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The production of space, the urban and the crisis of capital: (re)reading Lefebvre's theory of crisis

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of crisis in Henri Lefebvre's work, highlighting its significance in his urban theory. Drawing on Karl Marx's theory of the crisis of capital, the text highlights crisis as an ongoing and destructive process driven by capitalism's inherent contradictions. The article demonstrates how capital's crisis is linked to the production of space and how capitalist social structures perpetuate deepening Lefebvre's critique of traditional Marxism. By stressing the central role of crisis, the paper enhances understanding of Lefebvre's theory and his critique of traditional Marxism. It also highlights Lefebvre's contributions to analyzing the capitalist crisis.

Keywords: crisis, production of space, capitalism, marxism, labor, Henri Lefebvre

A produção do espaço, o urbano e a crise do capital: (re)lendo a teoria das crises de Lefebvre

Resumo

Este artigo examina o conceito de crise na obra de Henri Lefebvre, destacando sua importância em sua teoria urbana. Baseando-se na teoria da crise do capital de Karl Marx, o texto destaca a crise como um processo contínuo e destrutivo impulsionado pelas contradições inerentes ao capitalismo. O artigo demonstra como a crise do capital está ligada à produção do espaço e como as estruturas sociais capitalistas perpetuam o aprofundamento da crítica de Lefebvre ao marxismo tradicional. Ao enfatizar o papel central da crise, o artigo aprofunda a compreensão da teoria de Lefebvre e sua crítica ao marxismo tradicional. Ele também destaca as contribuições de Lefebvre para a análise da crise capitalista.

Keywords: Boletim Paulista de Geografia; scientific production; guidelines.

La producción del espacio, lo urbano y la crisis del capital: (re)leyendo la teoría de las crisis de Lefebvre

Resumen

Este artículo examina el concepto de crisis en la obra de Henri Lefebvre, destacando su importancia en su teoría urbana. Basándose en la teoría de la crisis del capital de Karl Marx, el texto destaca la crisis como un proceso continuo y destructivo impulsado por las contradicciones inherentes al capitalismo. El artículo demuestra cómo la crisis del capital está vinculada a la producción del espacio y cómo las estructuras sociales capitalistas perpetúan la profundización de la crítica de Lefebvre al marxismo tradicional. Al enfatizar el papel central de la crisis, el artículo profundiza la comprensión de la teoría de Lefebvre y su crítica al marxismo tradicional. También destaca las contribuciones de Lefebvre al análisis de la crisis capitalista.

Palabras-clave: crisis, producción del espacio, capitalismo, marxismo, trabajo, Henri Lefebvre

Introduction

"How had capitalism, which seemed mortally wounded, been able to survive?" Lefebvre (1976, p. 48) asks himself in *The Survival of Capitalism*. As the author himself will develop at various points in his work, this wound is not the result of anti-capitalist social struggles but one that is inscribed in the law of the contradictory development of capital itself. This intuition is essential to my approach here. Lefebvre thus recognizes that there is a crisis immanent to capital. However, even in crisis, capital survives.

In his work, Henri Lefebvre developed a radical critique of capital. His insights have had a significant impact, particularly in radical geography, as he was among the few scholars to emphasize the spatial aspects of the expanded reproduction of capital. Lefebvre, grounded in Marxian analysis, understood that capital's dynamics carry inherent contradictions. So, in order to comprehend Lefebvre's contribution, one must take into deep consideration Marx's theory: "Only a return to Marx can restore the acute and trenchant character of these blunted concepts." (Lefebvre, 2016, p. 34). As Lefebvre stresses, Marx has written a critique of political economy, that is, the subtitle of his book that is often forgotten.

Lefebvre remains essential to understanding capital, even today. His thought possesses a particular sense of critique that is important for contemporary times. This means that Lefebvre's theory remains helpful to today in helping us grasp our reality. My argument in this text is that Lefebvre's work is useful for understanding the capital crisis. At least in how I read Lefebvre's texts, the concept of crisis is presupposed, although not elaborated on or fully developed, except in a few texts, especially one chapter of Volume Three of De L'État (Lefebvre, 1978). In this paper, I aim to emphasize the importance of the notion of crisis in understanding Lefebvre's concept of the urban.

To demonstrate the pertinence of the crisis concept in Lefebvre's theory, I will ground my position in Robert Kurz's theory of capital's collapse. From my perspective, Kurz offered a particular reading of Marx that has some convergences with Lefebvre's notion of crisis. In this text, I will argue that Lefebvre's thought encompasses a theory of crisis, which is central to understanding his theory of the production of space and his other contributions. I

will do this by drawing some consequences from Lefebvre's formulations and interpreting them in the light of Kurz's unique reading of Karl Marx's work.

