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The city and the urban as spaces of capital and social struggle: notes on Henri Lefebvre's enduring contributions

Maria Ceci Misoczky[1]
Clarice Misoczky de Oliveira[2]

[1] Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul / Escola de Administração, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Administração, Porto Alegre / RS — Brazil
[2] Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul / Programa de Pós-Graduação em Planejamento Urbano e Regional, Porto Alegre / RS — Brazil

The argument of this essay is that Lefebvre's writings contain relevant contributions to understand the contemporary phenomenon of neoliberal urbanism and, at the same time, his politics of the possible can contribute to explain the restless urban struggles and spatial practices of social movements. We value the author's contribution from a comprehensive perspective, avoiding the usual fragmented way it has been used in the fields of public administration, organization and urban studies. Our reading follows Gadamer's notion of "the horizon of the question", which indicates that "we can understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer". Accordingly, the question posed asks for the contribution of Lefebvre's *oeuvre* to understand contemporary urban processes and to make visible possible futures objectively implied in processes of social struggles.
Keywords: urban; city; urban project; social struggles; Henri Lefebvre.

A cidade e o urbano como espaços do capital e das lutas sociais: notas sobre a duradoura contribuição de Henri Lefebvre

O argumento deste ensaio é que os escritos de Lefebvre contêm contribuições relevantes para entender o fenômeno contemporâneo do urbanismo neoliberal e, ao mesmo tempo, sua política do possível pode contribuir para explicar as incessantes lutas sociais e práticas espaciais de movimentos sociais. Valorizamos a contribuição do autor a partir de uma perspectiva compreensiva, que evita o modo fragmentado como tem sido utilizada nos campos da administração pública, dos estudos organizacionais e urbanos. Nossa leitura segue a noção de Gadamer sobre o "horizonte da pergunta", a qual indica que "podemos entender um texto somente quando entendemos a pergunta para a qual ele é uma resposta". Nesse sentido, a questão que fazemos pergunta sobre a contribuição da obra de Lefebvre para entender processos urbanos contemporâneos e para visibilizar futuros possíveis objetivamente implicados nos processos de lutas sociais.
Palavras-chave: urbano; cidade; projeto urbano; lutas sociais; Henri Lefebvre.

La ciudad y lo urbano como espacios del capital y de las luchas sociales: anotaciones acerca de las duraderas contribuciones de Henri Lefebvre

El argumento de este ensayo es que los escritos de Lefebvre contienen contribuciones relevantes para entender el fenómeno contemporáneo del urbanismo neoliberal y, al mismo tiempo, su política de lo posible puede contribuir para explicar las incansables luchas urbanas y las prácticas espaciales de movimientos sociales. Valorizamos la contribución del autor desde una perspectiva comprensiva, que evite el modo fragmentado como es usualmente utilizada en los campos de la administración pública y de los estudios organizacionales y urbanos. Nuestra lectura sigue la noción de Gadamer acerca del "horizonte de la pregunta", la cual indica que "se puede entender un texto solamente cuando entendemos la pregunta para la cual él es una respuesta". En este sentido, la cuestión que hacemos pregunta sobre la contribución de la obra de Lefebvre para entender procesos urbanos contemporáneos y para visibilizar futuros posibles objetivamente implicados en los procesos de luchas sociales.
Palabras clave: urbano; ciudad; proyecto urbano; luchas sociales; Henri Lefebvre.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cities has always been "centres of conflict, change and transformation", "cities can be crucibles where new politics can be constructed and emerge". Therefore, we have "to regain some notion of the city […] as a kind of body politics to which we can reconstruct, not only the cities, but can reconstruct human relations and ourselves" (Harvey, 2007:13). To accomplish it, we must review a way of seeing that "is dominated and limited by the obsession with 'the city' as a thing, one that marginalizes our sense of urban as a process" (Harvey, 2014:52).

In a dialectical way of thinking, "processes are regarded as in some ways more fundamental than things, and processes are always mediated through the things they produce, sustain and dissolve" (Harvey, 2014:61). This position implies a radical break with the idea that "the city is a thing that could be engineered successfully in such a way as to control, contain, modify or enhance social processes". The antidote is not to abandon all talk of the city but "return to the level of social processes as being fundamental to the construction of the things that contain them". Therefore, the urban must be understood "not in terms of some socio-organizational entity called 'the city' […], but as the production of quite heterogenous spatio-temporal forms embedded within different kinds of social action". This is the only way to consider the agency of the excluded and marginalized others, the ones that can never be entirely controlled, and "all sorts of liberatory and emancipatory possibilities they can produce" (Harvey, 2014:63).

In the same direction, Brenner and Schmid (2015:163) argue that "the urban and urbanization are theoretical categories, not empirical objects". Following Lefebvre's (2003) proposal of the urban as a multiscalar process of sociospatial transformation, the authors criticize the treatment of "the urban as a fixed, unchanging entity — as a universal form, settlement type or bounded spatial unit ('the' city) that is being replicated across the globe" (Brenner and Schmid, 2015:165). This critique is relevant because the mainstream of contemporary discourse on global urbanism has embraced a strong reassertion of the traditional empiricist concept of 'the' city. One of the consequences of this mainstream framework is that the nature of contemporary urban restructuring is obscured by a narrative that takes for granted the increased importance of cities and avoids key issues such as what they are and how their constitutive properties may be changing in qualitative terms.

