

SOCIAL THEORY
FOR TODAY

QUOTIDIAN TURN: HENRI LEFEBVRE

Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) bequeathed a rich, if largely ignored, sociological legacy in his sustained effort to theorise imperceptible, long-term changes in the banal forms of everyday life, or the quotidian (ordinary, daily, common), from the 1930s down to the late twentieth century. While some consider his 1947 *Critique of Everyday Life* (1991b) ‘an enduring classic of modern social thought’ and ‘the defining element in Lefebvre’s social theory’, it has largely been neglected in English language social theory (Gardiner, 2000: 73; Butler, 2012: 107). The empirical grounding of his social theory was eclipsed by the reception in English-language ‘human geography’ of Lefebvre’s (1991a) endlessly resourceful, though highly abstract theory of space, *The Production of Space*. This optic tends to eclipse the way that Lefebvre’s theory of everyday life runs like a red thread through his analyses of modernity, technology, time and space, politics and the state, processes of difference, the city and the rural, and the worldwide (Elden, 2004: 120; Lefebvre, 2009).

In an earlier book, *The Sociology of Marx*, Lefebvre (1968a: 22) argued that while there is a sociology *in* Marx, he cannot be pigeonholed *as* a sociologist. Lefebvre rejected two possible ways of constructing Marxism as sociology. First, a theoretical system could be deduced from fundamental philosophical categories like materialism. Alternatively, dialectics might provide sociology with a universal method for analysing society. The problem in both cases is that scholarly knowledge is divorced from worldly practice, with the result that form is separated from content, systems from processes, structure from agency. With its concern for the ‘facts’ empirical sociology neglects the play of contradictory forces in the social totality. Instead of theoretical closure of philosophical systems such as existentialism and structuralism Lefebvre insisted on the open, creative possibilities of human struggle and heightened ‘moments of presence’ (Shields, 1999).

This also meant clarifying the relationship between politics and social theory. Just as Marx was not a superior economist, neither was he specifically a ‘political

theorist'. In contrast to Hegel, for Marx people are not essentially 'political animals' but social beings (Lefebvre, 1968a: 123). In the words of the poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891), the point is to 'change life' not merely to change governments (Lefebvre, 1969: 90; 1991a: 59; Kolakowski and Lefebvre, 1974: 248). Political change is 'conjunctural' whereas social revolution heralds a profound 'structural' transformation (Lefebvre, 1976: 95). Lefebvre emphasised that, beyond any narrow concern with economics, alienation in everyday life is the central problem of Marxist theory. If the philosophical concept of alienation is integrated into sociology, then 'it becomes scientific and allows the sociology of everyday life to become a science as well as a critique' (Lefebvre, 1991b: 36).

This chapter first introduces Lefebvre's approach to social theory. Lefebvre's social theory rested on a distinctive approach that he hoped would demonstrate that Marxism is a creative, living theory of possibility rather than a stale dogma. The rest of the chapter concentrates on his fifty-year long critique of everyday life, oriented around Marx's problematic of alienation. This leads into a consideration of modernity, crisis and those intense moments when everyday life is transcended for a time. Lefebvre resisted the pessimism of much critical sociology that everyday life is a closed book, that alienation is self-sustaining, and that conditions of crisis are necessarily catastrophic for society. Lefebvre does not simply paint a bleak picture of social suffering and 'inauthenticity' in the manner of the 'sincere' clichés of existentialism and critical theory. Life may be re-enchanted in ways that social theory has not yet recognised. Social change does not obey a prescriptive model but requires a sociological wager on the future.

LEFEBVRE'S SOCIOLOGY

With the crisis of French society in the 1930s Lefebvre shifted from the artistic and philosophical rebellions of surrealism and existentialism to Marxism (Burkhard, 2000; Merrifield, 2006). One problem with symbolic rebellions of art and philosophy is that they often rely on a 'transcendental contempt for the real, for work for example' (Lefebvre, 1991b: 29). Lefebvre was immersed in contemporary philosophical currents, especially Heidegger and Husserl, and by the discovery of Marx's early writings on philosophy (Elden, 2004). After the 1939–1945 war, philosophy, Marxist and non-Marxist, found itself in crisis, caught between analytical vacuity and ideological dogma:

On one side, the non-Marxist side, the symptoms are obscurity, jargon, technicality, illusory profundity. On the Marxist side they are false clarity, pedagogy which takes itself as a measure of thought, desiccated dogmatism and skeletal schematization, propagandist exploitation of ideological themes. (Lefebvre, 2002: 84)

Lefebvre (1946: 6–13) was especially critical of the 'humanist' rejection by existentialist philosophy of the mundane, banal and trivial as 'inauthentic' compared to the metaphysical mysteries and 'comfortable indeterminacy' of personal

anguish, the tragedy of choice, and social nihilism, encapsulated in the famous phrase of the existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): ‘Hell is other people.’

On the other hand, Lefebvre was deeply critical of the intellectual fashion for ‘structuralism’ as a pure form of ‘scientific’ knowledge opposed to ‘ideology’. In its willingness to move away from a dialectical theory of praxis and onto the non-Marxist ground of a systematic theory of formal knowledge, structuralism was symptomatic of a deep-seated crisis in Marxist theory. Lefebvre argued that the retreat into the formal structures of knowledge evaded the problems and failures of post-war Marxism to accommodate technocratic demands for epistemological foundations. An influential strand of Marxist structuralism was developed by Louis Althusser (1918–1990) and his followers. Althusser (2008) argued that ‘science’ should be purified of any lingering ‘ideology’, such as the dialectical method and the concept of alienation, viewed by Althusser as ‘unscientific’ hangovers of philosophical idealism. The fact that Marxist theory was forced to submit to abstract criteria merely demonstrated to Lefebvre the depth of the crisis of a theory that had lost contact with all-too-human processes of social life.

Lefebvre’s critical sociology aimed to change theory and life. Too often, social theory merely contemplates the world – ‘Why change the real rather than merely noting it down?’ (Lefebvre, 2002: 186) – and looks down on everyday life from the perspective of more elevated experiences like science, literature, culture, and philosophy: ‘People who gather flowers and nothing but flowers tend to look upon the soil as something dirty’ (Lefebvre, 1991b: 87). Marxism is often accused of inverting these priorities by becoming mired in the dirty business of the economy or technology and treating everything else – art, ideology, politics and so on – as mere reflections of class interests. For Lefebvre, this leaves human praxis out of account. Humans produce the alienating structures that dominate them but they also make social change possible. As Marx famously asserted, people make history but not in conditions that they choose freely. Praxis relies on two temporal coordinates: it depends on the past (as determination) and it faces into the future (as possibility) (Lefebvre, 1968a: 55). ‘Determination’ by the past need not, therefore, mean ‘determinism’ by monolithic structures.

