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This article aims to rediscover and analyze overlooked works by Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) that demonstrate his engagement with historical analysis, challenging stereotypes that confine him to urban or cultural studies. His work addresses the intertwined issues of "revolution" and "history" within 20th-century Marxist debate. The first section explores Lefebvre's concept of "revolution" within critical urban theory and the theory of everyday life. The second section delves into his anti-determinist, anti-historicist approach to history within Marxist discourse. The third section examines his "progressive-regressive" method, tracing its roots in Marx and Engels' thought, and its value for historical analysis and contemporary uses of the past. Ultimately, this article highlights Lefebvre's significant contribution to rethinking the concept of "revolution" and its enduring implications.
Keywords: Henri Lefebvre; Marxist history; revolution; Paris Commune; alternative to capitalism.

Navegando a "revolução" no *corpus* literário de Henri Lefebvre: uma investigação académica com relevância para as dinâmicas políticas contemporâneas

Este artigo pretende redescobrir e analisar obras pouco exploradas de Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) que demonstram o seu envolvimento com a análise histórica, desafiando estereótipos que o restringem aos estudos urbanos ou culturais. O seu trabalho aborda as questões entrelaçadas de "revolução" e "história" no debate marxista do século XX. A primeira secção explora o conceito de "revolução" de Lefebvre no âmbito da teoria crítica urbana e da teoria da vida quotidiana. A segunda secção investiga a sua abordagem anti-determinista e anti-historicista da história no discurso marxista. A terceira secção examina o seu método "progressivo-regressivo", traçando as suas raízes no pensamento de Marx e Engels e o seu valor para a análise histórica e para os usos contemporâneos do passado. Por fim, ao longo do artigo, relaciono a relevância do contributo de Lefebvre para repensar o conceito de "revolução" hoje, nas suas múltiplas sequelas.
Palavras-chave: Henri Lefebvre; história marxista; revolução; Comuna de Paris; alternativa ao capitalismo.

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Introduction: "Revolution" after the "Short Twentieth Century"

What does the word "revolution" refer to today? By "today" I mean the 21st century and so, the question could mutate like this: what is meant by the word "revolution" and what are its uses and practices after the "short twentieth century"? In my opinion, on the one hand, it has become an "unspeakable" word, because liberal-democratic or conservative platitudes immediately lash out at those who want to change the world, as they will necessarily build a new totalitarianism system later.[1] Simplifying this thesis, it is best not to think about revolution,

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1 Firstly, throughout the article, I use the concepts of "liberal-democratic," "neoliberal ideology," "model of liberal capitalism," "neoliberalism," and "neoliberal policies" to refer to the current socio-economic-political system. With this, I do not intend to equate economic liberalism or neoliberalism with the more politically oriented liberal democracy. Instead, I aim to define the contemporary system, which currently encompasses a strong combination of the ideological extremization of bourgeois liberal democracy (manifested in State-form institutions) and that of political economy (the mode of production). This system increasingly undermines the welfare state born from the Fordist-Keynesian pact in the second half of the 20th century, particularly in the Western world. To delve into the critique of State institutions alongside the critique of the economy and how these two spheres have significant consequences in society, see: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Secondly, I refer to the intensification of the political discourse propagated by the conservative and reactionary political spectrum. Primarily, this political discourse, in its rejection of the concept of "revolution," distorts it to accuse the opposing political front of aiming to establish a new

since the institutions through which social change can be traversed already exist. Thus, the meaning of revolution is its equivalence to the periods of terror or of blind violence that led to totalitarian systems, and the authoritarian drift of the same liberal democratic institutions matters little.[2] On the other hand, "revolution" is a concept that has been strongly subjected to a process of *recuperation*, as a "passive revolution," as Lefebvre would say;[3] that is, it is a word that has been completely reclaimed and recovered by the logics of that power which it was intended to oppose and overthrow. The latest model of laptop or smartphone, etc. is presented as a revolution.[4] Every novelty in the technology market is a revolution, and advertising uses this to sell the idea of a new and supposedly better way of life. The real revolutionary today is exclusively the market, which won the ideological battle with the fall of the Berlin Wall and knows how to continuously renew itself to nurture standards of living of a worthy consumer society. "There is no alternative," said Margaret Thatcher, the only possible horizon is capitalism, and no other way of life is allowed outside of it: this is the system of the "capitalism realism" described by Mark Fisher. In truth, we are continuously bombarded by the impossibility of being able to make a revolution, and a certain kind of ideology has had to empty this concept of content, individualizing and depoliticizing it, and so "the result is that the revolutionary idea tends to lose its political substance

dictatorship, akin to the Stalinist regime. For instance, in recent times, both radical right-wing and neoliberal right-wing parties in Southern European countries or Latin America exploit the legacy of Hugo Chávez to emphasize the perceived danger posed by progressive governments (in the backdrop of this rhetoric, Gustavo Petro, the current President of Colombia, was compelled to sign an official document during the electoral campaign affirming that he would refrain from utilizing the state's authority to expropriate private property for the common good). In Italy, figures like Silvio Berlusconi since the 1990s and presently Giorgia Meloni exploit the "communism" threat to indiscriminately attack social movements and left-wing government parties. Secondly, such political discourse, when it appropriates the term "revolution," does so in an anti-system, anti-political manner, employing populist tactics to present itself as a popular political alternative. With Antonio Gramsci, one could argue that it embodies the concept of "passive revolution," see: Pasquale Voza, "Rivoluzione passiva," in *Dizionario gramsciano. 1926–1937*, ed. Guido Liguori and Pasquale Voza (Roma: Carocci, 2009).

2 Enzo Traverso, *Revolution: An Intellectual History* (London: Verso, 2021, epub), 22.

3 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life. The One-Volume Edition* (London: Verso, 2014), 779–784.

4 Athina Rossoglou and Dimitris Gkioulos, "Revolution Is an Idea for the Future, Not Just a Glorious Past. An Interview with Enzo Traverso," *Jacobin Magazine*, 17 December 2023, https://jacobin.com/2023/12/enzo-traverso-revolution-images-history-walter-benjamin-italy.

and to be reduced to a stance of desire, aesthetic or ethical, to a judgment of taste or an act of faith," as Daniel Bensaid wrote.[5] The aim of this article is to question the meaning of the concept of "revolution" in the work of Henri Lefebvre's (1901–1991) from the reality of the world in which we live today and, conversely, to interrogate Lefebvre's legacy to assess the political relevance of some of his issues.

In current international debate, Lefebvre is best known for his critical theory of the city and the urban or for his various volumes on the critique of everyday life. Currently, he is much more discussed in the field of urban studies or everyday life studies than in the fields of political philosophy or conceptual history. In several works devoted to the main issues debated by the different versions of Marxism in France and around the world in the last century, Lefebvre made a lively intervention, discussing the foundations of Marxism with Louis Althusser, Jean-Paul Sartre, or Guy Debord, the best known among others. However, he wrote about a hundred volumes and pamphlets, he dealt with a variety of issues and his "theory of revolution," and "theory of history" are very little discussed. Lefebvre wrote in a volume devoted to Althusser's critique of structuralism: "Every age may have the Marx it wants or deserves. Something new can and must therefore arise in our understanding of Marx's work. And this insofar as society and history produce something new, whether foreseen or unforeseen [...] Shouldn't we distinguish between understandings and interpretations? A new understanding of Marxist theory is introduced, we say, as a function of a new problematic in social practice."[6] For the words "Marx" and "Marxist theory" we could very well substitute the word "revolution" or "theory of revolution," and in this spirit we approach a critical study of this concept with Lefebvre's tools. The question is: what new understanding of the concept of revolution can we introduce as a function of new problematics in social practice?

