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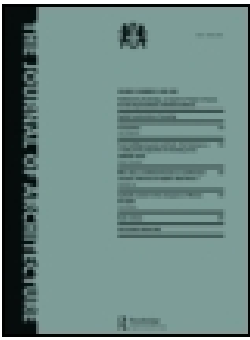
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Henri Lefebvre's lessons from the Bauhaus

Throughout his writings, Henri Lefebvre made sporadic observations on the German art, design, and architecture school Bauhaus. His commentary on the Bauhaus can be read in light of his wider criticism of Modernist architecture and its political project. Despite its revolutionary aspirations, the Bauhaus provided 'the architectural requirements of state capitalism'. This article argues that looking at Lefebvre's ambiguous reading of the Bauhaus unveils the more complex trajectory of his thinking on Modernist utopian impulses to change society through design. Alongside his criticism of the Bauhaus as tailor made for what Lefebvre calls the neocapitalist state, his work also includes more positive comments on the school. While Lefebvre rejects the reformist tendencies of the Bauhaus, he acknowledges that the school plays an important, historic role for advancing political change through architecture. As such, Lefebvre's criticism of the Bauhaus should be reconsidered in terms of offering a lesson in Modernism. Its attempt to create a new space to configure new social relations becomes an unfinished project; it is precisely the failure of Modernism to push this project beyond conformist and reformist agendas that needs to be considered. In conclusion, Lefebvre reads the utopian aspirations of the Bauhaus within and against their actual historical outcome.

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Introduction

'It is easy enough to establish the historic role of the Bauhaus, but not so easy to assess the breadth and limits of this role', claimed Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* of 1974.¹ Since its founding, the Bauhaus (1919–1933) has been regarded as one of the most important points of reference for architecture's potential to contribute to social and political change. We are of course familiar with the famous artworks, objects, and buildings of the Bauhaus. But perhaps even more famous was the school's utopian vision for the future that confronts inherent problems of the modern world and capitalism.² According to the founder of the Bauhaus Walter Gropius, 'young people flocked to us from home and abroad, not to design "correct" table lamps, but to participate in a community that wanted to create a new man in a new

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environment'.³ Yet, such utopianism has naturally raised critical questions concerning the legacy of the Bauhaus and the gender bias, Eurocentrism masked as universalism, and technocratic belief in progress that come along with it. Such debates in turn spawned diverse understandings and interpretations of the Bauhaus. One of the longest-standing among these debates concerns the status of the Bauhaus in the capitalist mode of production of the twentieth century.⁴

This article discusses French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre's (1901–1991) critical reading of the Bauhaus from the point of view of this tension.⁵ Lefebvre is known for his forceful critique of Modern architecture and its political worldview.⁶ What started as a utopian attempt to renew and modernise the housing condition of the working class through rationalisation and mass production resulted in the monotonous architectural reproduction of the relations of production on a global scale.⁷ Taken together with other seminal Modern architects such as Le Corbusier, the Bauhaus plays the part of the antagonist in this reading:

An ambiguity follows from what Le Corbusier and the members of the Bauhaus believed to constitute a revolution. We took them for Bolsheviks when actually they inaugurated capitalistic space. Their conception of space has spread alongside neocapitalism and especially with the triumphal rise of the State.⁸

Yet, I argue that Lefebvre's encounter with the Bauhaus, Modernism, and the architectural avant-garde in general (especially Russian Constructivism) is more complicated than what has so far been assumed.⁹ It is indisputable that in Lefebvre's reading, Modern architecture failed to provide a sufficiently radical alternative to the crisis of capitalism after the First World War. But Lefebvre also suggests that there is a 'lesson to be learned' from Modernism: 'new social relations demand a new space, and vice-versa'.¹⁰

From this vantage, the lesson of Modernism — an attempt to create a new space to configure new social relations — becomes an unfinished project; it is precisely the historical failure of Modernism to radicalise and push this project beyond the prevailing capitalist society that Lefebvre takes as his own point of departure. While he rejects certain reformist tendencies of the Bauhaus that pushed to adapt to the state, architectural planning, and the capitalist mode of production in the 'neocapitalist state', he also acknowledges the ways in which the Bauhaus provides an important historical model for driving political change primarily through architecture.

My argument for a more comprehensive re-reading of the Bauhaus in Lefebvre's work is threefold. First, I discuss Lefebvre's critical Marxist argument about the ways in which, despite its original left-wing sympathies, the Bauhaus ended up providing spatial settings for the advancement of the capitalist modes of production of the twentieth century that Lefebvre calls 'neocapitalism'. I comparatively read this critique with that of another important Marxist architectural theorist, Manfredo Tafuri, who also explored the relationship of Modern architecture with Keynesian-Fordist capitalism. Second, I show how Lefebvre also provides a more positive reading of the Bauhaus, springing from the same Marxist predicates. To contextualise this alternative trajectory

of the Bauhaus in Lefebvre's work, I extend my analysis beyond his seminal writings.¹¹ Third, I examine how, despite his critique, Lefebvre frequently appropriates architectural concepts originally associated with Modernism for his own purposes. Perhaps the most famous example is his creative adoption of the 'social condenser' as a concept associated with Russian Constructivism.¹² In the case of the Bauhaus, a good example is Lefebvre's critical adoption of Gropius's concept of the 'architect as coordinator'. While rejecting this approach, Lefebvre elaborates on Gropius's original concept to outline what he himself calls the 'architect as social accelerator'. In conclusion, acknowledging this trajectory illuminates the more complex relationship between Lefebvre and the 'utopianism' of Modern architecture.