Accordingly, I argue that this notion of crisis diverges significantly from its hegemonic application within radical geography. Central to this distinction is the reading of Lefebvre as a critique of 'traditional Marxism'—a theoretical orientation, as defined by Postone (1993), that prioritizes a critique of exploitation and distribution from the standpoint of labor, and which has historically dominated geographical analysis. By moving beyond these paradigms, a critical engagement with Lefebvre's work offers a more robust framework for deciphering the specificities of contemporary capitalist crises.

Lefebvre's reading of crisis

A theory of crisis is not usually considered in Lefebvrians terms, although, as I will argue, it is central to his thinking. As will be discussed in this section, the concept of crisis appears at various times in Lefebvre's work — sometimes more elaborately and emphasized, and at other times just mentioned.

In a 1948 essay published in issue 17 of the journal *La Pensée*, Lefebvre (1948) emphasized the notion of crisis, which is already highlighted in the essay's title: "The Crisis of French Capitalism." The very first paragraph reads:

> "Dans le capitalisme (celui du xix° siècle), « la tendance continuelle des différentes sphères de la production à se mettre en équilibre n'est qu'une réaction contre la destruction continuelle de cet équilibre » (Capital, II, p. 257).. En d'autres termes, le capitalisme n'existe comme système économique et social que parce qu'il renferme une tendance interne à l'équilibre, une auto-régulation. Mais une tendance contradictoire, destructive de l'équilibre interne, agit également sans cesse pour briser le capitalisme et ses limites immanentes. Il est assez clair que dans le capitalisme déclinant, celui de la crise générale, particulièrement avancée en France, les tendances au déséquilibre et à la rupture des limites l'emportent sur les mécanismes régulateurs qui, autrefois, rétablissaient l'équilibre, en dehors de la conscience et de la volonté des capitalistes eux-mêmes (sans intervention de l'Etat, etc.)" (Lefebvre, 1948, p. 39).

Recognizing capital's contradictory tendency, Lefebvre presents a conception of capital's immanent limits. Following this conception, which, as will be seen, is rooted in Marx's theory, Lefebvre rejects the idea of a cyclical crisis. Therefore, for him, capital cannot be understood as a phoenix that is reborn from its own ashes. There is a critical tendency inherent

in the very functioning of capital, which, in its historical process, moves to place barriers and limits on the expanded reproduction of capital.

In this sense, Lefebvre's understanding of the idea of crisis is crucial, as it diverges from the recurring notion of a crisis caused by over-accumulation. In his words, the crisis does not present itself as a crisis of overproduction. “Au contraire, elle a le caractère durable et paradoxal d'une crise de sous-production” (Lefebvre, 1948, p. 40). What he perceives, and can distinguish very well, is the material form and value, something that was emphasized by Postone (1993) years later. There is talk of a crisis of over-accumulation, as noted by Harvey (1982), who focuses solely on material wealth. But Lefebvre, based on his reading, insists that this is “a crisis of underproduction”. Underproduction of what? Underproduction of value. The capitalist system may produce vast quantities of commodities, but because of its contradictory functioning, the valorization of value becomes increasingly anemic. A lot of commodities are produced, but less and less value - and this is what makes up the crisis of capital.

Lefebvre’s reading of the tendency toward disequilibrium in declining capitalism aligns with a logic of crisis of valorization rather than a mere crisis of realization. Lefebvre suggests a more fundamental rupture than the cyclical crisis dynamic. This shift concerns the underproduction of value as a structural limit of the capital-form itself. In Marxian terms, this points to the contradiction between the increasing development of productive forces and the diminishing basis of value: labor time.

However, the diagnosis of a crisis that has been developing within the historically determined forms of capital for a long time, with no chance of reconstituting the pattern of accumulation of the 19th century, left Lefebvre with an important question: how does capitalism survive?

In an important essay, The Survival of Capitalism, Henri Lefebvre (1976) argues that capitalism survives through the reproduction of social relations and the production of space. However, if capital can survive, Lefebvre (1976: 48) recognizes that it is “mortally wounded”. As I will discuss in the following sections, capital is mortally wounded because it becomes “de-

substantialized", that is, by its very movement, it gets rid of its substance, living labor, the only source capable of increasing value.