This is my first article in a broader project on the French author, aimed at reclaiming Lefebvre as a Marxist philosopher. My goal is

5 Daniel Bensaid, "Revolutions: Great and Still and Silent," in *History and Revolution*, ed. Mike Haynes and Jim Wolfreys (London: Verso, 2007), 204.

6 Henri Lefebvre, *L'idéologie structuraliste* (Paris: Anthropos, 1971), 112–113.

to recognize Lefebvre within the "pantheon" of great Marxist thinkers of the twentieth century. I believe Lefebvre has been overlooked by Marxist thought and relegated to being considered merely a radical thinker in urban studies and studies on everyday life. On the contrary, I want to demonstrate that Lefebvre is a philosopher who addresses the problems of capitalist society and the legacy of Marx and Engels on a global scale. Lefebvre should not be confined to a few specific disciplines within the social sciences. Instead, I aim to recover his thought by showing that he is as complex an author as his contemporaries, such as Sartre and Althusser. Indeed, all the new manuals on Marxism or monographs published in our century overlook Lefebvre's contribution. Here, as a first step, we will address Lefebvre's idea of revolution within the Marxist debate.

In the introduction to this article, I aim to address fundamental questions that are crucial for understanding the contemporary dynamics of social change and political upheaval. These questions serve as a framework for measuring and testing Lefebvre's thought, shedding light on the enduring relevance and evolving nature of revolutionary thought and action in our modern era. The first section explores the concept of "revolution" within critical urban theory and the critical theory of everyday life, demonstrating the transdisciplinarity of Lefebvrian thought. In the second section, I delve into Lefebvre's theory of history, elucidating how the author develops an anti-determinist and anti-historicist viewpoint within the framework of Marxist debate. At the heart of my argument is the notion that a revolution cannot be considered as such unless it envisions alternative ways of designing urban and rural spaces, everyday life, and the temporal division between work and leisure. Moving on to the third section, I address Lefebvre›s concepts of "total history" and "praxis," discussing the "progressive-regressive" approach and its origins in Marx and Engels' thought. I highlight its usefulness in historical analysis and contemporary interpretations of the past. Throughout the article, I draw connections between Lefebvre's contributions and the current concept of "revolution" in its various manifestations. Finally, in the conclusion, I briefly discuss the

contemporary usage of terms such as "revolution," "revolt," "uprising," and "riot," exploring their link to Lefebvre's thought and their implications for ongoing debates.

Interpreting "Revolution" in Lefebvre's Works on Critical Urban Theory and Critical Everyday Life Theory

Firstly, we will trace the idea of "revolution" that emerges in Lefebvrian works on urban question and critical theory of everyday life, demonstrating the transdisciplinarity of Lefebvrian thought.[7] The question of revolution runs through the entire body of writings, as part of an attempt at radical renewal of French Marxism in the second half of the twentieth century. As Lefebvre was working on the first and second volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life*, he formulated the idea that Marxism and the works of Marx and Engels can be considered as a critique of everyday life.[8] Subsequently, two decades later, Guy Debord and Situationist Movement disseminated "détourné" comics in which they employ the artwork *The Death of Sardanapalus* by Delacroix, featuring the incorporation of the following statement: "Yes, Marx's thought is truly a critique of everyday life."[9] As is well known, until 1963 Lefebvre was great friend of Debord, though after that year, the relationship ended in extreme conflict. Debord, the situationist movement and Lefebvre influenced each other and collaborated in seminars on the critique of everyday life in Strasbourg. As a result, the idea emerges in Lefebvre that revolution can and must be a political event that completely transforms everyday life. Political action is deeply embodied in life; politics can and must transform and revolutionize life. This insight originated in Lefebvre as a young man, when he attended the surrealist movement, however—seeing its limitations—he thought that the surrealist motto "changer la vie" had to find other outlets for realization, and that a new revisiting of Marx and Engels' thought

7 Francesco Biagi, *Henri Lefebvre's Critical Theory of Space* (London: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2020).

8 Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 173 and 339–340.

9 René Vienet, "Les situationnistes et les nouvelles formes d'action contre la politique et l'art," *Internationale Situationniste* 11 (October 1967).

might be the correct way to think about revolution in the age of Fordism and the consumer society after World War II. The Marxian legacy serves as a catalyst to be evaluated within the real-world context of political actions and the tangible aspects of life generated and sustained by the capitalist system of production. The author contends that there is a need to reinvent revolution,[10] emphasizing the importance of reevaluating it in the context of everyday life, uncovering the potential that can be actualized through political action, shedding the constraints of ideology, and reconnecting with reality to understand and transform it. Notably, Lefebvre asserts that in the contemporary era it is imperative to develop a comprehensive strategy for responding to calls for a profound transformation of daily existence.[11] This is because political engagement in history plays a pivotal role in determining the realization of utopian possibilities. Among the most direct problems today is the frustration that political action no longer changes people's lives. Disaffection with political parties, engagement in social movements and consciously practiced citizenship are symptoms of an inability to make an impact on the crucial social questions of everyday life. The current liberal-democratic regimes also have a problem of legitimacy since they execute political prescriptions peculiar to neoliberal ideology, far removed from the daily lives of social majorities. The same problem concerns those alternative and more radical organizations that are incapable of envisioning political programs that are radically innovative and transformative of ordinary life. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, there were those who decreed the end of history and the beginning of a new era "of human rights" based on the American model. Instead, the reality that this new 21st century shows us is that political action and the possibility of thinking revolution has been stolen, and many forms of exploitation and oppression have not only not disappeared but have increased.[12] Lefebvre's contribution is an incentive to reinvent revolution as a political act that transforms people's daily lives. To explore

10 Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 339.

11 Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 340.

12 Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014).

this concept further, I will use Lefebvre's interpretation of the historical events of the Paris Commune.[13] As per Lefebvre's perspective, space emerges as the primary focus of purposeful endeavors and conflicts;[14] in fact, with Lefebvre we will read the Paris Commune as a political revolution that pondered how to transform the urban planning of the city and the everyday life that took place in it.