Tailor made for the neocapitalist state

Lefebvre's Bauhaus was a mix of images and proclamations from key protagonists and phases of the school with later images of the 'Bauhaus style' that proliferated with often diverging and contradictory meanings. As such, what Lefebvre associated with the Bauhaus may not be reducible to the original history of the school between 1919 and 1933.

The Bauhaus became an important point of reference for Lefebvre primarily after the 'Bauhaus: 50 Years' exhibition of 1968. Originally held in Stuttgart's Württembergischer Kunstverein, the exhibition moved to various European museums from 1968 to 1971. In the context of Cold War cultural politics, the exhibition advanced an apolitical and liberal reading of the Bauhaus and its later phases as a western style. As such, it omitted the earlier communist sympathies of the school, such as those of Hannes Meyer, the second director of the Bauhaus known for his committed Marxist worldview. Later scholarship has suggested that, while celebrating the liberal and democratic nature of the Bauhaus, the exhibition served its own ideological purpose.¹³ It mobilised the Bauhaus legacy in the service of the challenging nation-building project of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). In this context, the school provided an empowering example of alternative histories of modern German culture beyond the traumatic Nazi past. From this vantage, the Bauhaus aimed to create a more open and democratic society; a project that remained unfinished as the Nazis came to power and ultimately closed the school in 1933.

But even if the exhibition managed to reconsider and readjust the history of the Bauhaus in a progressive way, it failed to take into account contemporary socio-political upheavals that ushered in a wider crisis of architectural Modernism and its social and political efficacy to change society by engaging with it.¹⁴ Opening in Stuttgart just a few days after the 1968 student riots in Paris instigated German student movements, the Bauhaus exhibition represented an outdated and highly elitist architectural movement.¹⁵ This 1968 critique of the Bauhaus was compatible with critiques of Modernism in emerging architectural movements of the time, including those of Archigram, Superstudio, Ant Farm, Utopie, Constant Nieuwenhuys and the Situationist International.¹⁶ If

the Bauhaus was linked to democratic nation building, these movements that elaborated themes such as 'anti-statism, citizen participation, everyday life, temporality and ephemerality'¹⁷ were in stark contrast with it and the social mission of Modernism.¹⁸ From this vantage, the alleged 'utopianism' of Modern architecture appeared not as the radical rethinking of a new society, but more properly as 'pastoral modernism' that 'aimed at smoothing out differences and conflicts', as argued by Hilde Heynen.¹⁹

In this context, Lefebvre was similarly critical of the Bauhaus, challenging the wider connection of conformist social democracy, Modern architecture and economic progress. As such, the Bauhaus in Lefebvre's work did not refer to the original school, but primarily to its later representations.²⁰ Whether Lefebvre actually saw the 'Bauhaus: 50 Years' exhibition held in Paris in 1969 is unclear. But citing the catalogue of the exhibition, he maintained that the display promoted 'architecture's demiurgic role [which] is part of urban mythology and ideology'.²¹ He later attributed this type of reading to 'the naivety of art historians'²² that confused 'ideology [with] utopianism'.²³ Far from revolutionary, the Bauhaus appeared as 'tailor-made for the state'.²⁴

From today's vantage of almost total privatisation and commodification of public institutions and national services, such as social housing, Lefebvre's dismissal of the link between the Bauhaus and the 'state' seems strange. However, his position reflected the broader theoretical debate around the reformist tendencies of Modern architecture of his time. The concept of reformism has its own long history of theoretical debates within the Marxist tradition, where it is especially associated with Eduard Bernstein's theory of the evolutionary path to socialism.²⁵ Contrary to a more profound revolution, reformism is a political strategy that aims to trigger social and political change through existing institutions by means of progressive adjustments accumulating in the long term.

Historically, reformism was often linked with the early twentieth-century social democratic movements that considered the emancipation of the working class to be ultimately compatible with a regulated capitalist economy and the juridical-political institutions of the nation-state. In terms of architectural Modernism, this type of social democratic reformism can be traced not only to the Bauhaus, but even more clearly to architectural projects such as Ernst May's *Das Neue Frankfurt*, or the institutionalisation of CIAM and its scientific and functional discourse on urbanism.²⁶ These were architectural movements that 'foregrounded the social responsibilities of design, and produced primarily mass social housing and planned cities', in Tahl Kaminer's words.²⁷

For Lefebvre, architectural reformism presents no real alternative to capitalist development; on the contrary, it veils it. To cite just one example, the celebration of housing reform in the name of Modernism fails to grasp the integral transition of capitalism towards a new form of 'organised capitalism', what Lefebvre calls 'neocapitalism'.²⁸ This is not to be confounded with neoliberalism. Neocapitalism is a regime that departs from the laissez-faire capitalism

of classical economic theory to operate in a more complex nexus of regulated economy, nation-states and Modern architectural planning.