By assuming that capital is wounded to death, we can understand Lefebvre's (1976) answer to the question of capitalism's survival. Capitalism doesn't just survive in the limited space of "the hidden abode of production", as Marx (1992, p. 123) wrote. Indeed, the survival of capitalism was, in Marx's time, dependent on the exploitation of labor that occurred within the factory. However, the development of capital, which leads to the necessary expulsion of living labor from value-producing circuits, imposed a limitation on its own development. In this way, capital survives by reproducing social relations and producing space.

De-substantialized capital survives by imposing its social forms, even if they are decadent. This is the role of the reproduction of social relations. The dynamics of capital compel people to adhere to its forms. To survive, people must sell their labor power, even if this becomes an increasingly insolvent market. Those who can't sell their labor power must access alternative means of earning money, such as through credit. Capital is constantly restoring its social forms, even if it creates new contradictions and exacerbates old ones. Capital in its crisis also depends on the production of space. As well as pointing out, in *The Marxist thought and the city* (Lefebvre, 2016b), that the production of space involves a productive organization with a low organic composition of capital, Lefebvre (1973) sees the production of space as a moment to guarantee coherence to the whole, even if this whole is in crisis. I will elaborate on this further in a later section.

For now, it's important to recognize that capital's contradictory dynamics are prone to crisis. Lefebvre discovered that it is a secular crisis, not a cyclical movement of eternal return. Capital's historicity does not allow it to return to previous levels of productive organization or development of the productive forces, and as a result, the system of valorization of value is increasingly emptied of living labor. Capital, despite being wounded to death, continues to reproduce itself.

This dynamic produces what Lefebvre (1976, p. 97) called "an immense proletarianization separated from the working class". The condition of the proletariat is no longer, as in Marx's time, superimposed on the condition of the worker. On the contrary, as

he writes: “This vast proletarianization of the world contrasts with the working class bloc” (Lefebvre, 1976, p. 97). The phenomenon Lefebvre refers to does not concern the integration of the working class into the capitalist system, subject to exploitation. As he describes it, the proletarian condition is now that of those who “fail to link with the means of production” - in one expression, the working class without work.

That is why capital “must defend itself on a much broader, more diverse and more complex front [...]. This no longer coincides with the reproduction of the means of production, it takes place through everyday life, through leisure and culture, through schools and universities, through the extensions and proliferations of the city, that is, throughout the entire space” (Lefebvre, 1972, p. 68). So, to survive, capital doesn't just confine itself to the factory environment. This spatial expansion, therefore, is not merely a quantitative growth of the apparatus of production, but a qualitative response to the 'tendency toward disequilibrium' identified by Lefebvre decades earlier (1948). As the factory environment becomes increasingly de-substantiated—owing to the expulsion of living labor—capital must colonize the 'entire space' to compensate for the depletion of its internal source of valorization. In this sense, the colonization of everyday life, leisure, and the city (Lefebvre 1972) represents more than the reproduction of means of production; it signifies the pursuit of new frontiers for the extraction of rent and the management of a society where value can no longer be adequately produced through traditional industrial labor. The 'broad front' of defense that capital mounts is, in fact, an attempt to manage a permanent crisis of substance by subsuming the totality of social existence. Because of the immanent contradiction of capital itself, the factory environment has become de-substantiated from its foundation, living labor. Capital must now dominate all space and reach everyday life.

These considerations by Lefebvre are fundamental to understanding the transformations that capital underwent throughout the 20th century. As he writes in the third volume of Critique of Everyday Life, it is a question of understanding the discontinuities of the capitalist mode of production (Lefebvre, 2013). The consequences of this effect are essential for understanding capital transformations throughout the 20th century. Lefebvre was

attentive to the changes in social practice. In this book, Lefebvre is fully aware of the impending "total crisis":

> The reader will know that the total crisis, which is shaking the mode of production, set in at the beginning of the twentieth century with a silent catastrophe: the collapse of traditional reference points for - and by - thought; and a consequent collapse of values (Lefebvre, 2013, p. 765).

Since then, the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production has developed beyond industry. This crisis gives rise to new forms of social domination. This intuition allowed Henri Lefebvre to develop a much broader conception – and more adjusted to the developments of capitalism in the 20th century – of alienation: it is no longer restricted to the scope of production, the moment of work, the territory of the factory, but reaches the social practices of everyday reproduction. Everyday life itself is transformed into a terrain of domination under capitalism.