Sociological analysis begins, then, neither from some transcendental ideal nor by fetishising the empirical details of social structures but by inserting these into a theoretical critique of a whole way of life, including its creative possibilities (Lefebvre, 1968b: 162). Since understanding depends on a reciprocal relationship between two interlocutors, sociologists should avoid imposing their specialist language on the subjects being studied and undertake ‘the sociologist’s catharsis’ through a detour back to their own everyday reality (Lefebvre, 2002: 103). Yet the sociologist should in no way renounce the specialised language of science since it is the symbolic lubricant connecting diverse social groups. Without contact between practical language and scientific language, concepts become ‘jargon’, an arbitrary language with no purpose other than its own obscurity. Sociology must begin from some position within a totality that cannot be grasped all at once. Lefebvre (2002: 143) cites Picasso’s method: ‘First of all I find something, then I start to search for it.’

Totality was conceived by Lefebvre as an unfinished process of becoming, not a frozen social structure. Distinct levels of the social whole alternately complement and contradict each other. As such, totality cannot be confined by the specialised categories of sociology, economics, psychology, or history. Simply because totality is fragmented, knowledge should not be broken up into discrete social sciences. Particular branches of sociology – sociology of the family, the city and the countryside, classes, nations, states, knowledge, and so on – should reveal their relationship to totality: ‘the indispensable presuppositions in the social sciences remain the unity of knowledge and the total character of reality’ (Lefebvre, 1968a: 23–4).

Study of the social process as a whole and the social whole as a process requires what Lefebvre (1953: 117; 1991a: 66) called a ‘regressive-progressive’ method. This passes through three stages of description-dating-explanation. Lefebvre (1980: 50) insisted that dialectical theory must always have a triadic structure beyond the static dualisms of structuralism, such as inside and outside, male and female, symbol and reality, structure and action, and so on. Such opposed pairs of fixed concepts merely refer back to each other in a vicious circle, now one thing, now the other, now the macro-level, now the micro-level, and so on ad infinitum. A third concept must be introduced to mediate between two concepts, now no longer static, as when the opposition between empiricism and speculation is mediated by ‘theory’.

Theory starts from a *description* of present-day conditions, where sociologists begin from observations of the present constructed from fieldwork and survey data, not as pure facts but as research material disciplined by experience and general theory. Second, at the *analytico-regressive* stage, observational descriptions are compared with the past, with precise *dates* making the comparisons specific, to show how survivals from the past function as preconditions of the present. Finally, at the *historico-genetic* stage a ‘genetic classification’ of structures accounts for movement in the process of development. An attempt is made to return ‘progressively’ to the present, now put in a different light, to *explain* the overall process of development ‘genetically’, with all its arbitrariness, contingency, reasons, and causes.

One difficulty with Lefebvre’s approach is that the regressive stage and the progressive stage may become confused in the research process or in the presentation of the analysis. To control the different stages of analysis it is therefore necessary to begin logically from a theoretical concept, a ‘concrete abstraction’ that both derives from and illuminates social relations and processes, as Marx had done with the concept of value in *Capital* (1976). Lefebvre variously begins from concrete abstractions like modernity, everyday life, ‘the production of space’, ‘the urban revolution’, to arrive at distinct analyses of the contradictory processes of alienation and de-alienation in changed conditions.

This processual method of concept-description-explanation, Lefebvre argued, dissolves fixed oppositions and static categories. As structures, forms and systems, survivals from the past continue to exert an active influence on the present. Sociology examines structural survivals in the present as a ‘sociology of forms’. ‘Form’ refers to the inner structure of social relations, its rules, rituals,

conventions, categories, apperception and sequences, repeated in many different instances and situations across time and place. Central to social forms, however, are also processes that undermine or reverse the automatic reproduction of structures. Attempts were made by Lefebvre (1969, 1976) to understand how capitalism survived the revolution of May 1968 and, despite itself, continue to reproduce the social relations of production.

CRITIQUE OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Social survivals are reproduced in and by everyday life. For fifty years Lefebvre regularly revisited the problem of everyday life in a series of studies, from an initial critique of 1933, the four volumes of *Critique of Everyday Life* (original dates 1947, 1961, 1981, 1992), *Introduction to Modernity* (originally 1962), *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (originally 1968), *The Production of Space* (originally 1974), *The Urban Revolution* (originally 1970), *The Survival of Capitalism* (originally 1973), and *The Explosion* (on the May 1968 revolt; originally 1968). This series of studies charted changes in Lefebvre's theory of everyday life, from the rise of fascism and the crisis of the 1930s, the optimism of the Liberation, the emergence of technocracy and consumer society in the 1960s, the ideology of information technology in the 1970s, to the fully mediated everyday of the 1980s (Burkhard, 2000; Elden, 2004: 115). Throughout, Lefebvre reflexively reviewed and criticised his own earlier analyses.

While Lefebvre produced a number of studies of major literary and philosophical figures – Pascal, Descartes, Hegel, Diderot, Nietzsche – his 'critique of everyday life' aimed to combat arid 'philosophism'. From Heidegger's philosophy he seems to have assimilated Lukacs' concept of 'everydayness' as an inferior realm of reality compared to Marx's idea of the 'total man' [sic] beyond alienation (Lefebvre, 1968b: 148–65; 1991b: 64–8; 2005: 18–20; Goldmann, 1977). Lefebvre took a more ambiguous view of everyday life than Lukacs and Heidegger: it is the site of alienation but it is also where alienation might be overcome.

By concentrating on the problem of the quotidian, Lefebvre argued, the crisis of Marxist theory might be contained: 'We will therefore go so far as to argue that critique of everyday life – radical critique aimed at attaining the radical metamorphosis of everyday life – is alone in taking up the authentic Marxist project again and in continuing it: to supersede philosophy and to fulfil it' (Lefebvre, 2002: 23). Everyday life is a creative process whereby people produce themselves as humans along with their conditions of life, as well as the possibilities for changing their situation.