Neil Brenner has argued that the transition towards neocapitalism 'masked a profound transformation of state/economy relations, in which the state has become imbricated in ever more complex ways in producing, maintaining, and reproducing the basic socio-institutional and territorial pre-conditions for capital accumulation'.²⁹ In this context, capitalism survives not despite, but because of, new economic regulations and social policies. From this vantage, architecture and spatial planning plays a pivotal role in reorganising the conditions of production. Choosing the path of reformist improvements in living and housing conditions over a more radical rethinking of society, or 'avoiding revolution' as famously suggested by Le Corbusier, 'the architecture of the period turned out to be in the service of the state and hence a conformist and reformist force on a world scale'.³⁰ Based on this critique, Lefebvre's comments on Modern architecture range from Russian Constructivism to Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright. But it is especially the Bauhaus that he associates with the emergence of a new conceptualisation of space for a new mode of production, what he famously calls 'the production of space':

It might be asked at this juncture if there is any way of dating what might be called the moment of emergence of an awareness of space and its production: when and where, why and how, did a neglected knowledge and a misconstrued reality begin to be recognised? It so happens that this emergence can indeed be fixed: it is to be found in the 'historic' role of the Bauhaus.³¹

Here, Lefebvre's argumentation resembles that of Manfredo Tafuri who also went against dominant art historical readings of architecture to problematise the keen relationship of the Modernist avant-garde with capitalist modernisation. Tafuri reads the development of new ideas of architecture and design in a dialectical relationship with what he calls the 'capitalist development' of the twentieth century. He critically observes the constant crossovers between a Fordist–Keynesian mode of production and avant-gardist experimental culture, following 'the laws typical of industrial production: continuous technical revolution is their very essence'.³²

Like Lefebvre, Tafuri argues that the early twentieth-century Modernist movements in architecture, which are often considered socialist or left-leaning, helped to realise a 'utopia serving the objectives of the reorganisation of production'.³³ Likewise, it is precisely in the historic role of the Bauhaus that this connection is most thoroughly elaborated:

The Bauhaus as the decantation chamber of the avant-gardes, fulfilled this historic task: it selected from among all the contributions of the avant-gardes, testing them against the demands of the reality of industrial production. Design, as a method of organising production more than of configuring objects, did away with the utopian vestiges inherent in the poetics of the avant-gardes. Ideology was no longer superimposed on activity—which was now concrete because it was connected to real cycles of production—but was inherent in the activity itself.³⁴

Both Lefebvre and Tafuri view the legacy of Modernist utopianism to be far from radical. Instead, they regard it as an integral part of capitalist development based on a strong relationship between the state, the market, architecture and planning. Hence, according to Lefebvre, 'when it comes to the question of what the Bauhaus audacity produced in the long run, one is obliged to answer: the worldwide, homogenous and monotonous architecture of the state, whether capitalist or socialist'.³⁵ As such, Lefebvre's critique of the Bauhaus should not be understood strictly as a political issue. Apart from the relatively understandable and straightforward critique of the elitism associated with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe,³⁶ Lefebvre, a former member of the French Communist Party himself, also criticises Hannes Meyer, the second leader of the Bauhaus known for his communist sympathies.³⁷ Associated with catch-phrases such as 'Volksbedarf statt Luxusbedarf' ['the people's needs instead of the need for luxury'], Meyer's ideas, alongside those of other proponents of cost-effective, standardised, and egalitarian housing solutions for the proletariat as a way to answer the housing question, are 'realised only in terms of the restrictive norms and constraints of the existing mode of production'.³⁸ As such, they do not offer a proper political alternative.

The Bauhaus within and beyond the production of space

Tafuri's and Lefebvre's discussions of the Bauhaus form part of the broader debate on the status and afterlife of Modernist utopianism. Is it possible to consider societal change and escape the dominant power relations through architecture? Or do such attempts become trapped, recuperated, and absorbed by the dominant mode of production? For Lefebvre, such questions were articulated in relation to the historic role of the Bauhaus specifically in the post-1968 conjuncture which challenged the wider political reformist attitude. But Lefebvre's and Tafuri's critique of the Bauhaus also encapsulates the broader spectrum of Modern architecture in critical Marxist thinking of the twentieth century.³⁹ It is a critique that echoes views of Marxist philosophers Theodor W. Adorno and Ernst Bloch, linked with Lefebvre's more ambiguous position.