To move beyond this narrative, it is necessary to take into consideration the contemporary context of territorial and networked governance that has emerged through (a) the consolidation of neoliberal transnational marked-oriented rule regimes; (b) "the proliferation of national state projects of deregulation, liberalization, privatization and austerity"; (c) the worldwide diffusion of city-marketing campaigns (see Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1994) and locational policies driven by the competition between cities to attract investments (see Sassen, 2002); (d) the increased prioritization by local and regional governments of economic growth, property-led investments in flagship mega-projects, urban renewal and gentrification over job creation, social redistribution, equity and participation (see Schmid, 2012); (e) the constitution of interlocal networks and policy transfer to disseminate so-called 'best-practices'; (f) the ongoing explosion of political struggles over access to the basic resources of social reproduction and "to reshape the broader institutional and territorial frameworks through which urbanization processes are being managed at every spatial scale" (Brenner and Schmid, 2015:153).

This contemporary context has been produced with the active contribution of a set of academic disciplines, including managerial public administration and neoliberal urbanism. Very briefly, the first one refers to a set of approaches and techniques mainly borrowed from the private sector and applied to the public sector based on the belief in the efficacy of markets and competition; it includes practices such as privatization, contracting out and the development of internal markets (Pollit, 1990; Thynne, 2013). The second includes a broad set of market-disciplinary institutions, policies, and regulatory strategies under a common denominator: "the market-fundamentalist project of activating local public institutions and empowering private actors and organizations to extend commodification across the urban social fabric, to coordinate the city's collective life through market relations", and to promote the enclosure of non-commodified, self-organized urban spaces (Brenner, 2015:115). The complementarity between these disciplines is quite evident and could not be different, considering that both have operational functions in the neoliberal project of strengthening, restoring, or, in some cases, constituting anew the power of economic elites in the wake of the economic crisis of the 1970s. According to Harvey (2005:3), neoliberalism is the intensification of the influence and dominance of capital; it is the elevation of capitalism, as a mode of production, into an ethic, a set of political imperatives, and a cultural logic. Market exchange is presented as having "an ethic in itself", which would be "capable of acting as a guide to all human action and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs". The difficulties of criticizing these mainstream approaches and the actually existing neoliberalism increase due to what Lefebvre (2003:157) names as the 'blind field', referring to ways of seeing with fragmented and specialized concepts and theories.

It is interesting to note that Lefebvre (1971, 2003) was able to realize the emergence of the historic compromise between neoliberalism and managerialism. Despite referring to the French political context and not to the global class offensive that occurred in the 1970s, Lefebvre (2003:78) identified neoliberalism as "the use of instruments (ideological and scientific) to modify the distribution of resources and maximize the amount of initiatives allowed to private enterprise and, with respect to urbanism, to developers and bankers". Regarding managerialism, he identified "the reign of rational finality", a rationality that "follows from a misguided application of organizational processes and operations appropriated to the enterprise". According to it, "everything must be part of an order (apparent and fictional) enhanced by contrasts – everything except a residue of disorder and freedom, which is sometimes tolerated, sometimes hunted down with overwhelming repressive force" (Lefebvre, 2003:36). In a book originally published two years before, Lefebvre (1971:66-67) wrote: "We are now aware […] that the big 'modern' business concern is not content with the status of economic unit (or group of units) nor with political influence but tends to invade social experience and to set itself as a model of organization and administration for society in general". Its control "is sometimes overpowering, and, in its own way, the business concern tends to level out society, subordinating social existence to its totalitarian demands".

This compromise between neoliberalism and managerialism promotes the urban space as an object, as an entity of economic expansion in which investment and growth are ends in themselves. For those of us who oppose this compromise it is necessary an interdisciplinary perspective that rejects market-driven and market-oriented forms of urban and public administration knowledge. Aiming to understand the city and the urban as social processes as well as a general phenomenon,

it is indispensable to take Henri Lefebvre's overarching theory of space in its relationship with the theme of everyday life into consideration.

Between 1966 and 1974, Lefebvre dedicated to "rethink the dialectic in terms of space"; he "sought to revigorated our grasp of modern capitalism by squeezing it through the neglected sieve of space" (Smith, 2003:ix). The main books of this period are: *The right to the city,* a series of exploratory essays drafted during the 1960s and updated in 1972 (Lefebvre, 2001b); *The urban revolution*, originally published in 1970 (Lefebvre, 2003); and *The production of space*, from 1974 (Lefebvre, 1991). A common argument of these books is that space, which is radically open, holds the promise of liberation: "liberation from the tyranny of power, from social repression and exploitation" (Smith, 2003:xiii). These writing have the background of his continued preoccupation with the critique of everyday life, which is registered in texts published from 1947 to 1981. All of Lefebvre's production carries the theme of the possibility. Sometimes considered pejoratively as a romantic utopian, he always connected the need of critical knowledge with the possibility of transcending the actual social relations of production.