The idea of crisis appears in a more organized way in the chapter "De la théorie des crises à la théorie des catastrophes", in the fourth book of *De L'État* (Lefebvre, 1978). This is the place where Lefebvre gives most centrality to the idea of crisis in his work. He asks himself:

> Que veut dire ce mot: crise? Il désigne en principe un moment critique, une date séparant deux périodes, une coupure dans le temps. Que veut dire aujourd'hui: "la crise?" Crise de qui? de quoi? (Lefebvre, 1978, p. 2011)

In the following pages, Lefebvre dedicates himself to unraveling these questions. According to him, crisis results from the elements of social life that tend to disintegrate, producing disturbances. He emphasizes that the capitalist mode of production is necessarily critical, i.e., it is in crisis. However, "critical moments have ceased to stimulate invention". The crisis becomes a continuous experience, "se normalise, peu distinct de la non-crise", even though it is in crisis. It is, therefore, central to Lefebvre's thinking to take crisis as a category of analysis. Consequently, it implies thinking about his constellation of concepts gravitating around crisis.

Crisis of capital

Here I will connected Lefebvre's concept of crisis, outlined in the previous section with Robert Kurz work. Robert Kurz was one of the founders of a theoretical approach to

reinterpreting Marx's theory, which placed crisis as a fundamental category for understanding it. In one of his seminal texts, *The Crisis of Exchange Value*, Kurz (1986) discusses how the development of productive forces impacts the capacity to valorize value. As stated in Marx's work (1992), there are physical limits (the duration of working time and labor intensity) and social limits to the working day. The strategy of expanding surplus value through what Marx called absolute surplus value is limited. Thus, Kurz (1986) writes that "the valorization of value transforms itself from an absolute and extensive into a relative and intensive movement" through what Marx called relative surplus value. In this sense, the expansion of surplus value depends "on intensively and relatively increasing surplus labor, mediated through the development of the productive forces — that is, through the progressive scientification of the process of production".

Marx had already pointed out that the tendency to transform absolute surplus value into relative surplus value marked the true universalization of capital. In *Das Kapital*, Marx (1992) points out a series of examples of technological developments implemented in the production of goods that can be followed. The use of large machinery and the production of industrial complexes transformed the capitalist mode of production: "all the movements necessary for the processing of raw material without the help of man, but only his assistance". In this way, the human being becomes an appendage of the machine. It is the great mechanical monster that controls the process.

Kurz (1986) recognizes that since the 1970s, the scientific development employed in producing goods has substantially transformed the process of valorization. With the widespread adoption of automation, microelectronics and robotics, "The production of relative surplus value thus necessarily becomes the prime means of capitalist accumulation." This dynamic engenders three consequences: i. this process "brings about an escalation of the material output of products, which in turn forces an expansion of markets and an acceleration of accumulation; ii. with the increasing importance of relative surplus value in the valorization process, the individual product loses value; iii. finally, with the dispute between individual capitals, the means of surviving the competition is always to invest in relative surplus value from the development of productive forces and, in this way, "capital itself becomes the logical

and historical limit in the production of relative surplus value." The combination of these three consequences leads Kurz (1986) to perceive a tendency of capital to head towards its own collapse.

> As soon as capital can no longer increase the creation of value in absolute terms by extending the working day, but can only increase the relative size of its own share of the newly created value by means of the increase of productivity, there arises in the production of relative surplus value a countermovement, which must consume itself historically and work toward and bring about a standstill in the process of value creation. With the development of productivity, capital increases the extent of exploitation, but in doing so it undermines the foundation and the object of exploitation, the production of value as such. For the production of relative surplus value, inseparable as it is from the progressive fusion of modern science with the material process of production, includes the tendency toward the elimination of living, immediate, productive labor, as the only source of total social value creation. The same movement which increases capital's share of the new value decreases the absolute basis of value production by means of the elimination of direct living productive labor (Kurz, 1986, s.p.).

In truth, Marx (1973; 1992; 1993), at least since *Grundrisse*, already seems aware of this tendency and postulates the need to increase the organic composition of capital, which leads capital to spend less on living labor and invest more in constant capital. Thus, if investment in variable capital declines, capital appreciates less and less in proportion to its magnitude.