The examination of the Commune as a case study highlights how this event established a fresh interaction with urban space and, at the same time, revealed novel links to the flow of historical time. However, it should be said at the outset that for the author, the Paris Commune is a revolution and not a "revolt," an "uprising," a "rebellion," or a "riot" of a few months. Later, we will discuss this difference in the current debate; however, for now it is sufficient to assume this aspect.[15] Lefebvre thus interprets the Commune as a "festival" that disrupts the linear historical progression of capitalism, initiating an action that breaks away from the continuum of human events.[16] The notion of "festival" should, therefore, be understood as an epiphany, representing a tangible expression of the potential for creating an alternative political, social, temporal, and spatial framework. Lefebvre, in fact, employs the metaphor of a river overflowing within the urban landscape of Paris.[17] The philosophical and political concept of "festival" developed by Lefebvre is in line with the research conducted by Furio Jesi during the same time in Italy. Indeed, Jesi employs this interpretation to define the "moment of an interrupted battle," which unexpectedly exposes the oppressive apparatus of established order.[18] The political and conceptual notion of

13 Continuing the legacy of Lefebvre and Marx, David Harvey elaborates a volume on examination of the significance of Paris during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see: Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. For Lefebvre's insertion in architectural and urbanistic debates at the time, see: Lukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research and the Production Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

14 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (London: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]), 410.

15 Henri Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 27 and 34.

16 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 389–390.

17 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 21.

18 Furio Jesi, "Lettura del Bateau ivre di Rimbaud," in *Il tempo della festa* (Roma: Nottetempo, 2014), 69; Furio Jesi, *Spartakus* (Kolkata: Seagul Books, 2014), 47.

"festival" therefore proves valuable in comprehending the interruption of the prevailing historical timeline brought about by coordinated human action. Jesi emphasizes how this dimension is profoundly realized within the urban spatial context, especially in the dynamic relationship between the central figure—in this case, the insurgent population in Paris—and the social space they occupy, fundamentally redefining it.[19]

It is widely recognized that in the political context of the Commune, not only did anarchist and libertarian factions find inspiration, but the Marxian-Engelsian tradition also identified a political and social prototype to guide their own actions toward a new paradigm of alternative governance in contrast to capitalist society. Despite their differences in political ideologies and personal views, Bakunin, Marx, and Engels recognized in the Commune an endeavor to institute a fresh democratic, participatory, and self-organized system for all individuals.[20] Lefebvre's perspective draws inspiration from this debate, but it goes beyond the familiar boundaries by considering the Commune's uprising as a spatial insurgency and a conflict centered around space. The author's originality presents a fresh and innovative contribution to historical interpretation, employing Walter Benjamin's method[21] of going against the conventional flow of history: to brush history against the grain. Lefebvre demonstrates how the spatial perspective is exceptionally relevant. In this context, it is important to highlight Lefebvre's distinct innovation, which examines the struggle for space as an interpretive framework for revolutionary action carried out by the oppressed. This perspective can be seen as a shared moment of creating an alternative spatiality, simultaneously challenging the prevailing spatial order. In this historic event, space emerges as the paramount and ultimate objective; as described by Lefebvre, the Paris Commune can be understood in the context of the "contradictions of space,"[22] it represented a grassroots reaction to Haussmann's urban planning strategy. The citi-

19 Jesi, "Lettura del Bateau ivre di Rimbaud," 45–46.

20 Michel Léonard, *Une histoire de la Première Internationale* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2011).

21 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" (1940), trans. Dennis Redmond, available on: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm.

22 Henri Lefebvre, *Espace et politique* (Paris: Anthropos, [1972] 2000), 168.

zens who had been pushed to the outskirts of the city sought to reclaim the spaces from which they had been excluded by the political power. They endeavored to regain possession in an atmosphere characterized by both determination and joyousness. As we follow Lefebvre's perspective, the iconic Marxist concept of the "self-government of the producers"[23] goes beyond mere rhetoric and is transformed into the practical implementation of city and urban space management.[24] Lefebvre's novel interpretation underscores that the Commune represented a revolution which had the aim of reclaiming social space that had been taken away by Haussmann's authoritarian urban project. Additionally, Napoleon III's oppressive rule had erected the Vendôme Column as a symbol of their dominance, which was seen as mockery during the Second Empire. The Parisian working class could not tolerate this and decided to dismantle it, signifying the end of a specific spatial regime (Haussmann's project planning) and the start of a new collective and revolutionary spatial dimension shaped by the communard political structure. Although the three months of the Commune did not substantially alter Haussmann's infrastructure, right from the outset of their defiance, there was a new city organization that sharply contrasted with the empire's choices. Lefebvre highlights that the aim of the communard insurrection was to physically reclaim urban space that had been alienated from the lower segments of the population due to Haussmann's interventions. In essence, the Commune represents a counter-critique movement against the imposed division of spaces by capital. It seeks to reintroduce a unified perspective on life and human activities, thereby resisting the fusion of the state's central authority with the federal and self-governing aspects of the people of Paris. In direct contrast to the commodification of spaces, the Commune prioritizes the open and mutual acknowledgment of social space among equals.

With this purpose in mind, monuments of the "phallic, visual, geometric" dominance[25] were not neutral and were demolished not in

23 Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France. (1871)," in *Collected Work of Marx and Engels*, vol. 22 (London: International Publishers, 1987), 332.

24 Henri Lefebvre, *La fin de l'histoire* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1970), 236–237.

25 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 290.

the name of nihilist aspirations, but, instead, to affirm a new course to the spatial-temporal history of Paris. Those who perceive these actions as nihilistic and uncivilized should, instead, understand that the political order is inscribed primarily in the lived space and daily lives of people through this kind of monumentality. The Commune aspired to concretely rewrite and revolutionize its space and time.[26]

In his preliminary transcriptions for the *Passagenwerk*, Benjamin employed the term "expression" to elucidate the relationship between symbolic forms of life and the capitalist mode of production. Within this framework, he explored the correlation between nineteenth-century passageway architecture and the typical societal structures of France's Second Empire. Kristin Ross adopts a similar approach when examining the interplay between space and time during the Paris Commune of 1871 and emphasizes Lefebvrian insights that establish a connection between the everyday life of the Commune and its spatial dimension.[27] The Commune indeed represents a rebellion against the class-based spatial structure imposed by the empire, initiating an effort to reintegrate the revolutionary uprising into the urban social realm. Ross interprets this as a harmonious union, linking the space of the Commune with the poetry of Rimbaud. By reclaiming the streets and squares, the Parisian population disrupted the previous spatial hierarchy, reached the city center, and captured the Hôtel de Ville, transforming the site of decision-making and oppression into a shared social space for all individuals. The Hôtel de Ville, symbolizing institutional power, was transformed into a new horizontal and democratic spatiality, better suited to advancing the "right to the city" for all the oppressed.[28] In Lefebvre's perspective, there was a dialectical relationship between two radically different conceptions of time and space expressed on the one hand by the empire and on the other by communard revolutionaries. To illustrate this concept metaphorically, it can be likened to two straight lines colliding and, through this collision, disrupting the entire

26 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 394.

27 Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space* (London: Verso, 2008), 8–9.

28 Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space,* 42.

axial plane to create a new one. The revolution event lies in the conflict of the dialectic praxis and, by means of such a *crash*, establishes a new spatial-temporal perspective. In this context, Lefebvre expresses it thus: "The Parisian insurrection of 1871 was the great and ultimate attempt of the city to stand according to the measure and the code of human reality."[29] The Commune's political experiment involves a reintegration of the political dimension with other aspects of life. The city is thus regarded as an exemplary spatial model for the actualization of democratic practices, as opposed to state and imperial structures. Lefebvre, in line with Marx, delves into the foundations of a profound critique of the form of the state and its politics. This is the core of the meaning of the concept of "revolution" in Lefebvre.