Adorno argues that even the most revolutionary aspects of Modern architecture cannot escape the grip of prevailing social relations. Contrary to other forms of (high) art and their utopian potential to think of society differently, Modernism in architecture is 'conditioned by a social antagonism over which the greatest architecture has no power: the same society which developed human productive energies to unimaginable proportions has chained them to conditions of production imposed upon them'.⁴⁰ Bloch went even further, arguing that 'architecture cannot at all flourish in the late capitalist hollow space since it is, far more than the other fine arts, a social creation and remains that way'.⁴¹ For Bloch, it was precisely the status of the Bauhaus in its post-1968 representation which demonstrated that 'when a lifestyle is as decadent as the late bourgeois one, then mere architectural reform can no longer be shrouded'.⁴²

While Lefebvre certainly shares this pessimism for architecture's 'utopian function' to think of a radically different society, he also acknowledges the dis-integrating role of architecture to challenge the existing mode of production from within.⁴³ As Fredric Jameson suggests in his comparative reading of Lefebvre and Tafuri, 'a certain alternate idea of space [exists] within the object of an analysis rather than outside of it'.⁴⁴ In this sense, Lefebvre interprets architecture not only as a reflection of capitalism, but also as a continuous site of struggle over different meanings, one which always contains opposite opinions: both prevailing ideological socio-political structures and latent utopian possibilities for differential spaces.⁴⁵

In addition, for Lefebvre, it is precisely Modern architects who realise how 'space itself, at once a product of the capitalist mode of production and an economic-political instrument of the bourgeoisie, will now be seen to embody its own contradictions'.⁴⁶ Instead of treating social relations and their inherent contradictions as ahistorical, neutral, or static, Lefebvre emphasises how Modern architecture not only reproduces existing social relations, but also realises their contradictions in spatial form:

In the context of the productive forces, the technological means and the specific problems of the modern world, things and objects could now be produced in their relationships, along with their relationships. Formerly, artistic ensembles—monuments, towns, furnishings—had been created by a variety of artists according to subjective criteria: the taste of princes, the intelligence of rich patrons or the genius of the artists themselves. Architects had thus built palaces designed to house specific objects ('furniture') associated with an aristocratic mode of life, and, alongside them, squares for the people and monuments for social institutions. The resulting whole might constitute a space with a particular style, often even a dazzling style but it was still a space never rationally defined which came into being and disappeared for no clear reason.⁴⁷

Here, once again, Lefebvre appraises the Bauhaus for aiming to respond to these contradictions and surpass them:

As he considered the past and viewed it in the light of the present, Gropius sensed that henceforward social practice was destined to change. [...] This insight confirmed after its fashion an idea of Marx's, the idea that industry has the power to open before our eyes the book of the creative capacities of 'man' (i.e. of social being).⁴⁸

From this vantage, Lefebvre traces the genealogy of capitalist development through the legacy of the Bauhaus and other Modernist movements in architecture. Furthermore, he is interested in their latent political tendencies that have 'the power to open before our eyes the book of the creative capacities' that lie ahead. While this trajectory is not exclusively linked with the Bauhaus, the school remains an example that Lefebvre frequently utilises when he aims to challenge the deterministic logic between architecture and the broader economic base structure.⁴⁹

To cite just one related example, I will briefly discuss Lefebvre's participation to a lesser-known architectural conference titled 'The Universitas Project: Institutions for a Post-Technological Society'. Held in 1972 at the New York

Museum of Modern Art, the Universitas project was organised by Emilio Ambasz. It was an ambitious attempt to sketch the contours for an experimental university that would connect theoretical inquiries to future education in architecture, design, and environmental science.⁵⁰ Known for his collaborative approach to design and critical social theory, the list of participants invited by Ambasz included not only notable architects, design theorists, architects, and art historians such as Meyer Schapiro, György Kepes (who also taught at 'The New Bauhaus' at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago), Carl Schorske, and Christopher Alexander, but also philosophers and political theorists such as Lefebvre, Alain Touraine, Manuel Castells, Jean Baudrillard,⁵¹ and Hannah Arendt. In Ambasz's words,

The Universitas Project starts from the recognition that although human activity, more and more, shapes its milieu, the shape which is being taken by this man-made milieu has so far escaped our control; and what this project, therefore, questions is whether the prevailing modes of thought and the existing institutions that we have are capable of dealing with the problems of the man-made milieu.⁵²

The attempt resonated strikingly with that of the Bauhaus. Even if the conference was not explicitly built on the legacy of the Bauhaus as a direct model for a new experimental university, there still was 'a shadow of the Bauhaus as an institution hovering around the Universitas project', as noted by Carl Schorske.⁵³ During the conference, Lefebvre reiterated his argument that the Bauhaus functioned as an important genealogical starting point for understanding the key relationship between space and new modes of production in twentieth-century capitalism. But the production of space now had a more comprehensive meaning:

What did the Bauhaus introduce that was entirely new at the time? It was, to my mind, the production of space, of course, around the year 1920, although all societies before had produced space, the idea of space creation emerged and became clear. Objects, as such, were no longer created that were finding their place in space, but the power, the technology or whatever that was necessary to create space itself as a new concept and as a new product emerged.⁵⁴

Strictly speaking, this does not significantly develop Lefebvre's reading of the Bauhaus. But Lefebvre's reflection on the Bauhaus during the Universitas project can be stressed to demonstrate that he did not regard the relationship between the Bauhaus and capitalism as deterministic. Rather, the Bauhaus served as an ambiguous reference to the contradictions in the production of space in Lefebvre's demonstration of the ways in which 'space, as we produce it now could come to terms and could also put to use the revolutionary transformations of our thinking, of our modes of living, and of the tools that are disposed of', and his conviction that 'this is one of the things that could be studied by a new institution'.⁵⁵