We value the contribution of Henri Lefebvre from a comprehensive perspective, avoiding the usual fragmented way it has been used in the fields of public administration, organization and urban studies. Of course, we do not provide an exegesis or a neutral selection of ideas and concepts. Our reading follows Gadamer's (2004:363) notion of "the horizon of the question", which indicates that "we can understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer". Accordingly, the question posed asks for the contribution of Lefebvre's *oeuvre* to understand contemporary urban processes and to open possible futures objectively implied in processes of social struggles.

Therefore, the argument of this essay is that Lefebvre's writings contain relevant contributions to understand the contemporary phenomenon of neoliberal urbanism and interlocality competition and, at the same time, his politics of the possible[1] can contribute to explain the restless urban struggles and spatial practices of social movements.

2. HENRI LEFEBVRE AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE URBAN

If the city is something to be "rethought and reconstructed on its current ruins", then we have to understand that the city is the deployment of time, and that it is the time of those who are its inhabitants. Hence, "it is for them that we have to finally organize in a human manner" (Lefebvre, 1967:10). In another engagement with the theme of the city, Lefebvre (1965) discusses the use of the city in revolutionary times (*La proclamation de la Commune*), when it became a place of encounters and utopia. However, it was in *The right to the city* (written France during the 1960s, and in response to the urban crisis of that period), that the famous statement of this right as a cry and a demand was formulated, a right that "emerges as the highest form of rights: liberty, individualization in socialization, environs (*habitat*) and ways of living (*habiter*)" (Lefebvre, 2001b:134). His concern is with specific

[1] As we present our argument we hope to make it clear the meaning of this expression from a Marxist perspective. By now, we just want to say that the meaning of possibility here has nothing to do with the possibilist approach first elaborated by the geographer Vidal de la Blanche and further developed by Lucien Febvre. Opposing determinism, they argue, around the mid of the XXth Century, that the natural environment offers possibilities for human decision (Clocke, Philo and Sadler, 1991).

urban needs: "those of qualified places, places of simultaneity and encounters, places where exchange would not go through exchange value, commerce and profit" (Lefebvre, 2001b:106).

Marcuse (2012:30) explains that Lefebvre's (2001b) right is both a cry out of necessity and a demand for something more. Those two different things express: "an exigent demand by those deprived of basic material and legal rights, and an aspiration for the future by those discontent with life as they see it around them and perceived as limiting their potential for growth and creativity". In other words, "the demand is of those who are excluded, the aspiration is for those who are alienated; the city is for the material necessities of life, the aspiration is for a broader right to what is necessary beyond the material to lead a satisfying life" (Marcuse, 2012:31).

Moving beyond rights formalized in legal codes, the right to the city aspires the right "to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of these moments and places". It refers to the "realization of urban life as the rule of use (of exchange and encounter disengaged from exchange value)", instead of the "mastery of the economic (of exchange value in the market, and commodities)". Consequently, it "is inscribed within the perspectives of the revolution under the hegemony of the working class" (Lefebvre, 2001b:138-139). In these quotes, it becomes clear that the author is not writing about the right to the existing city, but to the right to a future city, to a transformed and renewed urban life. Therefore, it includes the right to produce the city as well as to enjoy it, the right to determine what is produced and how it is produced (Marcuse, 2012).

The underlying idea is that the city is an *oeuvre* (in the same sense of an *oeuvre* of art); The space is "not only organized and instituted, it is modelled, appropriated by this or that group according to its demands, its ethics and aesthetics, its ideology" (Lefebvre, 2008:82). The eminent use of the city, that is, "of its streets and squares, buildings and monuments, is *la* fête (which consumes unproductively, without any other advantage than pleasure and prestige). […] The *oeuvre* is use value and the product is exchange value"; however, the *oeuvre* has been suppressed by the "irreversible orientation towards money, towards commerce, towards exchange, towards the products" (Lefebvre, 2001b:12).

Therefore, the right to the city demands the economic and political (generalized *autogestion*) revolution, but also a permanent cultural revolution. And the agent of this revolutionary process can only be the proletariat, because only it "has the capacity to produce a new humanism", the humanism of the urban man "from whom and by whom the city and his own daily life in it become *oeuvre*, appropriation, use value (and not exchange value)" (Lefebvre, 2001b:140).

The idea of a generalized project of *autogestion* through which all social institutions would be radically democratized was proposed amid a critique to the degree to which *autogestion* had become a hollow slogan within the French Left. For Lefebvre (2001a), this project refers to a continually enacted conflictual process through which participants engage in self-criticism, debate, deliberation and struggle. According to Brenner (2008:240), Lefebvre insists that "it not a magic formula, a system, a model, or a panacea; it is not a purely technical or rational operation", and "it is in constant danger of degenerating, of being assimilated into considerable less radical projects of *co-gestion*". The idea is not of a prescriptive framework to a post-capitalist society, but a political orientation through which various sectors of social life might be subjected to forms of democratic control by the very social actors who are most immediately attached to them. It implies a revolt against control and management from

above and the possibility of a utopian virtually present non-alienated urban society that Lefebvre announced in *The right to the city* (Lefebvre, 2001b) and re-stated and further developed in *The urban revolution* (Lefebvre, 2003).