However, it must be recognized that there is no finished theory of crises in Marx. Kurz (1986; 1993; 2012) reconstructs and extracts a theory of the crisis or collapse of capital from the unfolding of his reading of Marx, which is quite coherent and has strong heuristic potential. But Kurz (2012) is aware that there are ambiguities in Marx. Lefebvre (1978) is also aware that Marx allows us to speak of cyclical crises, i.e., crises that have a "fonction purgative" (Lefebvre, 1978, p. 228) and that, through the destruction of stocks of goods, equipment and productive forces, reconstitute the conditions for their renewal. Recognizing this, Lefebvre (1978, p. 227) suggests thinking - based on Marx - of a theory of the "general crisis", which, according to him, "recouvrait une grande complexité de phénomènes irréductibles à l'économique, encore qu'ayant une base économique".

Kurz criticizes the concept of a crisis of overaccumulation, which, although the author acknowledges it is present in Marx's texts, is nothing more than a few "fragmentary argumentative threads" (Kurz, 2014, p. 230). This is a similar argument to the one I mentioned in the previous section, but on that occasion, it was put forward by Lefebvre. The idea of a

"crisis of overaccumulation" leads us to believe that there is "too much value" that has not been sufficiently realized in the form of money. As he explains,

> In this case, the crisis no longer refers to an internal limit of capital, but becomes a function of capital itself, insofar as it would carry out, through the devaluation of capital on all levels or in all states of aggregation (especially in the form of the devaluation of material capital and surplus monetary capital as well as collective layoffs), a compensation so that the congestion caused by overinvestment could gradually dissolve and the process of valorization could begin again (Kurz, 2014, p. 231).

Thus, it must be understood that the crisis is not a problem of a lack of "realization" of the surplus value actually produced, but of a lack of production of surplus value itself (Kurz, 2014, p. 239). Marx says that only human force, living labor, can produce surplus value, being vampirized by dead capital. It is precisely at this point that the most fundamental contradiction of capitalism emerges, namely, the opposition in negative integration (Kurz, 2012) between capital and labor. Capital only exists to the extent that it dominates labor. The unfolding of Marx's texts gains strength when he perceives, through the coercive law of capital, that the owners of the means of production tend to invest in constant capital to the detriment of variable capital, which would increase productivity. This, in his system, would lead to what Kurz (1991) calls a crisis of valorization, revealing the internal and absolute limit of capital, the tendency already inscribed by Marx (1993, p. 356):

> As accumulation progresses, the ratio between the constant and variable parts of capital changes: if it was originally 1:1, it now becomes 2:1, 3:1, 4:1, 5:1, 7:1, etc., so that as capital grows, instead of 1/2 of its total value, only 1/3, 1/4, 1/5, 1/6, 1/8, etc. are progressively converted into labor power, while 2/3, 3/4, 4/5, 5/6, 7/8, etc. are converted into means of production. Since the demand for labor is not determined by the volume of total capital, but by its variable component, it progressively decreases with the growth of total capital, instead of, as we previously assumed, growing in the same proportion as it does. What is at issue here is that the expansion of the constant part of capital implies a relative dispensation of labor power which, long before it becomes an absolute dispensation, already operates as a fundamental limit to valorization.

Thus, the crisis must be understood as the loss of the substance of capital, that is, living labor. Capital, in its own dynamic of further accumulation, empties itself of its foundation. As Kurz explains, "the elimination on a massive scale of living productive labor as a source of the creation of value can no longer be recuperated by newly mass-produced cheap products, since this process of mass production is no longer mediated by a process of reintegrating a labor population that has been made superfluous elsewhere" (Kurz, 1986).

Technological innovations applied to the development of productive forces point to the further elimination of living labor. As Marx wrote: "Capital thus works towards its own dissolution" (Marx, 1973, p. 700).

Society of unemployment

The result of this, emphasized by Robert Kurz (2014), is the tendency of capital to produce mass unemployment in its own development. Therefore, what I have described here is not limited to an economic crisis - which can easily be falsified through financial flows of fictitious capital. It is a dissolution of historically determined social forms. Labor has historically constituted itself as a form of social mediation (Postone 1993), and this form has declined with the deepening of the crisis of capital. Kurz (2014) views this process in the same manner as Lefebvre (1948, 1978). As he rightly points out, the immanent crisis of capital produces

> les laissés pour compte et les marginaux, les chômeurs, les gens exclus du fonctionnement normal des centres et noyaux de l'activité productrice, les périphéries par conséquent, les chômeurs occasionnels se mêlent aux travailleurs congédiés, le chômage structurel au conjoncturel (Lefebvre, 1978, p. 226).