According to Łukasz Stanek, Lefebvre's account of Modernist architecture 'as opposed to land, land rent, and ownership structures inherited from history' aims to show how 'the dominant production of space does not conceal the possibility of a different development but reveals it'.⁵⁶ Here, 'the historic role of the Bauhaus' is also credited for outlining the contradictions within the

current modes of production as a way to transgress them. Hence, the 'discovery' of the production of space by the Bauhaus places architecture at the centre of political struggle in a manner not subordinated to a broader economic base structure. From this vantage, the production of space is the place 'where the relationship between infrastructures and superstructures in society is to be found'.⁵⁷ This discovery 'leads directly to the next question: will the *designer* continue working in this space, as he is still doing at the moment? Or will he conceive and carry into effect *another space*, the space of another society and of another life?'⁵⁸ For Lefebvre, the failure of the Bauhaus was also linked to an inadequate reply to this question. Nonetheless, the 'discovery' — that space is socially produced — in itself is something he kept returning to.

From the architect as coordinator to the architect as social accelerator

In the previous sections, I suggested that Lefebvre's reading of the Bauhaus is not limited to a critique of its integration with what he calls state-led capitalism. More importantly for Lefebvre, the Bauhaus is a point of reference for considering everyday life and its spatial settings as a medium for social, aesthetic, and political change.⁵⁹ As Lefebvre suggested during the Universitas project, the Bauhaus functioned as an important model and point of reference for later practices:

We should try to introduce a discontinuity in history, at the same time, maintaining a continuity of knowledge, so that whatever we know now may be in some use in, let's say, one generation or in the year 2000. There are, of course, very unfavourable scenarios that come to mind. There is an example, of course, of the very survival of man as species; it can be considered that man could be largely eliminated either through a third world war, or through pollution, or any such destructive happening. But, in order to keep on working, we have, to some measure, to retain at least a slightly favourable idea of the future. And so we go back to the Bauhaus.⁶⁰

But to which Bauhaus should we go back? Throughout the article, I have retraced a marginal trajectory in Lefebvre's thinking that considers the Bauhaus as a somewhat experimental model for rethinking architecture's political capacity regardless of the actual historical outcome and legacy of the school.⁶¹ A more complex historical lineage can be traced especially in his reading of Gropius.⁶² For Lefebvre, Gropius's understanding is not limited to a discussion of architecture as supplementary to politics. It responds directly to given policies in design and planning to explore how these can become instrumental for certain political goals, such as responding to the housing question to stabilise society, among others. This presents a way of thinking of architecture itself as a political medium for elaborating different spatial modalities of modern society.

In this context, Lefebvre discusses Gropius's famous idea that the architect should operate as a *coordinator* of society.⁶³ They should curate architectural solutions for societal problems to steer society in another direction through new built forms:

Gropius, moreover, saw things in broad terms, suggesting that the architect serve as a coordinator who would unify problems, proceeding from 'a functional study of the house to that of the street, from the street to the city, and finally to regional and national planning.' Unfortunately, the opposite took place: structural planning subjected lower degrees and levels to its own constraints. Can this situation be reversed? The possible, associated with socially transformative activities, is currently impossible. It is not the architect who will 'define a new approach to life' or enable the individual to develop himself or herself on a higher level by throwing off the weight of the everyday, as Gropius believed. It is the new approach to life that will enable the work of the architect, who will continue to serve as a 'social condenser', no longer for capitalist social relationships and the orders that 'reflect' them, but for shifting and newly constituted relationships. The architect may even be able to function as a 'social accelerator', but the economic context that would make this possible must be examined carefully so we are not fooled by words or appearances.⁶⁴

Gropius's ideas of the architect as coordinator and the ways in which architecture and design can be considered to promote political change seem to simultaneously resonate with two opposite tendencies of the Bauhaus in Lefebvre's work. The first conceptualisation is primarily historical, encompassing the broader political logic of Modernism. According to Lefebvre, Gropius here assumes that social change implies total architectonic solutions, from the smallest details to large-scale urban plans. For Lefebvre, this conceptualisation of architecture, defined by Gropius as the 'logical and systematic coordination in the treatment of architectural problems', is too instrumental and mechanistic. This is why it ultimately 'merges with that of industrialisation and the neocapitalist space'.⁶⁵

But the same concept provides a point of departure for Lefebvre's more speculative approach, in which new buildings and architectural forms not only 'reflect' the existing social relations but also accelerate them. In this context, it is not the fixed blueprint of the architect's original intentions and novel forms per se that matter. Rather, architecture serves as an accelerating force towards the unknown future. Elsewhere, Lefebvre refers to the similar idea of 'transduction', a concept borrowed from the natural sciences, to describe a process of converting and transferring different constituents that 'elaborates and constructs a theoretical object, a possible object from information related to reality and a problematic posed by this reality'.⁶⁶ In what follows, this transductive method 'gives shape to certain spontaneous mental operations of the planner, the architect, the sociologist, the politician and the philosopher. It introduces rigour in invention and knowledge in utopia'.⁶⁷