There are determined biological, historical, economic, sociological *conditions* (which are taken over and modified by their own creative praxis), which constitute the 'real' in its accepted sense. There are *processes*, which contain the evolution and forward movement of the real. These conditions and processes point towards *possibilities*. (Lefebvre, 2002: 110–11)

Not only would the critique of everyday life rejuvenate Marxist theory but Lefebvre's conception of Marxism was fundamentally defined by the description, analysis, and explanation of everyday life (Lefebvre, 1991b: 148). By the 1930s official Marxism had been codified into a closed book that neglected the wider problem of everyday life. At the same time, radical non-Marxist theory took the modern world to task but evaded the problem of capitalism until it was imposed by the pandemonium of crisis: 'capitalism isn't a country in which you spend three weeks so that you can come back with a book' (Lefebvre and Guterman, 1933: 77).

Simply because the familiar is familiar does not mean that it is readily understood (Lefebvre, 1991b: 15). On the other hand, Lefebvre argues, the sociology of everyday life too often results in a trivial analysis of trivia. 'Ordinariness' cannot be analysed in an 'ordinary' way (Lefebvre, 1962: 100). Lefebvre's student Georges Perec (1999: 126) closed his sociological novel *Things* with a misappropriated envoi from Marx to the effect that the method of inquiry is as much part of the truth as the final conclusion. As Marx put it in one of his earliest articles:

Truth includes not only the result but also the path to it. The investigation of truth must itself be true; true investigation is developed truth, the dispersed elements of which are brought together in the result. And should not the manner of investigation alter according to the object? If the object is a matter for laughter, the manner has to seem serious, if the object is disagreeable, it has to be modest. (1842: 113)

If the present is to be understood as a historical process long in the making, then the correct procedure seems to be to work from the present back to the past and to retrace our steps back to the present. This procedure accounts for historical processes without being entirely subordinated to them: 'The sociologist has first to observe, and analyse, in order to explain. He [sic] uses history as an ancillary, subordinate science in the study of social processes as a whole' (Lefebvre, 1953: 116).

MODERNITY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Historically, people have always constructed daily routines and habits but they have not always had an 'everyday life'. Prior to modernity diverse social forms, structures, and functions – eating, drinking, sleeping, working, travelling, and so on – were experienced as part of a whole 'style of life'. Everyday life only became possible once divisions were established between work, home, and leisure, politics and economics, public and private and, later, between modernity and modernism. In modernity, things, from cars to coins to coffee-grinders, become separated out, named and integrated as functional objects within systems. For instance, food is organised as a system of interdependent functional parts, fridges, freezers, microwave ovens, supermarkets, advertising, transport, industrial farms, and so on. The

everyday does not itself form a 'system' but integrates and connects systems like food with other systems, say the leisure system or the educational system.

Everyday life is, first, a residual zone, whatever is left over once all distinct, specialised functions are subtracted; second, it forms the common ground that connects isolated systems together; and third, it expresses 'the totality of the real' in partial and incomplete social relations like friendship, love, play, communication, comradeship, and so on (Lefebvre, 1991b: 97): 'The everyday can therefore be defined as a set of functions which connect and join together systems that might appear to be distinct' (Lefebvre, 1987: 9). Everyday life mediates between culture and nature. So-called 'higher' activities of art, science and philosophy impose structured forms on the spontaneous ambiguity of the lived everyday: 'And yet it is the spontaneity nobody can do without. And yet, compared with nature it is already more ordered and more beautiful, and more economical with its means and its ends' (Lefebvre, 2002: 357).

Modernity contains within itself a wide range of variation at the leading edges of cultural, technological, scientific, and intellectual development. In the 1840s, Marx identified modernity with a form of political power invested in raising the state above everyday life (Lefebvre, 1995: 170). It is also to be found in the beginning of a sociology of the everyday in Charles Baudelaire's poetic notion of 'modernity' as residing in whatever is fashionable, ephemeral, and fleeting. What Marx saw as abstract and unnatural, Baudelaire saw as concrete and social. With the failure of the 1848 Revolution, modernity became a parody of revolution for Baudelaire while for Marx it became the site of revolutionary praxis.

Well before Marx, theorists of civil society like Adam Ferguson (1723–1816) had located the roots of the state in the spontaneous order of institutionalised social relations. However, Hegel (1770–1831) severed the umbilical cord and elevated the state above civil society as a mystified 'world spirit'. Social relations, including contradictions that produce antagonisms and struggles between classes, account for the state as a 'concrete abstraction', not the other way around (Lefebvre, 2009: 109). Indeed, the state became a concentrated but contradictory 'centre' for economic growth and the reproduction of the social relations of production on which it depends. Increasingly, a worldwide process (*mondialisation*) enmeshes states, markets, urbanism, and the everyday, and 'pulverises' social space in the multiple tensions between functional homogenisation and concrete differentials of space (2009). As the micro-manager of everyday life within its own boundaries, the function of the state changed: 'Previously, what was not prohibited was permitted. Today, everything that is not permitted is prohibited' (Lefebvre, 2005: 126).

A 'silent catastrophe' befell modernity in the early twentieth century with the collapse of the core reference systems of European civilisation. In science, Einstein's theory of relativity undermined the old geometric systems of Euclid and Newton. In painting, Cezanne and Cubism overthrew illusory perspectives of three-dimensional space. In music, classical tonality was dissolved by atonality. This silent catastrophe foreshadowed the 'noisy catastrophe' of the technological warfare of 1914.

