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**Preface**

“Certains naissent de façon posthume.”<sup>1</sup> Some are born posthumously. Thus begins an article written for a French journal by Stuart Elden, a British political scientist and geographer and translator of the *Éléments de rythmanalyse* (1992) into English (2013). There have, in fact, been a series of works, new editions, and translations appearing only after Henri Lefebvre’s death in 1991. Yet as I will show in what follows, it would be somewhat one-sided to reduce Lefebvre’s (literary) afterlife to these publications alone, or to see, in his afterlife alone, his significance for and influence on the social sciences and cultural studies.

These lines are occasioned by this publication: a series of contributions on the “theory and application” of Lefebvre in the cultural studies that originated in the context of Lefebvre workshops in Erfurt (2014), Darmstadt (2015), and Basel (2017). The project was held together, above all, by Jenny Bauer (Kassel) and Robert Fischer (Erfurt) and was initiated in cooperation with Erfurt Spatio-Temporal Studies.<sup>2</sup> The volume reflects what has been evident for several years now in the German-speaking world, and not only here: an increased interest in Lefebvre’s theory of space – and this despite the fact that his main work on the theory of space, *La Production de l’espace*, has not yet been translated into German. The fascination that Lefebvre’s approach to space holds is certainly to be explained with the general spatial turn in the social sciences and cultural studies. But it must be emphasized that Lefebvre – in contrast, for example, to Michel Foucault, who is also counted among the great thinkers of space from the last century – does in fact develop a comprehensive theory and method, and that he did not just make essayistic attempts to do so. This is why part of the charm of his theory of space, which is also a critical theory of society, lies in its better applicability.

Yet this theory of space is in no way all that Lefebvre’s work has to offer. A critique of everyday life, the right to the city, dialectical materialism, and rhythm

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1 Elden, Stuart. “Certains naissent de façon posthume: La survie d’Henri Lefebvre”, Élise Charon and Vincent Charbonnier (trans.). *Actuel Marx* 36:2 (2004): 181–198. The article discusses the French reception of Lefebvre since his death in 1991.

2 Several institutions contributed financially to the project: The Lehrstuhl “Geschichte und Kulturen der Räume der Neuzeit” (Erfurt University); the DFG Research Training Group “Dynamics of Space and Gender” (Universities of Kassel and Göttingen); the DFG Research Training Group “Topology of Technology” (TU Darmstadt); the Graduate School of Social Sciences (G3S) (University of Basel).

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**Note:** Translated by Michael Thomas Taylor.

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analysis are likewise terms that can be connected with Lefebvre, who was at once a philosopher, sociologist, urban theorist, and publicist. And this is the reason that the resurrected Lefebvre can today appear in different guises depending on the historical, spatial or academic context. There were also periods of time after 1991 in which – in complete contrast to today, 2018 – he had already been declared dead. In what follows, I will sketch the basis of the – constantly changing – current relevance and visibility that Lefebvre has experienced since his death, above all in France, to then engage with his reception in Germany.

## 1 Lefebvre's various afterlives, above all in France

In 1994, the journal *Espaces et sociétés*, founded in 1970 by Henri Lefebvre and Anatole Kopp, published a special topic issue on the “current relevance” of Henri Lefebvre. The issue was occasioned by the question of whether Lefebvre’s thought remained relevant following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the failure of the workers’ movement. The contributions to the issue replied in various ways that certainly emphasized Lefebvre’s originality and the power of his vision. What is striking from today’s perspective, however, is the editors’ assertion that, only three years after his death, Lefebvre had been forgotten. The editors considered this forgetting to be evident even among the sociologists Lefebvre had taught at the universities of Strasbourg and Nanterre – exactly where, in other words, the student movement had begun and where students had learned, the editors argue, to critically question society.<sup>3</sup> In the rest of their introduction, however, the editors also turn to Lefebvre’s work to find reasons