Rather frustratingly, Lefebvre leaves the definition of both transduction and acceleration open. Accelerationism in general refers to a highly contested Marxist line of thinking which suggests that latent tendencies in the prevailing mode of production and its dominant technologies bear the promise of an alternative modernity beyond capitalist rationalisation. According to the contemporary 'Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics' by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, Marx is

not a thinker who resisted modernity, but rather one who sought to analyse and intervene within it, understanding that for all its exploitation and corruption,

capitalism remained the most advanced economic system to date. Its gains were not to be reversed but accelerated beyond the constraints of the capitalist value form.⁶⁸

Even if Lefebvre, who is well known for his fierce critique of the primacy of technology, fits poorly to contemporary debates on accelerationism, it is possible to find a parallel between Lefebvre's and Marx's ambiguous conceptualisation of modernisation. Like accelerationist thinkers, Lefebvre does not consider the superstructure of society, which includes architecture, subordinated to the broader economic base structure. Instead, Lefebvre posits that new social relations demand a new space and, even more importantly, that space might feature somewhat unexpected elements that cannot be calculated in advance; rather, it expands that which is considered possible.⁶⁹ In addition to the Bauhaus, another frequently recurring example in Lefebvre's writings in this context is the architecture of the Soviet Revolution. In Lefebvre's words:

Between 1920 and 1930, Russia experienced a tremendous spurt of creative activity. Quite amazingly, Russian society, turned upside down through revolution, managed to produce superstructures (out of the depths) of astonishing novelty. This occurred in just about every field of endeavor, including politics, architecture, and urbanism. These superstructures were far in advance of the existing structures.⁷⁰

A pivotal example here is the 'social condenser' which can be traced back to Russian Constructivism. Historically, this concept referred to architecture's capacity to condense new social relations through new architectural forms in a way that was not entirely limited to the existing material structures, but was also to some extent ahead of them.⁷¹ And even if 'it has become painfully obvious that those structures and the base did a poor job of catching up',⁷² Constructivism offered an important lesson, rather than a direct model, for new generations. It demonstrated how architecture plays a pivotal role in attempts to think of a different society.

The same is evident in the ambiguous position of the Bauhaus in Lefebvre's work. While he identifies the strong parallel genealogy that links the Bauhaus with later social formations of neocapitalism, he simultaneously acknowledges that the experimentation with novel architectural forms and creative uses of space prepare new sensorial conceptualisations of space and time that challenge existing social relations. This is how Lefebvre establishes a more affirmative critical position towards Modernist utopianism: the ultimate lesson from the Bauhaus and the Modernist avant-gardes is that revolution can be accelerated by transgressing the old spatial forms through the invention of new ones. For Lefebvre, any attempt to change society without realising this revolution in spatial forms will fall short.⁷³

Conclusion

Since its foundation, the meaning and significance of the Bauhaus has been debated from multiple perspectives. This debate is not only architectural, but

more broadly social and political. On the one hand, many early conservative and right-wing critiques characterised the Bauhaus school and movement as 'cultural Bolshevism'; and on the other, left-wing thinkers regarded the Bauhaus as an architectural equivalent of twentieth-century capitalism, an opinion strongly present in Lefebvre's work. Like Tafuri, Lefebvre attempted to debunk the utopianism of Modernist architecture as a reformist compromise between regulated economy and the state.

But this article has suggested that there are more complex relations and nuanced observations to be found in Lefebvre's reading of the Bauhaus. By utilising previously unexamined sources, such as the documentation of the Universitas project, I suggest that his attempts to critically examine the relationship between architecture, capitalism, and society through the legacy of the Bauhaus produced two different interpretations. The first, and better known, aimed to unravel the ideological dimension of utopianism often associated with the Bauhaus: the reformist impulse to renew architectural production and living and housing conditions did not lead to the radical creation of 'a new man in a new environment' that Gropius and others seemed to anticipate. But even if Lefebvre was convinced that Modernist utopianism ultimately failed, in a second and less well-known strand of his thinking, the Bauhaus, and Russian Constructivism, provided an important lesson for a central argument of his work:

A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realised its full potential; indeed, it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses. A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space.⁷⁴

In this light, architecture is not only a direct representation of prevailing social relations; it also plays an anticipatory or even accelerating role towards a future society. By approaching this question critically from the position outlined by Lefebvre, it is possible to reclaim simultaneously a defence and critique of Modernism from a contemporary perspective.⁷⁵ What are the conditions for collective social and political change through architecture, in the spirit of the Bauhaus, in the age of climate emergency and other planetary threats if one takes Lefebvre's claim that every political change implies architectural solutions, knowing that architecture alone cannot bring that social change about, seriously? Even if Lefebvre does not provide direct answers, he suggests that the lessons of Modernism are still worth revisiting: 'We can take some inspiration from Bauhaus, from the previous rebellions, from communities and other form of knowledge'.⁷⁶ But at the same time, his cautionary conclusion 'that the problems are new, and the science we are after is unknown', in light of the problematic version of Modernism that was historically realised, remains equally relevant.⁷⁷