When all that remains of the dominant codes of modernity are ‘relics: a word, images, metaphors’, then reality has proven itself more radical than critical social theory:

Around 1910 a certain space was shattered. It was the space of common sense, of knowledge (*savoir*), of social practice, of political power, a space hitherto enshrined in everyday discourse, just as in abstract thought, as the environment of and channel for communications; the space, too, of classical perspective and geometry, developed from the Renaissance onwards on the basis of the Greek tradition (Euclid, logic) and bodied forth in Western art and philosophy, as in the form of the city and town. Such were the shocks and onslaughts suffered by this space that today it retains a feeble pedagogical reality, and then only with great difficulty, within a conservative educational system. (Lefebvre, 1991b: 25)

Nonetheless, the crisis of modernity cannot be resolved by a romantic rejection of technics in order to return to an imaginary pre-technological past (Lefebvre, 1995: 279). In practice, everyday life continues to observe the old, familiar representations of space, time, and sound, and finds itself left behind by specialised culture. In this way, everyday life became radically separated from the leading edge of culture and science, opening up a yawning gap between modernity, as self-reflexive, critical knowledge, and modernism, the triumphalist self-images of the age (Lefebvre, 1995: 1–2). Modernity as an optimistic ideology of the ever-new became marginalised while modernism trumpets ‘the ideology of the end of ideology’ as technological practice marches on, promoting a retro-culture of the ever-same.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, everyday life formed the precondition for the emergence of what Lefebvre (1971) called ‘the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption’. In this society, older forms of scarcity are replaced by a rationally planned abundance and programmed obsolescence, and spontaneous self-regulation is replaced by ‘voluntary programmed self-regulation’ (Lefebvre, 1971: 72). Later, Lefebvre (2005: 28) claimed that his model of programmed consumption uncritically accepted at face value the bureaucratic ideology of organised social integration when counter-processes of social fragmentation were already far advanced. Tensions of everyday life, already expressed by the cultural models of the middle classes, ‘exploded’ into the open in May 1968 (Lefebvre, 1969). What had been implicit in everyday life suddenly became explicit.

BODILY RHYTHMS

Modernity installs a new conception of time. All human societies are founded on repetition through cycles of biology, night and day, seasons, life and death, hunger and satisfaction, activity and rest. In the repetition of everyday life, however, cyclical time is dominated by ‘linear time’, the time of accumulation, ‘rationality’, work, and consumption. Cyclical time is also divided up by the quantification of time in

clocks, timetables, and calendars. In everyday life, routine processes hammer rhythms into new shapes: 'The everyday is simultaneously the site of, the theatre for and what is at stake in a conflict between the great indestructible rhythms and the processes imposed by the socio-economic organisation of production, consumption, circulation and habitat' (Lefebvre, 2004a: 73).

Circadian rhythms are disrupted by the extension of repetitious activities into periods traditionally reserved for rest and piety, weekend and late night shift-working, 'overtime', shopping and leisure time (Lefebvre gives the example of 'Saturday Night Fever' at the end of the working week) (2004a: 74). Bodily rhythms – sleeping, eating, resting, defecating, and so on – are retrained for and by the social routines of modernity. Cultural products of everyday life like sport, novels, and films represent 'a liberation from worry and necessity' that may be scrutinised for evidence of a growing consciousness of alienation and the prospects of de-alienation, though they more often merely confirm alienation and passivity (Lefebvre, 1991b: 33).

Daily life is repeated *every* single day. Everyday life is filled with monotony yet, at the same time, it changes imperceptibly thanks to planned obsolescence and unplanned interaction. Everyday life mediates between the 'stagnation' of cyclical time and the 'progress' of linear time: 'Some people cry out against the acceleration of time, others cry out against stagnation. They're both right' (Lefebvre, 1987: 10). Women, the working class, and young people are forced by the structures of planned consumption to adopt the role of passive spectators. However, because everyday life turns what is relative to social relations into something absolutely essential and predictable, it doesn't take much to expose its constructed basis. Falling sick or in love, sleepless nights, unemployment, and numerous other unplanned disruptions to bodily rhythms produce a changed relationship to 'everydayness'.

Lefebvre (1991a: 40) located bodies in social space according to three conceptual coordinates – 'perceived-conceived-lived' relations of social practice. Social practices presuppose, first, the use of the body, hands, limbs, and sensory organs, as *practical perceptions* of the spaces of daily routines and familiar routes. Second, the body is an abstraction, *conceived* by specialists in scientific representations, anatomy, medicine, physiology, therapists, fitness instructors, and so on. Third, the body as *lived experience* is found in cultural spaces of representations. Cultural symbols, norms and morality operate on the body to produce an involuntary discipline, an instinctive 'body without organs'. Just as representations of space as specialised knowledge dominate other relations of social space, so the body is also subject to the symbolic domination of expert knowledge.

Lived bodies in everyday space may be dominated but they also incite creative resistance to abstract control. Lived rhythms of the body engaged in social practices cannot be wholly reduced to abstract analytical conceptions (Lefebvre, 1991a: 205–6). Crises, festivals and revolutions alter the ratio of the senses since they disrupt the rhythm of routine; custom, attitudes, conduct, work, and everyday life more generally: 'Disruptions and crises always have their origins in and

effects on rhythms: those of institutions, of growth, of the population, of exchanges, of work, therefore those which make or express the complexity of present societies' (Lefebvre, 2004a: 45). Festivals like the Paris Commune of 1871 or the events of May 1968 were constitutive acts that practically and momentarily united the passion and ordinariness of the world on a higher plane, demonstrating the possibility of de-alienation in everyday life (McDonough, 2009: 172–6).

THEORY OF MOMENTS

Such disruptions belong to what Lefebvre (1989; 2002) called the 'sociology of moments'. By the term 'moments' Lefebvre specified a relatively autonomous aspect of heightened social reality. Lefebvre's theory of moments is sometimes presented as the opposite of alienation, understood as an *absence* of human connection while moments signify a fully human *presence* (Merrifield, 2006: 21–38; Shields, 1999). In keeping with Lefebvre's triadic method, however, the relationship between presence and absence is not that of a binary pair of fixed concepts – absence – presence or alienation–transcendence – but is a relationship mediated by a third term, 'the other'. Presence is not absence but neither is it its absolute opposite, just as moments are not the absolute opposite of alienation. Neither absence nor alienation are pure concepts. As re-presentations they are made present once again.

All concepts are relativised by a third one: other, representation, contradiction, action, love, knowledge, creation, and so on. Any rigid separation into reified concepts brings processes to a pathological standstill: 'Pathology comes from the cessation of movement, from fixity in absence and emptiness, from the feeling of never escaping it, a state of nothingness' (Lefebvre, 1980: 56). Where social theory separates concepts into opposing pairs it transfixes them into something that they are not: substantial entities in their own right. In a similar way, substantiality is grafted on to the self-images of the age, its politics, ideology, technology, culture.

In previous societies, segregated moments of play, games, home, and work were not rigidly divided as they are by modernity. Distinct 'moments' are *separated* out from the more equivocal ambiguity of everyday life as discrete but connected activities: the game, justice, art, poetry, leisure, and so on. Civilisation imposes order on diffuse contents dredged from human and non-human nature. Moments socialise nature and naturalise sociality. Since each moment is unique but also generic the theory of moments overcomes the old antinomies between nature and non-nature, individual and society, plurality and totality, structure and action, discovery and invention, fact and value.