Another shared argument presented in these two books is the critique of urbanists and technocrats which, "unaware of what's going on in their own mind and in their working concepts, profoundly misjudging in their blind field what's going on (and what isn't), end up meticulously organizing a repressive space" (Lefebvre, 2003:157). Urbanism (of which urban planning is one of the main tools) is presented as a mechanical operation expressed in the standardization of architecture and the streamlined urban design; being both an ideology and the would-be rational practice of the state. Claiming "to replace or supplant urban practice", urbanism fails to examine it and becomes "a superstructure of neocapitalist society"[2] (Lefebvre, 2003:154). The function of urbanism is to control the consumption of space and habitat under the appearance of being neutral and apolitical (Lefebvre, 2003:164). In other words, it expresses and is the expression of a "naïve objectivism in which the city and the urban are conceived as self-evident empirical entities that can be transparently understood and instrumentally manipulated (Brenner, 2015b:20).

Lefebvre (2003) urges the need to analyse the city and the urban space as totalities and to think about alternative possibilities. According to Merrifield (2013:80), the revolution "Lefebvre simultaneously comprehends and aims to incite is a process as well as praxis, a theoretical and a practical problematic". The term 'urban revolution' indicates "the transformations that affect contemporary society, ranging from the period when questions of growth and industrialization predominate (models, plans, programs) to the period when the urban problematic becomes predominant" (Lefebvre, 2003:5). The term 'urban society' refers to "tendencies, orientations, and virtualities" within the context of the analysis and critique of the "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption" (Lefebvre, 2003:1-2). The author analysis the urban as a possibility, as a potential inherent in existing urbanization but that can only be realized through a fundamental social change: the urban revolution. Elden (2001) indicates that the quality of this analysis is that it goes beyond the critique of the urbanization process, thinking through the implications of this process to lay bare its social possibilities, revealing a potential that Lefebvre programmatically calls 'the urban society'. The urban (an abbreviated form of urban society) can "be defined not as an accomplished reality, situated behind the actual in time, but, on the contrary, as a horizon, an illuminating virtuality" (Lefebvre, 2003:16). The urban and its open possibilities holds the promise of liberation from the daily life dominated by exchange value, as it was mentioned before.

Being part of a Marxist tradition of concrete utopianism,[3] Lefebvre (2001b:109) grounds his dialectical utopianism[4] upon the method of transduction, which "introduces rigour and knowledge in utopia". It is an intellectual and practical operation for constructing possible objects "from information

[2] "A form of 'organizational capitalism', which is not the same as 'organized capital'— in other words, a bureaucratic society of controlled consumption" (Lefebvre, 2003:154).

[3] A tradition to which, for example, Bloch' (1986) daydreams and the anticipation of the Not-Yet-Become and Freire's (1985) dialectics of denunciation and annunciation belong.

[4] Lefebvre (2001) distinguishes his utopianism from varieties of experimental positivist utopianism, mentioning the planning of Paris for the year 2000 and Brasília as examples of this utopianism.

related to reality and a problematic posed by this reality, and it includes an incessant feedback between the conceptual framework and the empirical observations. It is "a method for deriving alternatives from the present that surpass it nonetheless" (Coleman, 2013:358). It is not an abstract possibilism, but the identification of concrete praxis, including organizational practices, that contains the ability to open the way to the achievement of the possible.

Lefebvre (2003:39) is convinced that such potential can only be identified by the analysis of the urban practice, because in the urban space, which is a "concrete contradiction", "anything can become a home, a place of convergence, a privileged site, to the extent that every urban space bear within it this possible-impossible, its own negation". As soon as we stop defining urban space-time it in terms of industrial rationality and its project of homogenization, it "appears as a differential, each place and each moment existing only within a whole, through the contrasts and oppositions that connect it to, and distinguish it from, other places and moments" (Lefebvre, 2003:36). To define the properties of urban differential space (time-space), Lefebvre (2003:38) proposed new concepts:

- Isotopy — "a place (topos) and everything that surrounds it"; "it is a homologous or analogous place"; however, "alongside this 'very place' there is a different place, another place".
- Heterotopy — a place of difference "with respect to the initial place"; a difference that "can extend from a highly-marked contrast all the way to conflict".
- U-topic — "the non-place that has no place and seeks a place of its own"; it has "nothing in common with an abstract imaginary; "it is at the very heart of the real, the urban reality that can't exist without this ferment"; this is "a paradox space where paradox becomes the opposite of the everyday".

What about the city? For Lefebvre (2003:57), "the city 'object' exists only as a historical entity". His critique is directed towards the "word 'city', which appears to designate a clearly defined, definitive object, a scientific object and the immediate goal of action[5], whereas the theoretical approach requires a critique of this object' and a more complex notion of the virtual or possible object".