This description, given by Lefebvre, is of a structurally surplus population that no longer has the possibility of integration. Aaron Benanav (2010, p. 27-8) states, "Capital produces a relatively redundant population out of the mass of workers, which then tends to become a consolidated surplus population, absolutely redundant to the needs of production". I previously presented Lefebvre's idea of proletarianization as a multiplication of "workers without work", something quite similar to what Benanav (2010, p. 29) writes: "the proletariat is a working class in transition, a working class tending to become a class excluded from work". In this way, the crisis as it appears is not in the usual sense indicated, of economic content, but a secular crisis, a crisis in the reproduction of the capital-labor relationship. The expansion of this reproduction indicates that workers are becoming an externality of the process of material reproduction and that, therefore, their existence is no longer productive, but an existence marked by direct domination.

This shift signals a mutation in the form of social mediation. In the expansive phase of accumulation, capital's power is primarily exercised through what Marx (1992) described as the 'mute compulsion'—an economic power that coerces individuals into the labor market to ensure their reproduction within the commodity-form. However, as the crisis of valorization unfolds, this mediation through labor collapses. People are no longer dominated *as laborers* integrated into the value-circuit, but are subjected to the abstract logic of capital as an 'externality.' Consequently, domination ceases to be primarily mediated by the wage-form and instead assumes a more direct and violent, often extra-economic character, as capital in crisis must manage a population that remains tethered to the commodity-world despite being structurally excluded from the production of value.

The critical analysis of how capitalism manages to reproduce itself by valorizing and hiding its internal excess is only meaningful if it is accompanied by an interpretation that the "normal" functioning of capitalism itself produces a human surplus, the result of the relentless pursuit of endless profit. The spread of what Marx called the lumpenproletariat is precisely this absolute population surplus as a result of the logic of capital. As Henri Lefebvre (1978, p. 225) wrote: "Actuellement n'y a-t-il pas reconstitution de l'armée de réserve des travailleurs". It is no longer a question of a reserve army but of a surplus population (from the point of view of accumulation).

From crisis to catastrophe

The transition from a theory of crises to a theory of catastrophes in Lefebvre's thought reflects a shift from analyzing cyclical economic malfunctions to understanding a permanent 'critical state' of the social system. For Lefebvre, while traditional crises were moments of rupture that led to new equilibriums, the contemporary era is defined by an "espace de catastrophe" where the state of exception becomes the rule. He argues that this occurs because the global system has lost its traditional regulatory foundations, noting that "le monde actuel perd son ancienne base, mais il garde son fondement dans les sentiments de domination et le ressentiment" (Lefebvre, 1978, p. 216). This "ancienne base" can be understood as labor social mediation that become obsolete. In this context, the crisis is no

longer a temporary obstacle but a manifestation of a deeper dissolution of social forms. Lefebvre emphasizes that the state manages this catastrophe through a hierarchical morphology, asserting that “le pouvoir établi, lorsqu'il déclare la crise, il déclare la répression et virtuellement la guerre à ceux qui veulent considérer cette crise comme symptomale d'une dissolution plus vaste” (Lefebvre, 1978, p. 216). This results in a terminal logic where the state survives at the expense of social vitality, as exemplified by his stark observation: 'tout meurt, sauf l’État, qui tue tout' (Lefebvre, 1978, p. 217). Thus, the catastrophe is not merely an event, but the violent preservation of the capital-labor relationship through pure political and spatial domination.

Lefebvre (2024), in another book, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, also observes how the transformations of capitalism have transformed the exercise of violence. The author identifies that, with the birth of capitalism, what he calls repressive societies were a condition for the development of society's class structure, with its various dispositives of persuasion and oppression. With the rearrangements of society, especially during the 20th century, what he calls super-repressive societies were identified, in which violent devices are integrally linked to everyday life. However, with the development of the crisis, Lefebvre (2024) arrives at the idea of a terrorist society, i.e., a society in which violence and terror become widespread on a global scale.

In any case, the process of crisis produces a “décomposition de la vie quotidienne et du pouvoir politique exercé jusque dans et sur le quotidien” (Lefebvre, 1978, p. 241-2). This idea, presented by Lefebvre, can be understood in relation to Kurz's notion of “catastrophic desocialization” (2014). The mechanism that amalgamated social practices through work leaves the scene, and this form of sociability becomes obsolete. Violence, whether produced by the state and its repressive apparatuses or produced diffusely and molecularly by disaffected individuals, becomes endemic. Moreover, it has become the very essence of social mediation.