Sociology studies social forms, relations, and the groups that constitute them. A 'moment' is defined by its *form* independent of particular content (Lefebvre, 1989: 171). Presence is only made manifest in a form, yet form, taken by itself, is empty, hence it is also an absence. Forms are repeated on each occasion yet at the same time re-invented. In everyday speech, a moment is not the same as an

'instant', which is ephemeral, forgettable, and transitory. In Hegelian philosophy a 'moment' is a vital stage in the dialectical movement of alienation. From this, the moment is defined by Lefebvre as a privileged 'higher form of repetition, renewal and reappearance, and of the recognition of certain determinable relations with otherness (or the other) and with the self' (2002: 344). It becomes an *absolute* moment in itself of limited *duration*, which creates an intense consciousness that the moment will not last no matter how much we may want it to. A moment is a mediating term, neither continuous with the time of everyday life nor the pure discontinuity of a sudden irruption or revolution.

FORMS OF THE MOMENT

Everyday life combines a plurality of separate moments. Lefebvre (2002: 352) distinguishes conjuncture, structure, moment, and situation. A *situation* is created by a decision to wager on the moment. The moment gives *structure* to the form – 'ritual, ceremony and necessary succession' – of the changed situation. This form is only made possible by a *conjuncture* of circumstances encountered in everyday life. The structured form of moments adds something vital that intensifies everyday life, its performance, communication, and enjoyment. Without this, everyday life would lack richness and diversity. The pleasure of moments overcomes stale binaries of lightness and heaviness, and levity and seriousness. Moments make 'festivals' of everyday monotony by imposing new social forms on the spontaneous ambiguity of the everyday.

Play makes the players, while players are consumed by the game. Appetite comes only with eating. As an 'impossible possibility', a wager is placed with stakes borrowed from everyday life that are not part of the game itself. This is the moment of decision that Weber had in mind when he described science as vocation: 'Whoever wants knowledge sacrifices everything which is not knowledge in pursuit of knowledge: everything becomes an object of knowledge and a means of knowing the object it is pursuing' (Lefebvre, 2002: 347). When cultural theory describes the moment as representation it loses hold of it as an act (Lefebvre, 1980: 55). Sociological recognition of the arbitrary nature of moments can result in a reluctance to wager and engage in practical critique and so hesitate indefinitely from deciding to act. Social theory must form a judgement about the appropriate level of engagement. In so doing, it 'reserves for itself possibilities, choices, options, disengagement and commitment' (Lefebvre, 1989: 176).

As a distinct 'moment' of everyday life, play is radically transformed by formalised 'rules of the game'. To become a player in modern games – chess, cards, sport, love, sociality – is to be 'in the moment', an intensified, self-contained point of alienation (absence) from the routine concerns of social life. In the 'moment of rest' the struggle to overcome activity and to 'take it easy' in modernity requires specific bodily techniques and specific places set aside for leisure at certain times. To be in 'the moment of poetry' is to not be somewhere else. And

so on. The 'moment of justice', for instance, is defined by the specific form of the trial, evidence, and judgement: 'It is easy to notice the similarity between the inner ceremony of the virtuous mind, and the highly externalised formalism of justice as an institution' (Lefebvre, 2002: 355). In the moment of formal justice everything is subordinated to the passion for justice, which becomes separated from the moral judgements of everyday life. There, judgements are made ritually by self-appointed judges, appealing to some non-existent higher principle, even though the evidential basis for the final verdict is arbitrary, weak or wholly unreliable.

MOMENTS OF ESCAPE

All levels of society maintain imaginary escape routes from everyday life. Only they never leave. Young people are initiated into the myth of autonomous adulthood, yet adults are already integrated, child-like, into institutional structures and functional organisations where responsibility is transferred to a socially appointed superior. Even the cultural transgressions of the middle classes merely confirm the social integration of the group in familiar routines and habits acquired from reading the right newspaper, conversing about the latest gritty drama, or choice of schools or neighbourhood. Social relations are mystified by myths but, on the other hand, myth colludes with truth and expresses something of reality:

For bourgeois culture, like every ideology, has real content; it expresses and reflects something of the truth. The mystification lies in the presentation, use and fragmentation of that content; culture, taken as a whole, lives parasitically on this real content, which it has ceased to renew. (Lefebvre and Guterman, 1933: 74)

By starting from everyday conditions sociology avoids constructing communication as an ideal model, 'a communication of angelic and disembodied minds', where perfect speech situations are bought at the price of the ambiguous depths, passions, and shifting levels of life as it is lived (Lefebvre, 2002: 343). Moments are not forgotten but enter into collective and individual *memory* as a specific re-cognition of the *content* of everyday life, of which it remains part, while constructing something *original* that takes on the force of necessity.

Only passion formed in and by the risks of 'the moment' makes possible what was previously impossible about everyday life. Heedless passion leads into the 'madness' of a specific alienation, of the obsessive lover, the reckless gambler, the blind devotion to theory, that can never totally succeed on its own terms and is fated to return, chastened, to the banality of everyday life. The tragic contradiction of everyday life consists in the effort to transcend it in moments whose inevitable failure prepares the way for a return to the mundane and trivial. Until, that is, a fresh decision is taken to wager again and break out of repetition: 'The fact of making a decision changes what was a distant possibility into an imminent possibility' (Lefebvre, 2002: 351).

In this, Lefebvre's decisionist theory of moments shares something with the wager of Pascal and Nietzsche. A wager always implies the risk of failure as well as creating 'situations' that would not otherwise exist in the same way: 'To obtain the gifts of chance and chance encounters, risks must be taken – the risks of failure, poverty, vain pursuit, the risk that the moment of presence will end, leaving behind it wounds and nostalgia' (Lefebvre, 1980: 54). There is no escaping a wager on the 'tragic festival' of the moment since, without the tragic passion it engenders, all that would be left would be the prosaic, desolate stubbornness of everyday monotony.