The essential properties of the urban phenomenon considered as a process are: (a) social relationships have a surface area, including the most abstract relationships arising from commodities and the market, contracts and quasi-contracts among agents in a global scale — from this point of view it is a concrete abstraction; (b) this phenomenon and the urban space "are not only a projection of social relationships but also a terrain on which various strategies clash"; (c) both retain "a reality and a virtuality that are specific to them", "there is an urban practice concerning space and its organization cannot be reduced to global ideologies or institutions or to specifically 'urbanistic' activities". The urban space has also topological "properties that theoretically constitute a network of pertinent positions": "the private and the public; the high and the low; the open and the closed; the symmetric and the asymmetric; the dominated and the residual, etc." (Lefebvre, 2003:87). A key aspect of the urban phenomenon is centrality, "but a centrality that is understood in conjunction with the dialectical movement that creates or destroys it" (Lefebvre, 2003:116). Any point can become central. The urban is, therefore, "pure form: a place of encounter, assembly, simultaneity". The specific quality of the urban

[5] Urbanism is the social and ideological practice (reductive and expression of a class strategy) that imposes the application of industrial rationality, and considers the urban as an effect, a result, or a means (Lefebvre, 2003).

space is that it creates the possibility of bringing together "very different worlds and value-systems, of ethnic, cultural, and social groups, activities and knowledges".

Lefebvre' fascinating perspicacity allowed him to recognize tendencies that only announced themselves at the time he was writing (as the emergence of neoliberalism and managerialism mentioned before). One of these was the growing importance of the second circuit of capital.

According to Merrifield (2006:82-83), writing the year before U.S. president Nixon devalued the dollar and unilaterally abandoned the 1944 Bretton Woods agreement, starting the process that resulted in a deregulated and unstable capitalism, "Lefebvre sensed its coming, saw how it facilitated what he'd call the 'secondary circuit of capital', a siphoning off of loose money set on speculation in real estate and financial assets, liquid loot yearning to become concrete in space". In Lefebvre's (2003:155) words: "Capitalism appears to be out of steam. It found new inspiration in the conquest of space — in trivial terms, in real estate speculation, capital projects (inside and outside the city), the buying and sale of space. And it did so on a worldwide scale". Therefore, "space is no longer only an indifferent medium, the sum of places where surplus value is created, realized, and distribute". Instead, "it becomes the product of social labour, the very general object of production, and consequently of the formation of surplus value"; and, in that sense, in a depression capital flows toward it and "the secondary circuit serves as a buffer"[6] (Lefebvre, 2003:159).

Having defined the urban as the place where differences can come together and generate something new — the level of mediation between the global and the private that has the form of centrality, encounter, and interaction, Lefebvre (1991) questioned how these different aspects are related to each other, and how they are socially produced (Schmid, 2012:49)

The starting idea of *The production of space* (Lefebvre, 1991:186-187) is that "we have passed from the production of things in space to the production of space itself" because of "the growth of the productive forces themselves and because of the direct intervention of knowledge in material production". All social space has a history. Therefore, in the "current mode of production and society, space has its own reality "with the same claims and in the same global process as commodities, money, and capital". What is specific of capitalism is the production of "an abstract space that is a reflection of the world of business". Lefebvre (1991) is interested in the specificities of capitalist space and he always have in mind the possibility of the reconstruction of the social space from below, with the socialization of the means of production. Then, the space would be produced to satisfy social needs. What we are stressing is that there is no way of understanding the propositions of *The production of space* in their full extension and complexity stripping the philosophical position of its author and purifying it from Marxism, contradictions, and the perspective of the "redefinition of space as a function of use value"[7] (Lefebvre, 2009:194).

The basic proposition of the book is that "(social) space is a (social) product". It is not constituted "neither by a collection of things or an aggregate of (sensory) data, nor by a void packed like a parcel with various contents, […] it is irreducible to a 'form' imposed upon phenomena, upon things, upon

[6] See, for example, Gothan (2009) and the examination of the subprime mortgage crisis as an illustration of the tendency of capital to annihilate space through time, as predicted by Lefebvre.

[7] This is the case, for example, of the postmodernist reading of Soja (1989, 1996, 2000).

physical materiality" (Lefebvre, 1991:26-27). If space is a product, knowledge should address the process of production. To achieve this aim, Lefebvre (1991:38-39) develops three concepts in the format of the dialectical relationship which exists within the tread of the conceived, the perceived, and the lived:[8]

- Representations of space — "the conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bend"; it is conceived and only encountered through abstractions contained in plans, codes and designs that shape the representations of the ordered space; it is central to the production of abstract space.
- Representational space — "directly lived through its associated images and symbols", it "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" to produce meanings of the lived experience; it can open up the possibility of difference.
- Spatial practice — revealed through the deciphering of the society's space "it embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality and urban reality"; it is the everyday life, experiences and routines that mediate between the conceived and the perceived.