Lefebvre's Philosophy of History: Unlocking the Potential of the Possible

After summarizing the Lefebvrian interpretation of the Commune understood as an urban revolution and everyday life by the Communards, I would like to briefly show the role of this reflection in the Paris Sixty-Eight movement, and then tie Lefebvre's volume on the Commune written in 1965 to the book *The Right to the City* published in 1968. My thesis is that Lefebvre, as a Marxist and Marxian author who greatly emphasizes dialectical materialism, always has the revolutionary event in mind, even when discussing the "right to the city" and "production of space." Lefebvre always thinks about social transformations from a political perspective, and thus from a communist revolutionary perspective. Clearly, Lefebvre's communism is certainly heterodox and anti-dogmatic, against a certain vulgar Marxist scholasticism. We could probably speak of "communisms" in the plural or revolutionary political processes/politics of communism. As he wrote: "Marx's thought serves to understand what is happening in the modern world, trying to act to orient and transform it: any other interpretation implies a

29 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 32.

radical misunderstanding and leads Marx's thought to deterioration."[30] Indeed, "Why not admit that Marx's thought constitutes an initial nucleus, an effervescent germ, the ferment of a conception of the world that develops without avoiding confrontation with different works?"[31] Moreover, Lefebvre's historical-philosophical method is to show the possibilities that were contained in the experience of the Commune and were aborted by the military defeat of this political revolution. The Commune lasted about three months, but the urban, everyday life revolution that was planned there not only turns out to be a model of a post-capitalist society toward the liberation of communist society, but these transformations are also utopian-concrete elements that were not fully developed due to the short time they were experienced. Lefebvre is a thinker of the possible and of the "possibles" in the plural, of the various sediments of time that coagulate in the Commune.[32] Lefebvre's historical method is to look at the tradition of the oppressed as Benjamin would say, with a willingness to dignify the uprising of the Commune by glimpsing its revolution, and not just a mere brief revolt or self-managed riot for a few months.

Now I would like to return to the link that exists between the French Sixty-Eight movement and Lefebvrian reflection. *The Right to the City* together with *La Proclamation de la Commune* serve as a powerful source of inspiration for the political discourse during the sixties and seventies in France, especially influencing the actions of the student movements. In the extensive dialogue titled *Le Temps des mépris-es*, Lefebvre recollects the events of 1968, drawing connections between the rebellion in Paris and Prague. He identifies these occurrences as prime illustrations of the "contestation" within the European context: in Paris, the rebellion was against "state capitalism," while in Prague, it revolved around "state socialism."[33] During 1968, Lefebvre foresaw the

30 Henri Lefebvre, *Le retour de la dialectique* (Paris: Messidor-Éditions sociales, 1986), 143.

31 Lefebvre, *Le retour de la dialectique*, 145.

32 Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018). Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities* (London: Brill, 2013).

33 Henri Lefebvre, *Le Temps des méprises* (Paris: Stock, 1975), 107.

endeavor to critically analyze modernity, a subject widely discussed in academic circles. Between 1965 and 1968, he taught "urban sociology" at Nanterre, a significant hub during the May '68 events in France. Additionally, starting in 1961 in Strasbourg, he organized seminars on the critique of everyday life, where notable figures like Debord and the situationist group were invited, and Jean Baudrillard served as one of his assistants. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the leader of the student movements, was one of his most outstanding students. *The Explosion*[34] is the book in which the author assesses the trajectory of the events that unfolded in France and Paris during 1968. This publication serves as an "instant book" where he compiles his thoughts on the student uprisings and the resistance against urban consumer society. Lefebvre's principal thesis draws a parallel between the events of March 1871 and those of May 1968. Indeed, he establishes a connection between the "storming of the city center" by the Paris Commune and the development of the phenomenology of urban activism carried out by the students. Lefebvre observes the convergence of the student movements toward the center of the city as they aim to protest the confinement of the university campus, such as that in Nanterre, positioned on the outskirts of the city following the Fordism model. The Fordist architecture planning initiative of the campus university in Nanterre had effectively relegated the students to the outskirts of the city, notably exemplified by the placement of the Nanterre campus adjacent to one of Paris's most extensive slum areas in the sixties. The pattern of the Commune's destiny was repeated a century later in the Fordist developments within the French capital: an uprising against the established order. This involved a dialectical interplay between social groups pushed to the periphery of the city (*banlieues*) and the urban center's dominance driven by profit-driven principles, ultimately resulting in the gradual displacement of residents and citizens from their living spaces.

Lefebvre constructs his theory of history primarily within the enduring outlines of constant allusions to "possible." The concept of "pos-

34 Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969 [1968]).

sibles" means an interruption of the capital's temporality, a deviation from the time dictated by the dominant political order, and an opening to other kinds of temporality and life possibilities for people. The dominant history is stopped, and another history begins where oppressed subjects begin to make history. This proposition introduces a fresh perspective on history, one that stands in contrast to historicism and the universalizing aspirations of progress: "This time [...] went far beyond the historical moment, bound to the possible through the impossible."[35] The Commune event possesses a "trans-historical and ontological" dimension[36] because it tangibly and actively embodies an ideal that was previously deemed impractical outside of historical contexts, projecting these ideals into a genuinely achievable future praxis. As Lefebvre puts it, "past becomes or re-becomes present, according to the realization of the possibles objectively included in the past. The past is unveiled and updated with them."[37] While the Commune was ultimately defeated due to the military forces pitted against Thiers' army, supported by Bismarck's German might, its sociopolitical organization within the spatial realm of Paris, as per Lefebvre, still retains its relevance. Violent suppression extinguished this spatial-political initiative, but not the everyday life practices in which the popular forces of Paris recognized themselves. Lefebvre, in fact, developed a theory centered on the clash of opposing political principles: "authority" versus "liberty."[38] The "possible" emerges in this temporal dialectic, between the time of the oppressors and the time of the oppressed. Many "possibles" remain unexpressed in the past—they are like "seeds beneath the snow"[39] that then can and could be born and realized in our present. Lefebvre's theory of history often intersects with the critique of everyday life as well because the concept of "possible" just as it is valid in his theory of history, is also useful in understanding the countertrends and resistanc-

35 Lefebvre, *La fin de l'histoire*, 236–237.

36 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 32.

37 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 36.

38 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 150.

39 Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury* (London: Verso: 2015), 142.

es to the time of capital in the present of ordinary life. Clearly, here I need to delve more deeply into the question of history, as I have already elsewhere addressed the problems related to the Lefebvrian critique of everyday life. The event of "revolution" encapsulates many "possibles," that is, different deviations from the linearity of history written by the ruling classes. Revolutionary periods are themselves "possible" whether the emancipatory principle is realized or not: "every revolution holds something of prophetic in it"[40] and "this utopia, this pretense myth, was for a few days part of facts and of life. In this sense, the Commune intermingles with the idea of revolution itself, seen not as abstract reality but as solid idea of freedom."[41] In the two extensive volumes on the production of space, the author wrote:

> Revolution was long defined either in terms of a political change at the level of the state or else in terms of the collective or state ownership of the means of production as such [...]. Under either of these definitions, revolution was understood to imply the rational organization of production and the equally rationalized management of society as a whole. In fact, however, both the theory and the project involved here have degenerated into an ideology of growth which, if it is not actually aligned with bourgeois ideology [...]. The transformation of society presupposes a collective ownership and management of space founded on the permanent participation of the "interested parties," with their multiple, varied and even contradictory interests. It thus also presupposes confrontation.[42]

But "interested parties" do not constitute the liberal-democratic deliberative space, for example theorized by Jürgen Habermas or John

40 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 38.
41 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 390.
42 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 422.