This situation requires a readjustment. Lefebvre (1978) describes this transformation in terms of a shift from crisis theory toward catastrophe theory:

> La théorie classique des crises ne disparaît pas. Elle prend place dans celle des catastrophes. Elle permet de décrire et d’analyse les symptômes d’une éventualité, la catastrophe. Elle détermine

> les causes, et raisons, d'effets qui débordent ces causes et raisons: l'ébranlement des conditions de stabilité d'une morphologie, sa rupture (Lefebvre, 1978, p. 257).

Lefebvre sees a revolutionary possibility in the crisis. It is at this critical moment that things can change. This is a question that runs through his work, always emphasizing the possibility of transformation, sometimes more emphatically and convincingly than in this 1978 text. In this particular text, Lefebvre presents a more nuanced analysis, not positing revolution as a certainty, but rather as a possibility, alongside barbarism. Considering the state's role, he emphasizes the construction of militarized states and the explosion of violent practices rather than the coming revolution. In a word, catastrophe.

The production of space, the urban and the crisis of capital

So far, I have discussed how we can interpret the notion of crisis in Lefebvre's thinking. However, from now on, I also propose that the idea of crisis in Lefebvre's work is important for understanding his theory of the production of space and the urban. After all, it is in the city that the crisis presents itself most clearly. In this sense, it is worth remembering that both in The Urban Revolution and in his previous book, *The Right to the City*, Lefebvre (1968) talks about going through a "critical zone".

My interpretation of Lefebvre suggests that in order to understand this critical moment when talking about the transition from the industrial city to the urban, we need to emphasize the notion of crisis. Lefebvre's use of the critical zone should be read in conjunction with the concept of crisis.

The French philosopher understands the urban - as a noun - as a development of the contradictions of industrialism. The process of industrialization, as the contradictory development of capital, depended on agglomeration. It thus concentrates the elements necessary for the expanded reproduction of capital: people, activities, wealth, things, instruments of work, means of production (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 14). Thus, as an inducer of urbanization, but in a negative way - "L'industrialisation produit l'urbanisation d'abord négativement" (Lefebvre, 1968, p. 145) - industrialization reproduces capital itself. But it does so up to a certain point. From then on, society enters what Lefebvre calls the Critical Zone, a

moment when the contradictions of industrialization are exacerbated. From then on, “les conditions et les moyens de la société urbaine” arise (Lefebvre 1968, p. 145). It is in this critical zone, therefore, of crisis, that urban society insinuates itself as an emancipatory virtuality.

Here, we need to understand Lefebvre's whole meaning to the notion of the critical zone. It is a moment of collapse of the social forms proper to industrialization and, therefore, to capitalism. Lefebvre thus sees the overcoming of capital under the name of urban society. However, Lefebvre himself acknowledges that the contemporary world is characterized by the subordination of urban life to industrial growth. The collapse is prolonged without the decadent social forms coming to an end. This produces the catastrophes (Lefebvre, 1978) that the author mentions ten years after writing *The Right to the City*.

On the one hand, the promise of transformation emerges from the contradictions of industrialism. Conversely, the perpetuation of negative urbanization, subordinated to industry, reproduces the crisis on an ever-expanding scale.

Lefebvre (1991, p. 325) describes how space was "integrated into capitalism," producing "a forward leap of the forces of production," yet it has "occurred without breaking from the mode and relations of the capitalist production system." Capitalism, therefore, not only captures pre-existing space, but also produces a new space:

> through and by means of urbanization, under the pressure of the world market; and, in accordance with the law of the reproducible and the repetitive, by abolishing spatial and temporal differences, by destroying nature and nature’s time (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 326)

Lefebvre describes industrialization as the “dominant power,” which reproduces itself, albeit not without contradictions. These contradictions lead to the trend he describes as “implosion-explosion”, a process in which “urban concentration and the extension of the urban fabric” occur. Brenner and Schmid (2011; 2015) developed, based on this Lefebvrian ideia, the concept of planetary urbanization. According to them, urbanization must be understood as a two-sided process: on the one hand, a process of concentration, as the densification of cities and metropolitan areas, and on the other hand, the productive and logistical operationalization of the hinterland, rural and wilderness spaces.

It is interesting to note that the concept they present, operational landscapes, has highlighted the rule and domination of the industrialization process. With this, it is possible to

comprehend major socioeconomic, infrastructural and socio-metabolic industrial processes that are taking place all over the planet (Brenner and Schmid, 2015). However, as I have discussed elsewhere (Canettieri, 2024), the concept of operational landscapes is highly related to the development of the organic composition of capital. One must read the operationalization of landscapes as one of capital's necessities, which simultaneously deepens the very crisis it is trying to avoid.