Lefebvre (1991:40) emphasizes that the triad is not an abstract model, that if treated as such it "loses all force": "if it cannot grasp the concrete (as distinct of the 'immediate'), then its importance is severely limited, amounting no more than that of one ideological mediation among others". The triad — which expresses a Marxist totality between physical, mental and social space — is the means to understand the production of the capitalist space and its contradictions.

A key category is abstract space — an objectified abstraction, the materialization of what is conceived, a generalized representation. It is hard to understand this category without the company of Marx (2007). In the *Introduction* to the *Grundrisse*, he explains the transition from the concrete to the abstract, and conversely the movement from the abstract to the concrete. The abstraction results from the identification of the essential elements that constitute the phenomenon. Then, the progression from the simpler abstract concept lead to concrete forms and concepts.

The notion of abstract space is inspired by Marx's (2007:25) analysis of the historical emergence of the concept of labour. Under the first developments of capitalism labour as such, labour pure and simple, became true in practice. Labour consists of both the specific concrete labour of a worker and abstract labour - the expenditure of human labour in general. This abstraction is made concrete every day in the social process of production (Marx, 2003). Similarly, "abstract space[9] has real ontological status and gains objective expression in specific buildings, places, activities, and modes of market intercourse over and through space". Yet its underlying dynamic "is conditioned by a logic that shows no real concern for qualitative difference; its ultimate arbiter is value itself, whose universal measure (money) infuses abstract space" (Merrifield, 2006:111). Consequently, in the same manner as concrete labour disappears into the fetishized commodity, concrete space produced by concrete social relations of production disappears into the fetishized space. Abstract space is "a space of quantification and

[8] "Three specific moments that blur into each other", in the words of Merrifield (2006:109).

[9] The emergence of the concept of space and its production is also historical. Lefebvre (1991) traces it back to the Bauhaus, around the 1920s in Europe.

growing homogeneity, a merchandized space where all elements are exchangeable and interchangeable, a police space in which the state tolerates no resistance and no obstacles". It is where the economic and the political "converge towards the elimination of all differences" (Lefebvre, 1979:293), homogenizing and fragmenting the lived space as a means of social control to guarantee the reproduction of social relations of production.

Concrete space, in turn, is time inscribed into space, it is the space of the body and the memory, gestures and journeys, routines of everyday life. Abstract space is decorporealized, it is one more dimension of alienation. It is tied to the power of the technocrats, it is measurable, workable on drawings, and divorced from the lived. Simultaneously, it projects understandings back onto the lived. Abstract space is political, instrumental, "it serves those forces which make a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands on their way, of whatever threatens them — in short, of differences". However, this notion of the instrumental homogeneity of space "is illusory — through empirical descriptions of space reinforce the illusion". Abstract space "has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its lens". Thus, "to look upon abstract space as homogenous is to embrace a representation that takes the effect for the cause, and the goal for the reason why the goal is pursued" (Lefebvre, 1991:285, 287). If space is illusory, the more carefully one examines it, "considering it not only with the eyes, not only with the intellect, but also with all the senses, with the total body, the more clearly one becomes aware of the conflicts at work within it, conflicts which foster the explosion of abstract space and the production of a space that is other" (Lefebvre, 1991:391).

In the first pages of this essay, we outlined some aspects of the contemporary context of territorial and networked governance (Brenner and Schmid, 2015), in which neoliberal urbanism and managerial public administration play a central role. To finish this part, we introduce a worldwide contemporary urban practice: the Urban Project[10] (UP). We choose it, because it is one of the most evident expressions of the urbanism that Lefebvre (2001b, 2003) so emphatically criticized.

The UP includes the physical and image transformation of areas presented as declined and in need of renovation/rehabilitation or the generation of new urban zones. It modifies the built environment and/or the existing functions of the space in which it intervenes. Even in the cases in which it includes a wider project that integrates urban forms and landscaping, the focus is on specific areas. It is usually associated to the notion of urban strategy and public-private partnerships (PPPs) because it seeks immediate results and values the capacity to undertake (Avitabile, 2005). The UP achieved global acceptance with the help of Borja and Castells (1997:319). It should, according to them, have a centralized design by political and technical bodies. The understanding of UP as synonymous of Large Urban Projects (LUPs) is very common. LUPs are tools of intervention that result in flexible planning, although it may formally co-exist with master plans. According to Lecroart and Palisse (2007), the main characteristics of a LUP are: (1) to use of managerialist instruments and PPPs; (2) to be a political project, as well as a project in space and time; (3) to include social and spatial impacts beyond the immediate surroundings; (4) to connect multiple actors and complexity of uses. Vainer

[10] Some examples of UPs are: London Docklands. Available at: <www.lddc-history.org.uk/lddcachieve/>; London Olympic Park. Available at: <www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/our-story/transforming-east-london>; 22@ Barcelona. Available at: <www.22barcelona.com/>; Porto Antico di Genova. Available at: <www.portoantico.it/>; Porto Maravilha. Available at: <http://portomaravilha.com.br/>; Porto Alegre 4D Available at: <www.4distrito.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/>.