Rawls.[43] I want to highlight this notion, because it is greatly exploited by the "participationist" rhetoric of local and international institutions that forget the Marxist roots of the concept of "right to the city."[44] Lefebvre's political proposal is based on the model of self-management, *autogestion* in French,[45] of complex and grand revolution, from the micro to the macro level. It envisions the exhaustion of the capitalist model and the full realization of the democratic principle in line with the reflections on communism and the post-capitalist society imaged by Marx.[46] Lefebvre shows the need for a new "social pedagogy"[47] in the future post-capitalist and communist society. Revolution for Lefebvre is a radical overthrow of the status quo, but it is not exhausted in the appropriation of new power system, so it is a social process that requires a new pedagogical humanism where space and everyday life become crucial assumptions to be designed according to people's needs. In other words, a revolution is not such if it does not think of other ways of designing urban and rural spaces, everyday life, and time lived between work time and free life. This suggestion is of extreme interest today, an era where even on the left, people seem is incapable of describing an ultimate horizon to which to strive, or rather in this era

43 Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action,* vol. 1: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984 [1981]); Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2: *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987 [1981]); John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971). As for Jürgen Habermas, I refer to his theory of communicative action, and concerning John Rawls, I portray him as a theorist of a type of "liberal democracy" addressing the issue of justice and employing the philosophical metaphor of the "veil of ignorance," characteristic of contractualism. Lefebvre speaks of "interested parties" very differently from Habermas or Rawls, and Lefebvre's political subject is not abstract and presupposed as in the models of Habermas and Rawls. Lefebvre starts from the opposite point of view, namely from social practice, not from a deliberative political model. If we want to talk about a "model" in Lefebvre, the only possible model is the practical experimentation of radical democracy of the Paris Commune. The reference to Habermas or Rawls serves only to further explain Lefebvre's concept; unfortunately, there is not enough space here for a very in-depth comparison between the two distinct models of democracy.

44 Guido Borelli, "Lefebvre e l'equivoco della partecipazione," *Casa della Cultura*, 29 January 2019, available on: https://www.casadellacultura.it/853/lefebvre-e-l-equivoco-della-partecipazione.

45 Lefebvre, *The Explosion*, 84–90. Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 124–166.

46 Marcello Musto, "Communism," in *The Marx Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 24–50.

47 Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, [1973] 1976), 121–122.

where they have stopped thinking about a real alternative to the capitalist mode of production of life. With Lefebvre, on one hand I want to reconsider today the concept of revolution against the imaginary that deems any alternative to the international capitalist system impossible; on other hand, I want to rethink Marxism (maybe it would be better to say "Marxian thought") as living thought and not as a closed and pre-structured system to interpret reality. On the concept of the "right to the city" Lefebvre writes: "It is not 'right' in the lawful sense of the term [...] these rights are never literally put in practice, but they are continually mentioned to define the society situation."[48] The author does not aim to introduce an additional right to the extensive collection of "human rights." Instead, the author seeks to highlight the path of struggle and social conflict, one that is tangible and action oriented. The "right to the city" in fact "is announced as a plea, as a social and political demand,"[49] without a deep critique of capitalism; there is no option for its genuine realization. Hence, the question is not about a legal approach, but rather, we are faced with a philosophical-political perspective, which concerns the broader framework of reflection on the concept of revolution and social change. By utilizing the idea of the "right to the city," Lefebvre imagines a political theory of emancipation within discussions of revolution and history.[50] However, this propelling energy clashes with the exploitative motivations of the economic and political tenets of capitalism. Society is necessarily crossed by partition, by the disagreement of those who are excluded and ruling classes: "The urban presents itself—thus to Lefebvre—as a place of conflict."[51] Therefore, the city is interpreted as the scenario within which social conflicts are expressed and, by the way, Lefebvre is a scholar of Marx who reflects on conflict theory. The realization of the "right to the city" primarily takes form through political action, with the aim of achiev-

48 Lefebvre, *Espace et politique*, 144.

49 Lefebvre, "The Right to the City (1968)," in *Writings on Cities* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 158.

50 For a comprehensive review of the debate on the right to the city, I refer the reader to my volume: Biagi, *Henri Lefebvre's Critical Theory of Space*, 185–228.

51 Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003 [1973]), 175.

ing genuine democracy, even in matters related to the organization of society. The designation of the concepts of the "right to the city" and indeed "revolution" stays open and responsive to ongoing developments. Lefebvre does not fixate on a singular meaning or system but provides hints that should be pursued in shaping a theory that continually emerges from societal action and events.

Lefebvre believes that twentieth-century Marxism has emphasized the weakest points of Marx's theory, making his thought rigid and negatively "realistic."[52] Marxism, as interpreted by some scholars, has nothing more to say, because it is not adapted to the reality of societal issues; instead, the theory is imposed on reality, rather than recognizing how Marx sheds light on and helps us understand certain political and social dynamics. Additionally, while on the one hand, "the rhetoric about the inevitability and approach of the revolution, the sense of history, has sparked many deceptions,"[53] it has concealed the real situation, failing to convey the various possibilities at play and revealing the insubstantial determinism of the revolution's occurrence. On the other hand, Marx's analyses are not outdated, as many anti-Marxists believe, even though we must consider changes and look on Marx as a classic who still clearly speaks from the past to the present.[54] The author primarily criticizes structuralism, because it focuses too much on the structures of capitalism, forgetting that it is the conjunctural aspects that trigger the structural ones, namely the moments when crises and revolutionary moments arise: "History does not vanish in the face of the economic."[55] People and classes fight based on the concrete possibilities offered by history. If we were limited to structures alone, there would be no revolutionary action or rebellion, according to Lefebvre, structuralism has sought to do away with history and the dialectical method[56] and Marx is "a thinker

52 Henri Lefebvre, *Une pensée devenue monde* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), 167 and 169.
53 Lefebvre, *Une pensée devenue monde*, 172.
54 Lefebvre, *Une pensée devenue monde*, 175.
55 Lefebvre, *Une pensée devenue monde*, 177.
56 Lefebvre, *Une pensée devenue monde*, 178.