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<sup>3</sup> Coornaert, Monique and Jean-Pierre Garnier. “Présentation: Actualités de Henri Lefebvres” *Espaces et sociétés* 76 (1994): 5–11, here 6: “Mais, avant de présenter quelques-uns des axes autour desquels s’organisent les articles [...] un point semble mériter de retenir l’attention: la désaffection dont souffre la pensée de Henri Lefebvre, aujourd’hui, alors que, décédé depuis peu (juin 1991), il n’a cessé, jusqu’au bout, d’être publié, interviewé, interpellé. Cet oubli apparaît particulièrement manifeste chez les sociologues dans le champ même de celui qui enseigna la sociologie à l’Université de Strasbourg puis de Nanterre, là où prit naissance un mouvement étudiant dont beaucoup de protagonistes avaient d’ailleurs appris dans les cours de Henri Lefebvre à ‘contester’ la société.” [“But before presenting some of the axes around which the articles are organized (...) one point seems to deserve attention: the disaffection from which the thought of Henri Lefebvre suffers today, recently deceased (June 1991), he continued, until the end, being published, interviewed, questioned. This oversight seems particularly evident among sociologists in the very place where he taught sociology, at the Universities of Strasbourg and Nanterre – the place where the student movement began and where many of that movement’s leaders had learned to ‘challenge’ society in Henri Lefebvre’s classes.”]

for this forgetting. First, they argue that Lefebvre's influence during his life had always been only partial; it had been frequently focused on social problems, and less so on the theoretical-methodological elements of his work. Second, they argue that many of Lefebvre's themes had been quickly popularized. In their view, researchers, practitioners, politicians, and journalists appropriated some of Lefebvre's ideas – for example, the “civilisation urbaine” – only to then decontextualize and depoliticize them, making them into clichés. And third, they suggest that several of the shortcomings and ambiguities in Lefebvre's work could themselves have contributed to a gradual turning away from his writings. It was apparent even at the time in France that there was significant interest in Lefebvre's work in the Anglo-American world, which could be traced to the translation of *La production de l'espace* – for the editors, a strangely postmodern interpretation that did not really do justice to Lefebvre in his role as a progressive intellectual.

Just four years later in 1998, another text appeared dedicated to the “current relevance” of Henri Lefebvre's thought.<sup>4</sup> The spatial and urban planner Laurent Devisme saw *Le droit à la ville* (*The Right to the City*) as a leitmotiv of French urban policy from the 1990s. At the same time, he points toward the much older fact that Lefebvre's works that engage with the city were already being discussed in academic urban studies beginning at the end of the 1960s. Here we find, in other words, a gentle rebuke of the common reductions of Lefebvre and his work.<sup>5</sup> But Devisme also intends to point toward the contemporary relevance of Lefebvre's thought by confronting some of its aspects with the contemporary urban reality. For Devisme, this is – in addition to the general increase in urbanization – the concept or form of centrality. Lefebvre sees the city as characterized chiefly by centrality, but this does not mean the geographic center. Centrality exists where many things come together, where intensive communication and exchange take place; it is a place of convergence, the negation of distance, and the production of simultaneity. Urban centrality can be analyzed with Lefebvre's triad: as conceived, perceived, and lived space. Or to put it differently: centrality (a form, not a content) allows urbanity to originate or, conversely, follows from urbanity.

In 2006, the geographer Jean-Yves Martin published an article guided by the idea of making Henri Lefebvre more well known, especially in French geography,

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4 Devisme, Laurent. *Actualité de la pensée d'Henri Lefebvre à propos de l'urbain: La question de la centralité*. Tours: Maison des sciences de la ville, 1998.

5 Devisme, Laurent. “Lefebvre, Henri” In: *Dictionnaire de la géographie et de l'espace des sociétés*, Jacques Lévy and Michel Lussault (eds.), 546 f. Paris: Belin, 2003.

as a “spatiologue” (a scholar of space).<sup>6</sup> Following a brief introduction to several concepts concerned with the theory of space (“production,” “triplicité,” and “conflictualité”) and to the dialectical method that is also important for the analysis of space, Martin examines works from contemporary geographers to show how these scholars have been inspired by Lefebvre, and also how they further develop and update his thought. We should probably consider it telling for this moment in time that all of these authors were working on different continents: Rob Shields in Canada, Edward Soja in the United States, Ana Fani Alessandri Carlos, Amélia Luísa Damiani, and Cláudio Roberto Duarte in Brazil. The author nevertheless laments that most geographers continue to work with dualities of “espace/territoire” and to pay too little attention to users of space. But Lefebvre’s understanding of space included its permanent reproduction through its use, which is also what transformed space into an “œuvre collective (générique),” meaning joint effort of all human beings.<sup>7</sup>