(2012) arguments that this kind of projects causes ruptures in the city understood as a multiple social space. According to Archer (1992), the result is a city made piece by piece (a city in pieces).

It is relevant to mention some critiques of this contemporary urban practice as a complete expression of managerialism, in the terms anticipated by Lefebvre (1971, 2003). For Harvey (2001), the introduction of the competitive logic between cities led the fascination for innovation, embellishment and modernisation to a new level. Besides that, the economy based on floating capital and third sector activities transformed the cities' role: no longer as a support for developing productive activities but as raw material to accumulate capital. As Logan and Moloch (1987) realize, the space becomes a growth machine capable of increasing aggregate rent and ensuring wealth for the elites who use the growth consensus to eliminate any alternative. As part of this context, marketing gurus prescribe the marketing of localities (Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1994) based on four strategies: urban design; improved infrastructure; basic services; and specific attractions (location, history, consumption, culture, sports, and events). For Harvey (1989, 2012), this approach is part of the wider process of urban entrepreneurship and fetishization of the space in which the state acts through privatisation, favourable constructive parameters and tax exemptions, among others, promoting accumulation by dispossession. In other words, it actively takes part in resolving the problem of over-accumulation in processes that include the exploitation of depreciated land, expulsion of the poorest sectors of society, gentrification and speculation in the financial and real estate markets. In the words of Lefebvre (2003), the urban transformed in the second circuit of capital.

Under neoliberalism and managerialism, urbanism and its planning tools had to be adapted and expressions like the ones already mentioned become usual (strategic planning, urban entrepreneurship, urban market, among others), while new ones keep on emerging (cities as engines of innovation, smart-cities, sustainable cities, among others). The common feature of these variations of urban practices is their largely depoliticized discourse and aggressively market-oriented projects and prescriptions.

Taking these critiques into consideration, we think that Lefebvre's propositions contribute to a more articulate comprehension of concrete spatial practices,[11] such as this. Following his ideas, we can consider the UP large-scale architecture as the most developed abstraction of space, so far. In the anticipatory words of Lefebvre (1991:360): "the architect has before him a slice or piece of space cut from larger wholes, he takes this portion of space as a 'given' and works on it according to his tastes, technical skills, ideas and preferences".

Being the abstract space of planners and technocrats, architects and politicians, bankers and developers, this functionalist, form-logical reductive representation of space needs the creation of social consensus. For this purpose, "the urbanism of maquettes" (Lefebvre, 1991:318) becomes the urbanism of 3D, in which beautiful images articulates the seduction of aesthetics and the promises of development. The space is produced as geometric and isotopic and legitimized by the discourses of innovation and revitalization/renovation/regeneration. These euphemisms eliminate the historical lived space and reorganize it as a commodity to be consumed and for consumption; it suppresses difference and imposes homogenization; it creates artificial spaces. However, "this is a fake lucidity, one

[11] See, for example, the analysis of 22@Barcelona by Charnock and Ribera-Rumaz (2011) and the analysis of Porto Alegre 4D by Oliveira (2016).

which misapprehends both the social practice of the 'users' and the ideology that it itself enshrines" (Lefebvre, 1991:318). In fact, despite the reconfiguration of urbanism and elites' alliances to create new spaces for accumulation, in which the political and economic benefit for the dominant class is clear (Lefebvre, 2014b), the urban continues to be a collective project: "it is produced through collective action, negotiation, imagination, experimentation and struggle" (Brenner and Schmid, 2015:178).

3. SOCIAL STRUGGLE AND THE PRODUCTION OF U-TOPIC SPACES

The urban as a concrete abstraction associated with practice, as a form that has no specific content, but is a centre of attraction and life, gains a new meaning when it becomes a site for action and transformative politics. For Lefebvre (1969:118), writing immediately after the events of the French May 1968, when the movement took the *Quartier Latin*, in Paris, "[…] the utopian locality came to assume an extraordinary presence". This is because the power of the streets has the force to shake up societies, or at least to produce or reveal an institutional crisis. It is an effective power, even if transitory. Lefebvre (2003:38) is referring to u-topic places — spaces of consciousness, imagined spaces that contain the promise of liberation and transcendence. The street is, therefore, more than just a place for movement and circulation: "the street is where movement takes place, the interaction without with the urban life would not exist, leaving only separation, a forced and fixed segregation".

As a part of the critique of everyday life, Lefebvre (2014a:329) proposes a theory of moments. A moment "is the attempt to achieve the total realization of a possibility". Possibility, always determined and partial, "offers itself, and it reveals itself". The wish "to live it as a totality is to exhaust it as well as to fulfil it". Therefore, "the moment wants to be freely total: it exhausts itself in the act of being lived" (Lefebvre, 2014a:642). Each moment is characterized by a triad: perceived, situated, and distanced — in relation to another moment and in relation to the everyday. What defines a particular activity as a moment? The moment is "constituted by a choice which singles it out and separates it from a muddle or a confusion from an initial ambiguity"; it has a certain specific duration; it has its memory, its content, its form; every moment becomes an absolute; it is "disalienating in relation to the triviality of everyday life and in relation to the fragmented activities it rises above" (Lefebvre, 2014a:638, 641). It is in the moment, when it is politicized, that the radical discontinuity, the pure and absolute contestation, occur. Contestation, in its different forms and processes shook up the terrain of everyday life and appropriate spaces that assume new meanings.