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Notes and references

1. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 126.
2. In the definition of Modernism, I follow K. Michael Hays who suggests that 'Modernism, whatever we may mean by the term, has something to do with the emergence of new kinds of objects and events and, at the same time, new conceptualizations of their appearance, of the changed event structures and relationship between objects, their producers, their audiences, and consumers'. See K. Michael Hays, *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 4.
3. Walter Gropius, cited in Éva Forgács, *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995), p. 26.
4. For the contested nature of the Bauhaus from architectural, social, cultural, and political perspectives, see *Bauhaus Conflicts, 1919–2009: Controversies and Counterparts*, ed. by Philipp Oswalt (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009).
5. Rather than approaching the Bauhaus from the point of view of the history of architecture, my reading is limited to the status of the Bauhaus in critical political theory (Bloch, Tafuri, Lefebvre, etc.). For this type of reading of architecture, see *Political Theory and Architecture*, ed. by Duncan Bell and Bernardo Zacka (London: Bloomsbury, 2020). For a tentative discussion of Lefebvre's reading of the Bauhaus in existing scholarship, see especially Victoria Watson, 'How Henri Lefebvre Missed the Modernist Sensibility of Mies van der Rohe: Vitalism at the Intersection of a Materialist Conception of Space and a Metaphysical Approach to Architecture', *The Journal of Architecture*, 12.1 (2007), 99–112; Graeme Gilloch, 'Seen from the Window: Rhythm, Improvisation and the City', in *Bauhaus and the City*, ed. by Laura Collini and Frank Eckhardt (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), pp. 185–202; Łukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Cathy Turner, *Dramaturgy and Architecture: Theatre, Utopia and the Built Environment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
6. See, for example, *Architecture of the Everyday*, ed. by Deborah Berke (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997); *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, ed. by Ian Borden, Joe Kerr and Jane Rendell (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); *Non-Plan: Essays on Freedom, Participation and Change in Modern Architecture and Urbanism*, ed. by Jonathan Hughes and Simon Sadler (London: Routledge, 2000); Jeremy Till, Tatjana Schneider and Nishat Awan, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011); *Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture*, ed. by Łukasz Stanek, Claude Schmidt and Ákos Moravánszky (London: Routledge, 2014); *The Social (Re)Production of Architecture*, ed. by Doina Petrescu and Kim Trogal (London: Routledge, 2017). Nathaniel Coleman has argued that 'it is precisely the empty promises, false hopes and extravagant failures of modernist architecture and urbanism that preoccupied Lefebvre in much of his writings'. See Nathaniel Coleman, *Lefebvre for Architects* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 19.
7. *Back from Utopia: The Challenge of Modern Movement*, ed. by Hubert-Jan Henket and Hilde Heynen (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2002); Mauro F. Guillén, *The Taylorized Beauty of the Mechanical: Scientific Management and the Rise of Modernist Architecture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
8. Henri Lefebvre, 'Space and State', trans. by Alexandra Kowalski and others, in *Henri Lefebvre: State Space World*, ed. by Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 223–53 (p. 233).

9. In existing research, this complex relationship between Lefebvre and the utopian aspirations of Modernist architecture has resulted in a lively debate on Le Corbusier's role in Lefebvre's theory. See Mick Smith, 'Repetition and Difference: Lefebvre, Le Corbusier and Modernity's (Im)moral Landscape', *Ethics, Place & Environment*, 4.1 (2001), 31–44; Neil Maycroft, 'Repetition and Difference: Lefebvre, Le Corbusier and Modernity's (Im)moral Landscape: a Commentary', *Ethics, Place & Environment*, 5.2 (2002), 135–44; Mick Smith, 'Ethical Difference(s): a Response to Maycroft on Le Corbusier and Lefebvre', *Ethics, Place & Environment*, 5.3 (2002), 260–69.
10. 'Change life! Change Society! These ideas lose completely their meaning without producing an appropriate space. A lesson to be learned from soviet constructivists from the 1920s and 30s, and of their failure, is that new social relations demand a new space, and vice-versa.' Lefebvre, *The Production of the Space*, p. 59. Even though Lefebvre's empirical reference here is Constructivism, I maintain that it is in Lefebvre's reading of the Bauhaus that this lesson is most systematically elaborated and contested.
11. After the publication of Łukasz Stanek's highly important work on Lefebvre, a new interest towards his empirical side has emerged. According to Stanek, 'Lefebvre's theory cannot be understood without accounting for his philosophical readings, neither can it be grasped without acknowledging what was largely forgotten in his work: a number of empirical studies he carried out and supervised within a range of French research institutions, as well as his intense exchanges with architects, urbanists, and planners'. See Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space*, p. viii.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
13. For a more detailed reading of the Bauhaus in the context of Cold War cultural politics, see Greg Castillo, 'The Bauhaus in Cold War Germany', in *Bauhaus Culture*, ed. by Kathleen James-Chakraborty (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2006), pp. 171–93; Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); Frederic J. Schwartz, 'The Disappearing Bauhaus: Architecture and its Public in Early Federal Republic', in *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism*, ed. by Jeffrey Saletnik and Robin Schuldenfrei (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 61–82.
14. Tahl Kaminer, *The Efficacy of Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 2–10.
15. In 2018, a critical re-contextualisation of the exhibition was held at the Württembergischer Kunstverein, addressing the political stakes of the Bauhaus 50 exhibition. See 'Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart – 50 Years after 50 Years of the Bauhaus 1968', 24 April 2018 <<https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/193185/50-years-after-50-years-of-the-bauhaus-1968/>> [accessed 15 April 2021].
16. For an overview of architectural groups close to Lefebvre's theory and its problematic relation to Modernist utopianism, see Larry Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960–1970* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).
17. Kaminer, *The Efficacy of Architecture*, p. 3.
18. For an overview of Modernist architecture from the vantage of its political engagement, see Barbara Miller-Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); *Tracing Modernity*, ed. by Mari Hvattum and Christian Hermansen (London: Routledge, 2004); Malcolm Miles, *Urban Avant-Gardes: Art, Architecture and Change* (London: Routledge, 2004).
19. Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 5.
20. Among others, this argument is proposed by Victoria Watson in her critique of Lefebvre's reading of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the third director of the Bauhaus. When Lefebvre was writing his now well-known treatises on the relationship between urbanisation, architecture, and capitalism between 1967 and 1974, Mies had become the iconic and highly