Since 2009, the tide appears to have been gradually turning. Booksellers celebrated Lefebvre as one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century and an author who was experiencing a worldwide rediscovery.<sup>8</sup> On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its first publication, the Éditions Economica reissued *La somme et le reste* (1959). *Le droit à la ville* (from 1968) was also published in a third edition. It should also be mentioned that an intellectual biography of Lefebvre, written by the educator Hugues Lethierry, a student of Lefebvre in Nanterre, appeared in 2009.<sup>9</sup> Two years later, in the preface to another book edited by Hugues Lethierry that brought together brief contributions by various authors under the motto of “Lefebvre studies,” Andy Merrifield wrote that 2009 had been a significant year for French research into Lefebvre, who, Merrifield claimed, had until then been valued only as an export.<sup>10</sup> However unorthodox Lethierry’s book may have been it played a highly significant role in reawakening Lefebvre’s memory in France. In another book, also published as an edited volume, Lethierry

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**6** Martin, Jean-Yves. “Une géographie critique de l’espace du quotidien: L’actualité mondialisée de la pensée spatiale d’Henri Lefebvre” *Journal of Urban Research* [Online] 2 (2006), online since July 17, 2006, <http://journals.openedition.org/articulo/897> (12/04/18).

**7** Martin, Une géographie critique, 5.

**8** See <https://www.eyrolles.com/Accueil/Auteur/henri-lefebvre-94535> (28/04/18).

**9** Lethierry, Hugues. *Penser avec Henri Lefebvre: Sauver la vie et la ville?* Lyon: Chronique Sociale, 2009. In this context, we should not completely forget another of Lefebvre’s students, Rémi Hess, who wrote about his teacher even before Lefebvre died, and who has administered Lefebvre’s papers since his death, meaning he has published some of Lefebvre’s writings. See, among other things, Hess, Rémi. *Henri Lefebvre et l’aventure du siècle*. Paris: A.M. Métailié, 1988.

**10** Merrifield, Andy. “Préface.” In: *Sauve qui peu la ville: Études lefebvriennes*, Hugues Lethierry (ed.), 17–23. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001.

aims to move forward from thinking to acting.<sup>11</sup> Lethierry's political (Marxist) interest in Lefebvre is evident here, although several of the contributions show that Lefebvre's own afterlife had continued to develop in the meantime.

Since this turning point in 2009, Lefebvre has also reappeared in his home country in various guises. In 2011, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his death, two conferences took place at the University of Nanterre: "Henri Lefebvre in Urban Studies Today: *The Right to the City*" (June 10) and "Henri Lefebvre: Thought Become World?" (September 27–28).<sup>12</sup> Several of the contributions to the second conference were published one year later in a special issue of the journal *L'Homme et la société*. That publication speaks of a rediscovery, without however lamenting any absence. Quite the opposite: the issue emphasizes Lefebvre's relevance today. The blurb on the cover reads: "Never has any age been as subject to managerial and technical rationality as ours. Henri Lefebvre's thought, then, has made a world appearance/has appeared as a world."<sup>13</sup> This somewhat unusual formulation – "une pensée devenue/apparue monde" – is an entirely original play on words, the meaning of which only becomes clear from context: it combines the observation that Lefebvre's thought has since become known worldwide with the assertion that it also helps to understand (the problems of) today's world. I cannot precisely say how Lefebvre, who was a critical intellectual and not prone to aligning himself with mass movements, would have reacted to this claim. Still, the formulation "pensée devenue monde" essentially amounts to the highest accolade that can be given to an engaged intellectual.

In the meantime, Sylvain Sangla had also defended a geophilosophical dissertation on politics and space in Henri Lefebvre at the University of Paris 8.<sup>14</sup> Since 2010, a transdisciplinary research platform on rhythms has existed in the sciences, philosophy, and the arts.<sup>15</sup> This platform, primarily initiated by the philosopher Paul Michon, also indirectly follows Lefebvre's goal of transforming the analysis of rhythm into a kind of universal science in which the natural and social sciences, the humanities, and the arts come together to eventually produce a new

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**11** Lethierry, Hugues (ed.). *Agir avec Henri Lefebvre: Altermarxiste? Géographe radical?* Lyon: Chronique Sociale, 2015.