Merrifield (2011) addresses the problem of how to sustain the intensity of encounters and harmonize them with a continuous political process of authentic transformation, if the moment leads to other moments and a politics of encounter fails or collapse. Instead of providing a straight answer, and recognizing the inexistence of preconceived formulas for success, he values the process by which participants act and react, both affect and get affected, becoming conscious of their force and affirming the possibility of creating their own historical space, even if transitorily. These moments are always valuable because they contain and express the diversity of the living and show that "some cracks can always be found, even in an apparently closed system" (Coleman, 2013:356).

Lefebvre (2001b) once defined the right to the city as a cry and demand for the right to participate in life at the core of the action. Coherently with this proposition, some struggles that take the urban as their terrain can be seen not only as demanding access to services or citizens' rights but also

as confronting capitalism in moments of upheaval and protest. It is in the streets — transformed in political arenas — that they usually occur. Such power of the streets can produce processes of desalination of those who participate and, potentially, of those touched by it. In this transitory moments, the city regains its character of an *oeuvre*.

Following Lefebvre (1969, 2003), we can see the production of u-topic places in the many forms of encounter that happen, around the world, in social struggles motivated for different reasons: anti-austerity, pro-democracy, against police violence, feminism, pacifism, anti-capitalism; and also for affordable houses and public transport; and the defensive ones, such as pensions and workers' rights. The myriad of urban centred struggles transforms the city into the prime site of class struggle, expressed also by a myriad of spatial practices: occupations, marches, festivals, among others.

Lefebvre (1969) tells us that events upset calculations and structures; contestation opens the field of possibilities; encounters spawn new transient centralities. However, as he advises, events and centralities made of encounters cannot be taken as an end in themselves, as mere doing and acting. If taken in such way, they would be one more expression of reified consciousness indifferent to the "ends and social contents that hold sway in things" (Bonefeld, 2012:129). This caveat is relevant for the risk of fetishizing space in the context of the worldwide spreading of occupation movements. In the same direction, Marcuse (2011) alerts against taken the space being occupied as a prize, as the conquest of which is the goal of the movement, instead of a terrain on which the battle takes place.

Moments of contestation illuminates the urban as a virtuality that can become something else than the space of capital accumulation. The right to the city is made concrete when the people appropriate and regain the control of parts of it, even if with a specific duration and repressed by the state's violence. The space is then produced as a site for transformative politics, showing the truth of space: its possibility of becoming a concrete utopia organized by the lived. The virtual object — the urban society — is revealed, for a while, as the result of a historical process full of contradictions, conflicts and struggles.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In 1989, two years before dying, Lefebvre (2014b:568) published an article in which he writes in a sober and quite depressive way, very differently from his usual optimism regarding the promises of the construction of new values and an alternative civilization. He starts recalling how he use to consider the urban as a vehicle for these possibilities. Instead, what he sees is the reign of a strictly instrumental conception of the urban; the gentrification of city centres and their transformation into sites of consumption as well as objects of consumption; and "cities made doubly dependent upon technology and bureaucracy, in a word, upon institutions" which "freezes the fate of urban life". He also identifies another threat: the planetarization of the urban entailing the risk of homogenizing space and annihilating diversities. Worst, this homogenization is accompanied by the fragmentation "among spaces of work, leisure, material production and diverse services" and by the increased hierarchization of social classes as they are inscribed into space (Lefebvre, 2014b:569).

Despite the frustration he expresses for the failure of the promises he saw in the urban, Lefebvre (2014b:569) reinforces the contradictions of social practices which are inherent to everyday life can only be incrementally revealed. For example, "those between play and gravity, use and exchange, the

commodity and the commons, the local and the worldwide, and so forth". It is from these contradictions that a revolutionary concept of citizenship to struggle for the right of the city can emerge. And again, he reaffirms that we must pay attention to neglected forms of association and *autogestion* articulated in relation "to specific problems that, even if they are concrete, concern all dimensions of everyday life".

This last contribution has yet to be explored and appropriated to understand localized contemporary urban processes in their connection with the global context. The planetary expansion of the UP instrument is an example of an issue that can be further explained exploring his indications. His insistence that the future is not predetermined, that it can gain alternative directions on the basis of the organizational experiences of those who struggle to implement their visions, is also a relevant indication for avoiding the fetishism of the present in our praxis.

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Maria Ceci Misoczky
PhD in Administration; Professor and Researcher of the School of Administration at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). E-mail: maria.ceci@ufrgs.br.

Clarice Misoczky de Oliveira
Architect and Master in Urban and Regional Planning; PhD student in the Postgraduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). E-mail: arq.clarice@gmail.com.