of the possible."[57] In other words, Marx believes in thinking about the tendencies of history, reflecting on past and present dynamics to understand the trends of the near future, that is, the spaces in which new possibilities and opportunities emerge.[58] Indeed, the study of trends has become muddled in the most obtuse determinism.[59] The author writes as follows in the volume *Le retour de la dialectique*: "The great revolutions, spasms of society and history, have complex consequences; reversals, bifurcations, choices, and options mean that there is nothing linear about historical development; the 'direction of history' no longer seems predetermined."[60] Marx is a careful scholar of the historical developments and transformations of capitalism, so it makes no sense to emphasize parts of his thought that can be manipulated from a deterministic standpoint.[61] Furthermore, Lefebvre[62] does not forget those who, with a technocratic approach, have declared the end of the class struggle, envisioning a society pacified by a capitalist political economy. Even the forms of struggle and processes of emancipation are transformed, adapted, and renewed based on reality. They can be defeated for a long time, but they do not disappear: "Revolution is not what it used to be, and it will not be again. This statement came as a surprise to those who, just a few years ago, accepted a single, defined, unchanging 'model' for transforming the world. Today, however, it is widely accepted that revolutionary situations are always new, specific, and therefore conjunctural."[63]

What Is Historical Past? Total History, Praxis, and Progressive-Regressive Approach

Lefebvre is well known as a philosopher and urban sociologist, of the critique of everyday life and more generally as a Marxian and Marxist

57 Lefebvre, *Une pensée devenue monde*, 167.
58 Lefebvre, *Une pensée devenue monde*, 179.
59 Lefebvre, *Une pensée devenue monde*, 186.
60 Lefebvre, *Le retour de la dialectique*, 123–124.
61 Lefebvre, *Une pensée devenue monde*, 191; Lefebvre, *Le retour de la dialectique*, 47.
62 Lefebvre, *Une pensée devenue monde*, 199.
63 Lefebvre, *Le retour de la dialectique*, 124.

who moved within the framework of critical theory. Yet with the five-hundred-page volume on the Paris Commune, after much time spent in the archives between France and Italy,[64] he also shows great ability as a historian, between conceptual history and the history of modern political thought. Gérard Walter, French historian, and editor of Gallimard's important series on French history entitled *Trente journées qui ont fait la France*, decided to assign the volume on the Paris Commune to Lefebvre.[65] It is in this text that Lefebvre takes up and expands on the so-called "progressive-regressive approach" theorized some ten years earlier in an article on rural sociology,[66] adding the concept of "total history." In opposition to Raymond Aron, Lefebvre conceives this idea: "against the Liberal and reasonable relativism,"[67] the author counterposes the notion of "praxis."[68] Lefebvre criticizes, first, the interpretive division of those, like Aron, who separate history as a "science" from history understood as a "succession of facts," and second, the idea that historians will never reach a certain truth about the facts of the past, because to obtain something like a certain truth requires several studies, which must be added together or otherwise read and conceived as a whole, and then draw a single balance that brings together the various, even discordant, views. In this way, Aron believes he is moving beyond "pure relativism" toward a "liberal, pluralistic relativism." Aron fears grand narratives, grand ideologies, and the clash of different worldviews, so he translates a quiet relativist liberalism into the historical method, which is a guarantee of a healthy space for debate. In contrast, Lefebvre on the one hand wants to be in the focus of intellectual polemic, and on the other hand thinks this approach is not useful heuristically, especially when discussing revolutions,[69] events where political conflict

64 Kristin Ross and Henri Lefebvre, "Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview," *October* 79 (1997): 78; Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 41.

65 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 11.

66 Henri Lefebvre, *On the Rural* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022 [1970]), 12; Stuart Elden and Adam Morton, "Introduction," in Henri Lefebvre, *On the Rural* (Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2022 [1970]), xviii-xix.

67 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 29.

68 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 30.

69 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 27.

in history is expressed at the highest level. Aron[70] is a fierce opponent of any "total" interpretation of human history, of any philosophy of history that takes a total, long view of a certain kind of human facts. Aron criticizes the concept of "totality," rejects dialectical thought, and any intention of historical objectivity, favoring the idea of a plurality of perspectives. Moreover, Aron[71] wants to escape the dangers of subjective interpretations and questions, without finding an answer as to how much the historian's point of view influences the facts and their telling and analysis. Therefore, quiet liberal relativism seems to Aron to be a good compromise, on the one hand to balance different interpretations (to balance ideologies) and on the other hand to reach a truth that is the meeting point of a certain kind of studies, in a certain field. Lefebvre is not at all convinced by Aron's positions and now let us explain the concepts of "praxis" and "total history." In Lefebvre's opinion, the way out of Aron's dilemma, that is, from relativism (whether pure or liberal), is found in the concept of "praxis."[72] However, it should not be interpreted through that dogmatic and orthodox Marxism that succumbed to economic determinism, embalming Marx's thought. Lefebvre's position is strongly opposed to Aron because he is aware of the degenerations that certain forms of Marxism have taken on in the 20th century. Studying human praxis in history allows us to look at human action in its becoming and complexity, certainly without claiming to offer an absolute and definitive analysis forever, but with the vocation of a broad, complex view in the totality of events. For Lefebvre, relativism fragments the view, losing the historical development in its becoming, and while the comparison of different perspectives is welcome, it must take on objectives of broad horizons, without refusing to respond to historical questions like trends in the medium and long term. Lefebvre cannot give up on grand narratives. He cannot relinquish a complex and comprehensive view of a certain historical event. To do so would

70 Raymond Aron, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1948), 117–118 and 272–277.

71 Raymond Aron, *Dimensions de la conscience historique* (Paris: Plon, 1961), 17.

72 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 30.

mean giving up on the reflection on history, on a certain type of global intelligibility that can be achieved, without absolutism. Praxis concerns the ability to read and interpret a "growing complexity";[73] it cannot and should not confine itself between determinism and indeterminism. The real historical task is to grasp the historical becoming, to read its possibilities that have arisen or have not yet been expressed:

> These works (of different scholars) bring to light contents that were previously veiled, latent, masked or unnoticed in the explosive enormity of the phenomenon. The totality? It is found in the sum of manifestations, events, situations, and actions [...] More specifically, a revolution makes a series of events possible during a long process of which that revolution was the origin, a part, or a decisive moment.[74]

Consequently, the "total history" proposed by Lefebvre is a type of historiography that embraces complexity, taking the historian's values and ideologies into account without absolutizing them, but with the goal of providing a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of events.[75] Furthermore, "total history" also considers the evolution and development of certain interpretations of specific historical events:

> In our view, a revolution is a total phenomenon: economic, sociological, historical, ideological, psychological, and so on. A total phenomenon of this nature contains its own historical unity; the comprehensiveness sought by knowledge is included and discovered in this unity. As a total phenomenon, it seems inexhaustible, and it is. Therefore, new aspects are continually revealed in retrospect. It is not only the "historical" aspects in the strict sense of

73 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 31.
74 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 65.
75 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 49.

> the term. We are also talking about economic, sociological, ideological, or psychological aspects, and none of them can dogmatically claim the privilege of absolute causality.[76]

For example, it aims to understand what it means to interpret the Paris Commune of 1871 considering the Russian Revolution of 1917 or starting from the defeat of the Spanish republican forces against Francisco Franco in the 1930s. It seeks to understand why many states socialist regimes, despite disavowing the values of the Commune in practice, have always needed to reference that event. Another possibility is to consider what it means to interpret the Commune from the perspective of the ruling classes and starting from the state of exception declared in Europe by the early liberal regimes or by various extreme-right dictatorial regimes. "Total history" aims to understand not only historical facts, but also why that historical event has similar or different interpretations at various moments in subsequent times. What type of image of the future has a certain interpretation of a specific historical event provided?