**12** "Henri Lefebvre dans les études urbaines aujourd'hui: le droit à la ville" and "Henri Lefebvre: une pensée devenue monde?"

**13** *L'Homme et la société* 3–4 (2012).

**14** Sangla, Sylvain. *Politique et espace chez Henri Lefebvre*. Doctoral thesis. Saint Denis: Université Paris 8 Saint-Denis, 2010. Online: Bibliothèque numérique Paris 8, <http://octaviana.fr/document/152263594> (28/04/18).

**15** Rhuthmos. Plateforme internationale et transdisciplinaire de recherche sur les rythmes dans les sciences, les philosophies et les arts, <https://rhuthmos.eu/> (28/04/18).

social theory. The platform contributes to this aim by inviting authors from widely diverse disciplines to participate in a dialogue about rhythms.

Lefebvre's increasing presence among the living is also evident in how his theories have trickled down into books intended as academic introductions, especially to geography and urban sociology. Jean Rémy, a long-time member of the editorial board for the journal *Espaces et sociétés*, argues in the very title of the introduction that he published in 2015 that space is a central category for sociology, essentially basing his arguments on Lefebvre's triad.<sup>16</sup> And in Jean-Marc Stébé's brief introduction to urban sociology, which was first published in 2007 and appeared in a fifth edition in 2016, we read that Lefebvre's hypothesis is being increasingly confirmed by global urbanization.<sup>17</sup> Although the book discusses other theoretical approaches, Lefebvre's works on space and the city appear again and again (*La révolution urbaine*, *Le droit à la ville*, *La production de l'espace*). For the fiftieth anniversary of the first edition of *Le droit à la ville*, colloquiums, public discussions, and small exhibitions took place at various locations in France (Paris City Hall, the University of Tours, the University of Paris-Est Créteil, the University of Lyon, the University of Rennes 2, the University of Paris-Nanterre, etc.). It's as if things had never been otherwise: Lefebvre, the intellectual, who can help us to find solutions for the problems of today's society.

## 2 Lefebvre in the German-speaking world

Thinking about Lefebvre's reception beyond the French-speaking world is not only justified by the fact that he posthumously moves among the great thinkers of space. We should also ask this question because his written legacy does not allow us to overlook the fact that he was exceptionally familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. Moreover, he took concerned interest in Germany beginning in the 1930s and published work in France on Hitler's fascism.<sup>18</sup> What happens, then, with these varied interests after they had been integrated into scholarship, or with Lefebvre's own ideas and concepts after they had again been passed back over to the other side of the Rhine.

The reciprocal process of this intellectual exchange of gifts, as we might call it, can be gauged first of all in the translation of Lefebvre's works into German and their – in part – very successful sales numbers.

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<sup>16</sup> Rémy, Jean. *L'espace, un objet central de la sociologie*. Toulouse: Éditions érès, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Stébé, Jean-Marc and Hervé Marchal. *La sociologie urbaine*. (Que sais-je?) Paris: PUF, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> For example: Lefebvre, Henri. *Hitler au pouvoir: Les enseignements de cinq années de fascisme en Allemagne*. Paris: Bureau d'éditions, 1938.

Title	Translated by	Year published, publisher
<i>Problèmes actuels du marxisme</i>	Alfred Schmidt	1965, Suhrkamp, 6 editions through 1971: 40,000 copies sold
<i>La révolution urbaine</i>	Ulrike Roeckl Ulrike Roeckl	1972, List 1976, Syndikat 1990, Hain 2003, Dresden-Postplatz, Stephan Greene, and B-Books
<i>Sociologie de Marx</i>	Beate Rehschuh	1972, Suhrkamp
<i>Critique de la vie quotidienne</i>	Karl Held Burkhard Kroeber Burkhard Kroeber	1974, Hanser 1977, Athenäum 1987, Fischer Taschenbuch
<i>Le matérialisme dialectique</i>	Alfred Schmidt	1966, Suhrkamp, 5 editions through 1971: 36,000 copies sold
<i>La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne</i>	Annegret Dumasy	1972, Suhrkamp
<i>Le langage et la société</i>	Erwin Stegentrift	1973, Schwann
<i>La survie du capitalisme</i>	Bernd Lächler	1974, List
<i>Métaphilosophie</i>	Burkhard Kroeber	1975, Suhrkamp
<i>La pensée marxiste et la ville</i>	Christel Leclère	1975, Otto Maier
<i>Le marxisme</i>	Beate Rehschuh	1975, Beck
<i>Introduction à la modernité: Préludes</i>	Bernd Schwibs	1978, Suhrkamp
<i>La révolution n'est plus ce qu'elle était</i>	Burkhard Kroeber	1979, Hanser
<i>Le droit à la ville</i>	Birgit Althaler	2016, Nautilus