Whether it's the operationalization of inland landscapes or the construction of metropolitan areas, what is at stake here is the production of the built environment in a capitalist manner. From this basis, we can understand the submission of urbanization to industrialism. As appears in several of his texts, Lefebvre was aware that construction, given its nature, has a low organic composition and employs a large number of people. It is a counteracting force to the tendency towards crisis, but is incapable of halting this process. Lefebvre (1972, p. 118) argues that the production of space has an essential function in capitalism: "the struggle against the downward trend of average profit". As Kipfer et al. (2008, p. 7) have discussed, this argument was central for Harvey (1978) to develop even further the analysis of the urban process under capitalism: "in the process of urbanization, a secondary circuit of real estate investment becomes increasingly important in advanced capitalism, producing the distinct patterns of spatial homogenization and differentiation so characteristic of postwar metropolitan areas".

However, Harvey understands the production of the built environment as a cyclical process of expansion and contraction deeply intertwined with capital's cycles of growth and crisis (Harvey 1978; 1982). As I have argued before, this perspective cannot be attributed to Lefebvre. Although Lefebvre recognizes the production of the built environment as a way to rationalize the irrationality of capital's contradiction, recognizing that, "Le capitalisme, sous direction étatique, a tenté de corriger l'erreur en investissant dans le secteur II (production pour la consommation et le marché intérieur)" (Lefebvre, 1978, p. 229), as I have discussed before, crisis for him should not be understood as a cycle. Unlike the cyclical crisis perspective, with Lefebvre we can extract a concept of crisis that deepens itself. According to him, there is no resolution to the contradiction of capital other than its ultimate end. However, the

development of capital's immanent contradiction continues its downward spiral. Consider the successive technological developments employed in the productive forces that operate in the construction industry. Even the built environment sector is subject to capital's law of raising its own productivity, increasing its organic composition, eliminating living labour, de-substantiating itself and, ultimately, deepening the crisis.

As is stressed by Lefebvre (1991, p. 31) during his book *The production of space*: "Every society - and hence every mode of production with its subvariants - produces a space, its own space". How can we grasp the space produced by the society of crisis?

Acknowledging his contribution in *De L'État* (Lefebvre, 1978), we could suggest that this is a space of catastrophe, revealing all the violent and critical dynamics of the production of space during a time of crisis. It is a question of recognizing that the modes of capitalist sociability that produce spatial practices have entered a state of disintegration. The perpetual movement of the worsening crisis does not automatically bring about the end of capital - on the contrary, it leads to the spread of barbarism, violence and precariousness (Kurz, 2012).

However, a crisis is also an opportunity for transformation. The formation of an urban society or the extension of the urban phenomenon, as described by Lefebvre (2013, p. 169), will depend on a "rupture in industry and finance (a crisis)". In this sense, the moment of crisis presents an opportunity for a radical transformation of the capitalist socialization, leading to the overcoming of its social forms.

Final Remarks

In this text, I demonstrate the relevance of reinterpreting Lefebvre's work in relation to the concept of crisis. In Henri Lefebvre's work, the idea of crisis is a central category that allows the philosopher to articulate different dimensions of his analysis, although Lefebvrean intellectuals still need to adequately emphasize this issue. As I have argued here, it is from the idea of crisis that the author paves the way for his reflection on the urban. In this way, I have argued throughout this text that it is not possible to understand the urban and the production of space without taking into account a consequent analysis of the notion of crisis.

For Lefebvre, it is essential to understand the immanent contradiction of capital, which, in its own movement, puts itself into crisis. This contradiction leads to the impossibility of valorization and accumulation, but capital doesn't destroy itself.

As Lefebvre himself (1978, p. 232) argues: "S'il convient toujours d'analyses la crise (de décrire les phénomènes, de rassembler les informations et données), il faut également considérer cette même crise comme analyseur du monde actual". Thus, the causes and effects of the crisis must be analysed, but the crisis must also be taken as a means of analysing contemporary reality. Adopting the crisis as a key to interpreting the world thus means understanding the collapse of everyday life in the modern world, which can be characterised by an immeasurable accumulation of catastrophes.

The urban, as understood by Lefebvre, emerges from the critical zone, a moment when the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production grow, worsen and take on new meanings. In this way, the author seeks to understand the meaning of the urban as a means of transforming capitalist sociability in crisis. The urban carries within itself new contradictions, added to the other unresolved contradictions.

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