> No human activity exists without an image of the future, and even less so, a revolutionary activity. [...] People are driven to act by an exciting idea. They are willing to die to achieve a new life. The idea of freedom was much more thrilling than the development of productive forces and the convergence between these productive forces and relations of production. The Commune, the foundation of the Marxist analysis of revolutions, was a revolution that occurred without Marxist analysis. The revolution and the revolutionary fight for a future; they take their characteristics and elements from the image of that future, to the extent they can. In philosophical terms, there is no action without a project, and the elements of the project are found during action.[77]

76 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 65.
77 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 34.

Lefebvre defines "total history" as exhaustive, but not exclusive objectivity:

> The past becomes present or reverts to being so based on the realization of the possibilities objectively harbored in that past. It is unveiled and updated along with these possibilities. In our view, introducing the category of the possible allows for the conception of historical objectivity, making room for relativism and the inexhaustibility of the "real," both in history in action and in the history written by historians.[78]

The space in which the historian operates is within this dialectic, between different historical times, in the genesis of mutual perceptions of different periods and among layers of different times, all linked by a common destiny. In Lefebvre's view, there is also an echo of Walter Benjamin and Reinhart Koselleck. It is in this way that the events of the past always speak in a new manner to the present. The new aspects of the past emerge thanks to new questions that arise in the present. History is examined and re-examined because the present encounters new problems that it had not yet considered seriously. For the author, the Commune offers a "style,"[79] a certain way of conceiving the notion of revolution and of political practice. This style, if reinterpreted based on new social times, can still offer intriguing insights.

In the article "What is historical past?"[80], in which Lefebvre comments on the Albert Soboul volume entitled *The Sans-Culottes: Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government*, he re-examines the French Revolution of 1789–93. He considers some contemporary political experiences of his time between the 1950s and the 1960s, like the interruption of the mass movement, the division within the movement,

78 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 36.

79 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 40.

80 Henri Lefebvre, "What Is the Historical Past?," [1959] *New Left Review* 90 (1975): 27–34.

the nationalization and bureaucratization of its leaders, and so on. He praises Soboul's work precisely because it tackles issues that no historian had yet thought to address, and this possibility arises from similar issues in different historical times. For this reason, the work of the historian is crucial.

Another essential element is that "total history" deliberately makes use of sociology and, more generally, the social sciences, to produce interpretative categories within the framework of conceptual history:[81] "sociologize history, historicize sociology."[82] Indeed, sociological theory allows us to emphasize specific aspects of the historical social process and the progressive-regressive method is an important element of this marriage between sociology and history. As Elden and Morton[83] wrote, Lefebvre asserts that Marx's insight, in *Grundrisse*, revolves around the idea that "human anatomy offers a clue to the anatomy of the ape," and "the bourgeois economy, consequently, serves as the key to understanding ancient societies, and so on."[84] Simultaneously, historical examinations can aid us in investigating the present, underscoring the significance of these dual approaches. This approach effectively blends history and sociology, encompassing both diachronic and synchronic perspectives.[85] Several additional references can be pointed out as pertinent to Lefebvre's considerations regarding historical methodology in Marx and Engels, from which the progressive-regressive approach is derived.[86] One example is when Engels[87] talks about the part played by labor in the transition from ape to man, which was an unfinished fragment of the *Dialectics of Nature*; a second is the well-known passage authored by Marx and Engels showing that the bourgeoisie "com-

81 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 40–41.

82 Lefebvre, *La fin de l'histoire*, 144.

83 Elden and Morton, "Introduction," XVIII–XIX.

84 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin, 1973), 105.

85 Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 31. Lefebvre, *Une pensée devenue monde*, 79–85. Lefebvre, *Le retour de la dialectique*, 47.

86 Lefebvre, *La fin de l'histoire*, 103–105.

87 Friedrich Engels, "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man" [1876], trans. Clemens Dutt, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1876/part-played-labour/index.htm.

pels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a word after its own image";[88] third, Marx remarks once again, in the preface to the first edition of *Capital* (volume 1), that "the country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future."[89] Therefore, Kevin Anderson has philologically specified that, regarding this sentence, in the later French edition, from 1872 to 1875, an alteration by Marx was present that goes like this: "The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to those that follow it on the industrial path, the image of its own future."[90] Hence, instead of observing historic linear determinism, this methodological emphasis evolves into a more intricate and multifaceted temporal comprehension of sociopolitical evolution.

Within this framework, Lefebvre puts forward some theoretical categories to analytically develop the progressive-regressive approach. The first issue concerns the concepts of "horizontal complexity" and "vertical complexity."[91] With horizontal complexity, the author aims to describe the essential differences that characterize different social systems within the same historical period; for example, the model of liberal capitalism in the United States, the European model that blended elements of capitalism and socialism through the Fordist-Keynesian conciliation to develop a welfare system, the state socialism model in Russia, and yet another distinct model of state socialism like that of China. In horizontal complexity, historians study, delve into, and evaluate these different models in a specific century by comparing them to each other. With vertical complexity, they intend to define the phenomenon of the coexistence of various social organizations and structures differing in age and level of development but capable of coexisting during the same period, even though some forms are clearly surpassed

88 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Verso, 1998), 40.
89 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1990), 91.
90 Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 178.
91 Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 61–62.

by others, for example, the economic subsistence forms found in many African or Asian colonies in comparison and contemporaneous existence with more advanced forms of capitalism specific to the colonial countries. I am convinced that there is a point of convergence between Ernst Bloch's concept[92] of the "contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" and Lefebvre's vertical complexity. It seems to me that both authors focus on how history provides numerous instances of the "past" that lives on in certain forms of the "present." It is a coexistence of accumulated alterities across time and historical space. In this way, it is from these dual research dimensions that Lefebvre forms what is commonly referred to as the "progressive-regressive method," comprised of three different "moments": the descriptive moment, the analytic-regressive moment, and finally, the historical-genetic moment.[93] The first aspect exemplifies sociological research through its capacity to observe the subject of study by gathering field data while bearing in mind the previously acquired theoretical concepts (typical of classical sociological research). The second phase pertains to comprehending historical reality, focusing on the capacity to position it within its unique temporal and spatial context. Lastly, the third stage relates to the grasp of the genesis, which, within an overarching diagnostic framework, endeavors to reconstruct the development, resemblances, and disparities within a comparative framework. This allows for the explanation and validation of the phenomenon under investigation with these hypotheses. In summary, the triad of "description-dating-explanation" forms the methodological framework that Lefebvre attributes to this historical sociology. This research approach aims to emphasize the characteristics of society, identifying its links with the diverse modes of production and stages of development throughout history. The primary objective is to uncover the underlying rationale inherent in the concept of the world as presented by the capitalist project. By employing these three levels of analysis, sociological research, whether focused on the Paris Commune, the history of agrarian regimes, the

92 Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
93 Lefebvre, *On the Rural*, 69.

history of urban forms or any other issue, is tasked with shedding light on the genuine attributes of communities. This involves identifying their associations with the alterations brought about by the advancement of the capitalist mode of production. It also entails assessing the technical and technological shifts within societal models. It is essential to highlight that Lefebvre employs this method across all his research endeavors. In fact, when studying the city and urbanization, he traces it back to rural areas, delving into the origins of the subject of study. By reconnecting the historical-political concepts, he places emphasis on the transformations that the landscape has undergone. Subsequently, he examines the subject of study in the contemporary context with a well-defined understanding of its evolutionary context. For example, with this method we can understand that the "rural question," often seen as a pivotal component, fits into the larger mosaic characterized by planetary urbanization and industrialization.