THE RIGHT TO DIFFERENCE

A theory of moments allows for 'the right to difference.' Difference was implicit under the technocratic demand for uniformity and centralism, in which Marxist economism colluded. Demands for the right to difference broke into the open in the 1960s with the rise of diverse social movements, of women, nations, race, ethnicity and sexuality. Lefebvre (2005: 111) distinguishes between 'particularism' and 'differences.' Particularism appeals to absolute natural essences – skin colour, genitalia, age, origin – giving rise to racism, sexism, homophobia, and integral nationalism. Difference, on the other hand, is constructed as a group perception relative to and reciprocal with other perceptions. The right to difference develops out of struggles over particularism. These stand in constant, ambiguous tension with each other.

Difference was understood by the ideologues of the New Right as sub-Nietzschean inequalities of innate superiority and inferiority types, bolstered by the claims of sociobiology. For 'hypercritics' on the Left, all claims to rights of difference are dismissed as the traditional illusions of the middle class in formal rights rather than the need for genuine equality, as when the working class is priced out of city centres by the urban middle class. In terms of urban space, maximal difference shatters the homogenising power of abstract centrality. Neoliberal ideology promotes an anti-bureaucratic ideology of decentralisation and minimal difference, subordinating once-dominant institutions like public planning to private interests. Fragmentation can further homogeneity rather than lead to a difference of equals as cultural theory too often assumes (Goonewardena et al., 2008; Stanek, 2011).

Like Gramsci, Lefebvre takes a conjunctural approach to democratic struggles over difference against the essentialist foreclosure of particularism based on nationalism or ethnicity. Conjunctural analysis of the crisis of society 'based on the ideological predominance of these composite, heterogeneous classes, under the hegemony of capital' connects the struggles for difference to struggles over political and economic domination (Lefebvre, 2005: 121). Sociologists – Lefebvre is thinking of Bourdieu here – substitute 'distinction' for difference, with the result that classes are identified with a cultural 'classification' system, eliminating contradictions and ambiguities in social relations of difference. Lefebvre objects

that Bourdieu's 'scientific sociology' lacks a critique of the process, neglects difference and history, and abolishes 'the values attached to the art works themselves and not the groups, values that are detached and killed by this sociological description. In defining these values exclusively by their social relation conceived as a factor of distinction, positive knowledge abolishes them' (2005: 116). Positivist 'sociologism', like Bourdieu's, reduces social reality to one dimension – class – a 'static essentialism' and, unlike Adorno, fails to allow for the critical possibilities of aesthetics.

Social relations of production are bound to the production of social relations. An economistic ideology of production, centred on the workplace, encouraged the working class, still a relatively homogenous group, to seek to 'positively' reproduce the relations of production, albeit on a more just basis, rather than 'negatively' abolish them, the goal that Marx allocated to the dispossessed proletariat (Lefebvre, 1976: 99). Now the old alienation within production is overlaid with the new alienation of consumption, producing a general crisis of misrecognition:

It is the transition from a culture based on the curbing of desires, thriftiness and the necessity of eking out goods in short supply to a new culture resulting from production and consumption at their highest ebb, but against a background of general crisis. (Lefebvre, 1971: 55–6)

Unlike Bourdieu, Lefebvre (1976: 38–40) constructs a theoretical concept of the working class 'constituting itself' as an 'autonomous social class' that will 'realise its concept' when it overcomes the 'productivist ideology' produced by a particular historical conjuncture through the 'self-management' of social need.

Here Lefebvre distinguishes between 'the local working class', integrated into modernity by an ideology of economic growth and everyday life, and 'the world-wide proletariat'. Separated from the means of production, the process of proletarianisation creates a vast but disparate group of the world's dispossessed:

The vast proletarianisation of the world contrasts with the working class bloc, which stays solid. It includes youth, and intellectuals whom learning fails to link with the means of production; it includes black and immigrant workers. It is an enormous process, corresponding with the utmost precision to the initial Marxist notion of a class separated from the means of production, charged with negativity, and capable under certain conditions of a struggle to the death to change everything. (Lefebvre, 1976: 97)

In what sense is the working class now a class '*in* itself', let alone a revolutionary class '*for* itself', as Marx argued, if it is defined by an absolute notion of economic and political dispossession?

Instead of an historical and processual conception of class, Lefebvre's self-constituting 'class in itself' adopts the substantialist conception of class that Bourdieu's relational conception of class aimed to overcome. Rather than seeing class in terms of the fixed concept of a 'solid bloc', Bourdieu treated it as a relationship

of power in social space, not as a substantial 'bloc', reproduced over time but also subject to conflict and desubordination. This relational conception of class departs from Lefebvre's substantialist concept of 'class in itself'.

IN EVERY DREAM HOME A HEARTACHE

If everyday life is dressed in ambiguity, then alienation is a relative, not an absolute, condition. It is experienced at a discrete level below higher levels such as politics and the State, high technology and high culture, and prepares a space for a critique of superior cultural forms and ideologies. As an intermediate level it mediates in concrete ways the movements of need and desire, pleasure and pain, satisfaction and privation, fulfilment and tedium, work and non-work, seriousness and trivia. As such, everyday life is a system of representations, not merely a system of needs (Lefebvre, 2002: 61).

Here an internally stratified middle class predominates over everyday life. They populate the welfare state as professionals, functionaries, and clients, embodying the required virtues of competence, commitment, and integrity, and flood the field of consumption as people of good sense, sound judgement and fine taste. Everyday life is premised on middle-class consumption patterns, 'not a style of life but a lifestyle. The term "style" refers to an aesthetic or ethical bearing in which the middle classes are precisely lacking' (Lefebvre, 2005: 160). Middle-class consumers and producers prescribe and describe everyday lifestyles, from food to fashion, to furnishings and parenting. On the other hand, Lefebvre recognises that the women's movement emerged from the middle class and that some urban centres were revived by middle-class gentrifiers.

At his most 'structuralist' Lefebvre described everyday life as a 'social text' that needs to be deciphered. On a city street everybody is simultaneously reader and read, decoder and code, signifier and sign:

Do faces express anything? A little, but not much. Clothes and body language signify. So the spectacle of the street stimulates our desire to see things and forms our way of seeing them. How many women there are who have unknowingly become part of subtle systems of signs, entering them from within, and using them to classify other women with one simple glance at their shoes, their stockings, their hair, their hands and fingernails, their jewellery and their general appearance! (Lefebvre, 2002: 311).