Since the 1980s, there have been fewer translations into German, although several new editions have appeared (especially of *La révolution urbaine*). In contrast, the number of translations into English has been increasing, which is probably a sign that Lefebvre's work is starting to be received in Anglo-American sociology and human geography. This list shows, among other things, that Lefebvre has been read in the German-speaking world since at least the 1960s. This history nevertheless evinces a strange asymmetry: work translated on early topics is hardly interesting anymore today. By contrast, Lefebvre's frequently cited writings on space – with the exception of individual passages or chapters – were not translated into German, even though they were widely received, especially in cultural

studies.<sup>19</sup> Of course here, too, we ought to ask the questions that were already raised in 1994 in the special issue of *Espaces et sociétés* on Lefebvre. A certain reticence about Lefebvre may also be explained – especially in Germany – by the Marxist influences on his theory. Yet as far as the further reception of his writings in German philosophy, sociology, and urban studies is concerned, we still lack a comprehensive analysis.

Today, Lefebvre is once again being read in the German-speaking world, including his scholarship on the city. In 2014, *La révolution urbaine* was republished in German as *Revolution der Städte* by the Europäische Verlagsanstalt. In 2015, the Viennese journal *Dérive* devoted a special issue to Lefebvre.<sup>20</sup> And in 2016, almost fifty years after *Le droit à la ville* was published in French, the book appeared for the first time in German as *Das Recht auf Stadt*.<sup>21</sup> The timing of the translation can be explained by the rise of the right-to-city movements, as they exist, for example, in Hamburg. With their demands for affordable housing and more participation and dialogue to shape what happens in urban space, and in their protest marches against inner-city gentrification, these movements repeatedly refer to Lefebvre's text, even if this is not always directly evident from their websites and protest signs.<sup>22</sup> The explicit references are nonetheless to be found in statements made by the intellectual leaders of the movements and in social science research on recent urban social movements.<sup>23</sup>

All signs thus seem to point to a Lefebvre renaissance integrating the analysis of space and urban research. On the horizon, we can also glimpse the analysis of rhythm, in which Lefebvre saw a close collaboration between humanities, social sciences, and life sciences.<sup>24</sup> It is to this – now third – renaissance of Lefebvre studies that this volume in the series *SpatioTemporality: Practices – Concepts – Media* aims to make a contribution of its own.

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19 Dorsch, Sebastian and Susanne Rau (eds.). *Historical Social Research* 38 (2013). Special Issue: “Space/Time Practices and the Production of Space and Time”; Rau, Susanne. *Räume: Konzepte, Wahrnehmungen, Praktiken*. Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2013, 47–52, 74–80; 2nd edition 2017, 73–78.

20 Laimer, Christoph and Elke Rauth (eds.). *Dérive: Zeitschrift für Stadtforschung* 60 (2015). Special Issue: “Henri Lefebvre und das Recht auf Stadt. 15 Jahre dérive”.

21 Lefebvre, Henri. *Das Recht auf Stadt*. Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 2016.

22 Recht auf Stadt: *Netzwerk von Hamburger Initiativen für eine Stadt für alle*, <http://www.rechtaufstadt.net/> (10/05/18).

23 Boeing, Niels. *Von Wegen: Überlegungen zur freien Stadt der Zukunft*. Hamburg: Nautilus, 2015; Holm, Andrej and Dirk Gebhardt (eds.). *Initiativen für ein Recht auf Stadt: Theorie und Praxis städtischer Aneignungen*. Hamburg: VSA, 2011.

24 Schmolinsky, Sabine, Diana Hitzke and Heiner Stahl (eds.). *Taktungen und Rhythmen: Raumzeitliche Perspektiven interdisziplinär*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2018.

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