Conclusion: "Revolution," "Revolt," "Riot," and "Uprising": What Do They Refer to after the "End of History"?

Finally, I would like to briefly discuss the ways in which we use the concepts of "revolution," "revolt," "uprising," "riot," and the link between our contemporary debate and Lefebvre's thought. In summary, for Jesi, "revolt" differs from "revolution" in its ability to suspend historical time, whereas "revolution" remains within a circular dialectical movement of cause/effect and means/ends relationships with specific tactics and strategies to be practiced for pre-determined goals.[94] In contrast, a revolt is an "epiphany," that is, an anticipation, a present manifestation of a future reality of justice and freedom, for some days. It is the enactment in the here and now, for a short time, of the concrete utopia of the hereafter. I compare Jesi's category of "festival," in the sense of "epiphany," with Lefebvre's concept of revolution, but Jesi discusses the failed Spartacist revolution in Berlin in 1919, while Lefebvre talks about the Paris Commune in 1871. In this synchronic analysis I also

94 Jesi, *Spartakus*, 19.

add Benjamin, who in his reflections on history looks at the Commune, and at all the failed revolutions of the French working-class movement in 19th century, not forgetting the revolutionary thrusts of Germany after World War I and the reformist failures of the German Social Democratic Party. Lastly, I also call on Koselleck and his meaning of temporal stratification. I accomplish this kind of analysis following the path traced by Lefebvre described in the last section, in the framework of the contribution made by Massimiliano Tomba.[95] First, what I want to emphasize is an alternative legacy in modern history, which not only rereads history in another way, but is able to rediscover forgotten events and traditions, which even though they have been defeated still have much to say for our present. These events and traditions, although defeated, still act as "specters" for the ruling classes and can still help us to think on other possibilities to counter neoliberalism. Lefebvre, Jesi, Benjamin and Koselleck point us to an alternative legacy of philosophical and political reflection on history and on Marxism. It is worth mentioning that Marx himself never employed the term "historical materialist." Instead, he favored expressions like "practical materialist" or "communist materialist." This choice implies a focus on a practical approach to history, rather than presupposing a teleological conception of it. This approach is more about a "practical mode of intervention into history," as shown by Tomba.[96] Second, it is important to bring order to the confusion of concepts and use them clearly; indeed, clear use of concepts leads to better thinking. However, each author has their nuances, and contemporary debate is influenced by these differences. I prefer to call the Paris Commune a "revolution" like Lefebvre, but Jesi[97] reconceptualizes the notion of "revolt" because, during the years he was writing, he had observed a certain dogmatism on this topic. Similarly, he is thinking of ways to escape determinism, like other authors. Third, within the context of classical political thought, popular protests were typically categorized based on the model of social or political "revolu-

95 Massimiliano Tomba, *Insurgent Universality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

96 Tomba, *Marx's temporalities*, viii.

97 Jesi, *Spartakus*, 26.

tions." It was thought that these protests were associated with fundamental underlying factors, where intentions were expressed through discourse in the form of proposals for change. Social revolutions were believed to have long-lasting, transformative impacts on geographically extensive, self-reliant communities.[98] In this classification, uprisings, rebellions, riots, or revolts were positioned at the lower level, especially because the spatial impact often coincided only with the urban space of one or a few cities and basically, they are defeated revolutions. The current debate in the 21st century, instead, is much more complex and confusing. On one hand, the concept of "revolution" has undergone a "passive revolution" and has been emptied of content; on the other hand, it seems that the way political protest is practiced in our century increasingly favors the riot or, in any case, forms of tumult or rebellion.[99] In addition, as globalization has progressed since the 1990s, uprisings, revolts and riots have emerged as a central phenomenon for comprehending popular resistance to neoliberal policies, as Alain Badiou says with his "rebirth of history" in "time of riots"[100] or Toni Negri and Michel Hardt with their concept of "multitude."[101] Within this debate, there are those who have reinterpreted Machiavelli and Spinoza against Hobbes,[102] those who view rebellion/revolt/riot as a category of modernity that has been rediscovered to analyze many current political protests,[103] and others who have declared quite clearly that "the long history of protest movements is in fact mainly the history of mobs and riots."[104] In addition, there are those who think of these forms of protest as "open spaces for the event" and thus necessarily linked to the contin-

98 Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

99 Matthew Moran and David Waddington, *Riots. An International Comparison* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot* (London: Verso, 2016), 11.

100 Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History* (London: Verso, 2012), 5.

101 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

102 Antonio Negri, *Spinoza* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020): Filippo Del Lucchese, *Conflict, Law and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza* (London: Continuum, 2009).

103 Ian Hernon, *Riot!* (London: Pluto Press, 2006).

104 Frances Fox Piven, "Protest Movements and Violence," in *Violent Protest, Contentious Politics, and the Neoliberal State*, ed. Seraphim Seferiades and Hank Johnston (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 20.

gency of the situation,[105] or those who theorize the profound political nature of the motivations behind the riot like a revolution.[106] We might say: let us start with a riot and then hopefully revolution will really come as well.

This brief retrospective of contemporary literature helps us understand how the concept of riot/uprising/revolt/rebellion regains its dignity of meaning, without necessarily being seen as "children of a lesser god" compared to the concept of revolution. Reality tells us that the space between the meaning of revolt and revolution is vast, contingent, and re-signified by political practice each time. It has many nuances, just like the terms defining these concepts. How can Lefebvre's thought be measured with this debate and current questions? In my opinion, Lefebvre is more relevant than ever in the way he conceives political action in history. Indeed, Lefebvre thinks that "he who says revolution also says creation"[107] along with invention of social life forms, of values, ideas, and ways of living: political action and "revolution" are creative activities. For Lefebvre, "revolution" is the name of a radical social change that reconnects everyday life with the life of new political and social institutions, capable of reflecting an authentic, free life emancipated from oppressive apparatuses: in my opinion, he draws a politics of new communism. The real challenge today is to rethink politics in the context of practical revolution, a revolution that offers a concrete utopia to live. However, the brutality of neoliberalism today is such that we might settle for something less than a revolution, but at the very least, a policy of social reforms that can finally have a concrete impact on people's lives. For a long time now, policies have exclusively favored the interests of a small minority of society. Reflecting on revolutionary action, it is urgent today to—like Lefebvre—rethink human action that changes the course of history.

105 Anthony K. Thompson, *Black Bloc, White Riot* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2010), 25.
106 Ray Bush, "Food Riots," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 10, no. 1 (2010): 119–129.
107 Henri Lefebvre, *Le manifeste différentialiste* (Caen: Editions Grevis, 2020 [1970]), 23.

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