Women are compelled to negotiate the ambiguities of everyday mythology, to be both weak and strong, mundane and divine, immanent and transcendent. Lefebvre deciphered the women's magazine *Elle* as a glorious parade of myths, constantly moving from dream to reality and back again. Such switching invokes the greatest myth of all: 'the omnipotence of technology', represented in the magazine by lotions, furniture, 'healthy eating' formulae, and so on.

Put your trust in technology, that is, in the products of modern technology, which are involved in all of our everyday chores – all those demeaning, tiresome chores, like going to the office, taking the metro, sweeping floors, doing pieces of writing – and all those boring everyday things will be imbued with morning freshness if you put your trust in modern technology. (Lefebvre, 1962: 102)

Reconciliation with the impossibility of escaping from the everyday is secured by the dream-myth of happiness promised by consumer society. How might we live if only we could win the lottery?

If everyday life is indeed mystified by the inverted ‘topsy-turvy’ world of commodity fetishism, as Marx argued, then public discourse will also tend to be mystified. As Lefebvre put it, anticipating George Orwell’s ‘Newspeak’ by more than a decade, and with continuing relevance:

Who can be surprised if at this point armament is called disarmament, if preparation for war is called peace, if rescuing banks is called the march to socialism, and so on and so forth? All reality is enveloped in its opposite, and expresses itself as it. (Lefebvre and Guterman, 1933: 82)

With the crisis of the 1930s, cultivated eloquence in everyday life was supplanted by a cult of well-meaning ‘sincerity’ and a hard-headed attitude towards the ‘facts’. For all his catastrophic fantasies who could doubt that Adolf Hitler was ‘sincere’?

WORLDWIDE CRISIS

Until the 1970s a technocratic ideology of endless economic growth ruled out any future crisis and justified blind faith in ‘productivism’, production for production’s sake, and its philosophical and sociological counterparts, structuralism and functionalism (Lefebvre, 1976: 113). Against this, theories of social and political ‘peripheries’ – youth, sexuality, women, prisons, psychiatry – exercised a radical critique of centralised power. In focussing on radical peripheries, however, the problem of power centres was neglected. The emerging crisis was a crisis of centres and the centrality of authority that produce peripheries in the first place, ‘a crisis in the reproduction of the relations of production, and especially of the centres and centrality’ (1976: 117).

Lefebvre called this a ‘space of catastrophe’ because the process of *mondialisation* threatens to commit the ‘terrific’ of planetary destruction. Influenced by the neglected Marxist theorist, Kostas Axelos (1924–2010), *mondialisation* refers to the dynamic and contradictory process of making the planet ‘worldly’, that is, by conceiving social relations on a world scale, in contrast to the more familiar concept of ‘globalisation’, which tends to suggest a one-way process of domination of the local, regional, and national by the global level of geopolitical and economic power. This *mondialisation* process both ‘settles’ and ‘unsettles’ social space in the

serious human game of 'playing' with planet earth. A 'stratified morphology' arranges and embeds social space into hierarchical levels, ascending from a room, building, neighbourhood, city, region, state, or continent to the planetary level. As states seek to suppress resistance to the logic of morphological embedding, simultaneously settling and unsettling social space, geopolitical crises, antagonisms, and violence result.

States impose dominant space over dominated ones and homogenise world-wide space to compensate for or contain its fragmentation by market relations (Lefebvre, 2009: 234). As the state becomes worldly it also begins the process of withering away but in a chaotic, life-threatening fashion, 'torn apart by what overwhelms it from the inside and from the outside' (2009: 278). As the state balances between risks to its existence – from other states, its population and, above all, multinational capital – it tries to arrest the process of its decline as a power centre. The state refuses to wither away without resistance by renewing and consolidating its stock of coercive and invasive capabilities to meet new threats from worldwide terrorism, urbanisation, social movements, technologies and everyday life.

With the onset of crisis, discontent over the state form is expressed in a relatively undifferentiated way. 'Bureaucracy' is castigated as brutal and inefficient, and official institutions are distrusted (Lefebvre, 2005: 99). Everything that is distant from the everyday and the local reeks of corruption and indifference, leading to localism, scepticism, and nihilism, and a distrust of theory. Yet trust in immediacy and proximity misrecognises the local level as the site where social relations are reproduced. They are reproduced by far wider movements in society – the market, everyday life, the city – as well as on a world scale with the planetary realisation, distribution, and consumption of socially produced surplus value and other world-making activities: art, culture, science, military organisation, and so on (Lefebvre, 1976: 96). All this benefits neo-liberalism, a counter-movement that Lefebvre (2003: 78) identified at the earliest stages of the crisis as maximising incentives for private businesses, facilitated and overseen by the state.

Centres of institutional authority weigh heavily on everyday life by isolating decision-making power from routine habits, common sense, and discourses of triviality. Everyday life is suspended only when decision-making power is reclaimed by ordinary speech and spontaneous public action, as in May 1968 (Lefebvre, 1969). The revolutionary events of 1968 were not triggered by a classic economic crisis of the traditional Marxist model but by the alienating separation of everyday life and institutional centres. Lefebvre considered that exposure to critical sociology distinguished the youth rebellions against alienation in different national contexts: 'what has distinguished the French student movement from, for example, the American is that it hasn't tried to create micro-societies or marginal societies, but has attacked society itself in its entirety and in its totality' (Kolakowski and Lefebvre, 1974: 258). Everyday life itself was suspended by a series of 'absences' produced by strikes – no mail, no fuel, no transport, no banks, and so on. In the context of such absences, social practice began to actively overcome the separation of private life, work, leisure, politics, and public discourse.

CRISIS AS PRACTICAL CRITIQUE

Crisis is now 'total and permanent' (Lefebvre, 2004b: 2). It is total to the extent that crisis is not confined to the economy but extends to all established values and norms, and it is permanent to the extent that crisis constitutes the normal way of life in the modern world, as in the symptomatic announcement of the end of everything that came before yesterday. Another symptom of intractable crisis was that cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles were becoming ungovernable and uninhabitable in the 1970s, forcing either the relocation of power centres (bourgeois flight) or the recolonisation of the urban centre at huge cost (gentrification). Hence the triumphalist ideology of one period (1950–1970) gave way to the apocalyptic ideology and foreboding of the next (1970–1990), followed by even briefer triumphalism ('end of history', humanitarian interventionism, financial bubbles) and the neo-apocalyptic ideology of the past few decades ('war on terror', institutional, economic, and ecological crisis).

Modern societies live under permanent crisis – threats, risk, ruin, decay, upheaval, displacement. Crisis is not pathological but the normal condition. All that can be done is to respond to crisis through permanent invention of temporary solutions: 'Invent or perish!' If there is any hope it is that the negative destruction of institutions and values might play an unforeseen creative role. By the 1980s 'crisis' no longer referred to a temporary phase of instability bracketed by two stable periods:

Neither the thesis of a crisis of economy and society; nor that of a crisis of the bourgeoisie and the working class; nor that of the middle classes as relatively stable supports of established institutions; nor the very widespread thesis of a critical period for institutions, values and culture – none of these accounts for the situation, does justice to its gravity or the extent of the problematic. (Lefebvre, 2005: 37)

A continuum of perspectives on the crisis ranges from 'no crisis' to 'total crisis'. In the former case, a new international division of labour and technological development (the information and communications revolution) has merely redistributed wealth, production and power worldwide. For the catastrophic perspective, crisis threatens everything: culture, politics, values, and society. A more optimistic version of catastrophe theory insists that a social movement will emerge to prevent total disaster. None of these adequately explains crisis and the as-yet-unknown turns it will take (Lefebvre, 2004b: 11). Everyday life in crisis is 'a site of ambiguity, gambles and wagers' as it fluctuates unevenly between decline in one area and sudden revival in another (Lefebvre, 2005: 39).

One expression of the crisis of modernity is the fetish of living in the permanent present, constantly extolling the arrival of the 'new' and the 'end' of the old – the end of class, the end of ideology, the end of Marxism, the end of reality, the end of modernity, and so on, and, at the same time, celebrating 'the new', post-modern philosophy, architecture and art, the New Right and the New Left, even 'new' food (*nouvelle cuisine*). The ideology of 'the new' became a fetish that, in many cases,

referred simply to cyclical changes in fashion – political, intellectual, cultural, architectural – that revived the old, retro-style, rather than generating anything particularly new, as in the latest announcement of apocalyptic crisis or playful ‘post-modernity’.

This scenario of unremitting crisis is far from the bureaucratic programme of controlled consumption Lefebvre identified a decade earlier. Once the moment had been missed for the realisation of philosophy in the revolutionary events of May 1968, Lefebvre advanced the radical claim that crisis continued the work of social transformation as a ‘practical critique’ and dissolution of the established order: ‘The theory of permanent crisis replaces that of permanent revolution’ (Lefebvre, 2005: 39). There is now no point in dwelling on the crisis of Marxism as the critical theory of crisis. Against the practical critique of reality imposed by conditions of crisis, critical theory dissolved into ‘hypercriticism’. It became more shrill and indifferent to the transformations and possibilities of the ‘bad’ side of crisis as a negative critique of reality, pregnant with hidden possibilities.

CRITIQUE AND DEVELOPMENT

Like Gramsci, Lefebvre began to move social theory away from the blanket denigration of everyday life by critical theory as a negative, pre-theoretical and inferior domain of uniform alienation, whatever is left over by more ‘authentic’ or exceptional moments of revolution, culture, art, and science. Lefebvre established some of the ways in which everyday life is a site for moments of desire and praxis, as well as a site of monotony and repetition. Lefebvre’s critique of everyday life aimed to control the ambiguity that exists between concrete abstractions and fictitious reality. Everyday life becomes tragic the more it denies the reality of tragedy as its own negative: death, violence, wars, crime, aggression, crises, decline, ruins (Lefebvre, 2005: 166). Knowledge of the tragic, Lefebvre hoped, would transform the possibilities of everyday life from falling into nihilism and melancholy under the weight of crisis. It is precisely this gap between everyday life and images that more recent post-modern social theory has contested.

Analysing ‘the explosion’ of 1968, Lefebvre (1969: 41) claimed that although social reality had changed considerably over the past century, ‘the appearance and surface of society have changed much more, as have the resulting illusions’. As Lefebvre put it, the ‘prose of the world’ had come to dominate the ‘poetry of existence’. Moments of intense pleasure are swapped for a steady flow of mere satisfaction. Everyday life is invaded by the world of ‘publicity’, blurring the gap between representation and reality. Made-to-order spectacles of mass media momentarily rupture the fabric of everyday monotony with images of violence, death, disaster, and celebrities, cementing the gap between the ordinary and the extra-ordinary. Everyday life was rebranded as ‘popular culture’.

Instead of celebrating or denouncing everyday life and adopting the heroic myth of (male) transcendence as ideal models, social theory is arguably better served by Lefebvre’s (1968b) reflexive inquiry into changing empirical patterns

guided by meta-theoretical principles. Lefebvre recognised that the time of daily life cannot rest on a rigid distinction between progressive linear time and routine cyclical time, since the everyday is itself a product of history and is experienced through the memory and identity of groups and individuals. Neither should time (dynamic) be privileged over space (static), as in recent ideas of the fluid, rootless post-modern subject. Everyday life is too ambivalent for critical social theory to be satisfied with a rigid demarcation between the mundane and the spectacular.

In a debate with Leszek Kolakowski, leading historian of both Marxism and positivism, Lefebvre repeated the objections of critical theory to positivism as eliminating critique, tragedy and struggle from social theory. As Kolakowski pointed out, however, this ignores the critique by positivism since David Hume against unfounded myths and prejudices (Kolakowski and Lefebvre, 1974: 222–6). In turn, Kolakowski dismissed the obscurity of Lefebvre's concept of 'meta-philosophy' as mere reflection about philosophy when 'what philosophers do is quite simply to articulate the daily experiences of a certain community in a slightly complicated language' (Kolakowski and Lefebvre, 1974: 203).

Towards the end of his life Lefebvre (1990) returned again to the problem of how to change everyday life, a theme that had pursued him for sixty years, in radically different circumstances. Out of the crisis a new sense of democratic rights embedded in social practice might emerge, bypassing the inertia of both critical theory and positivism:

Thus, neither absolute negativism and its corollaries: pessimism, nihilism and despair, nor positivism: realism that blocks the horizon. Neither stagnation nor catastrophe. (Lefebvre, 1990: 254)

Citizenship could be transferred from the legal-judicial control of the state to the tacit agreement and habits of mutual recognition in everyday life. In this way, Lefebvre hoped that the state might wither away, the old abandoned project of Marx, without unnecessary brutality, suffering, and violence.