- elitist figure of Modern architecture, an easy scapegoat for the failures of Modernism. See Watson, 'How Henri Lefebvre Missed the Modernist Sensibility of Mies van der Rohe'.
21. Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 99 (note 193).
 22. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 303.
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
 25. Kaminer, *The Efficacy of Architecture*, pp. 23–26.
 26. Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).
 27. Kaminer, *The Efficacy of Architecture*, p. 19.
 28. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 17.
 29. Neil Brenner, 'Henri Lefebvre's Critique of State Productivism', in *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, ed. by Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer and Richard Milgrom (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 231–49 (p. 237).
 30. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 304.
 31. *Ibid.*, pp. 123–24.
 32. Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. by Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), pp. 85–86.
 33. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 304.
 36. Watson, 'How Henri Lefebvre Missed the Modernist Sensibility of Mies van der Rohe'.
 37. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, p. 99.
 38. Lefebvre, *Towards an Architecture of Enjoyment*, trans. by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 5.
 39. Michael Müller, 'The Dictate of Coldness: Critique from the Left, 1919–1933', in *Bauhaus Conflicts*, ed. by Oswald, pp. 50–67.
 40. Theodor Adorno, 'Functionalism Today', trans. by Jane Newman and John Smith, in *Rethinking Architecture*, ed. by Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 5–18 (p. 14).
 41. Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, trans. by Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), p. 190.
 42. *Ibid.*; in addition, see Nathaniel Coleman, 'Building in Empty Spaces: Is Architecture a "Degenerate Utopia"?', *The Journal of Architecture*, 18.2 (2013), 135–66.
 43. Cathy Turner has developed this idea further by suggesting that for Lefebvre architecture 'might be devised to allow or "activate" an alternative or transgressive space in dialectical relationship to established possibilities'. See Turner, *Dramaturgy and Architecture*, p. 4.
 44. Fredric Jameson, 'Architecture and the Critique of Ideology' (1985), repr. in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, ed. by K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 440–61 (p. 454).
 45. David Pinder, 'Reconstituting the Possible: Lefebvre, Utopia and the Urban Question', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 39.1 (2013), 28–45; Nathaniel Coleman, 'Utopian Prospect of Henri Lefebvre', *Space and Culture*, 16.3 (2013), 349–63.
 46. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 129.
 47. *Ibid.*
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. For instance, in 1969 Lefebvre participated in a seminar organised by Centre d'Études et de Recherches d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme (CRAUC) in which the Bauhaus was characterised as reactionary. Lefebvre contested this position claiming that it is not the original Bauhaus but later representations of it that were reactionary, given that 'every position

- can be hijacked to a certain extent'. Lefebvre, cited in Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space*, p. 148.
50. For a more detailed analysis of the conference and themes discussed, see Felicity D. Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 89–115.
 51. See Matthew Holt, 'Baudrillard and the Bauhaus: The Political Economy of Design', *Design Issues*, 32.3 (2016), 55–66.
 52. The citations to the Universitas Project discussed here refer to the conference's working papers and transcripts of the recordings that were published in 2006. See *The Universitas Project: Solutions for a Post-Technological Society*, ed. by Emilio Ambasz (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2006), p. 366.
 53. Schorske, cited in *The Universitas Project*, ed. by Ambasz, p. 299.
 54. Lefebvre, cited in *The Universitas Project*, ed. by Ambasz, p. 425.
 55. *Ibid.*, p. 426.
 56. Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space*, p. 247.
 57. Lefebvre, cited in *The Universitas Project*, ed. by Ambasz, p. 172.
 58. *Ibid.*
 59. The works of Peter Osborne and John Roberts are enlightening here. For example, Roberts suggests that Lefebvre 'identifies the temporal and spatial organisation of modernity as a means of theorising the forms by which a cultural resistance and critique of capitalism might take place'. See John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday: Revolutionary Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Theory* (London: Pluto, 2006), p. 79; Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995).
 60. Lefebvre, cited in *The Universitas Project*, p. 425.
 61. This ambiguity towards Modernist utopias comes close to Lefebvre's encounter with many other experimental architectural groups. Especially the ambiguous interpretation of the Bauhaus as an experimental attitude by the French postwar neo-avant-gardist group Situationist International can illuminate the broader context in which Lefebvre made this seemingly paradoxical reading of the Bauhaus. The Situationists attempted to revitalise the experimental attitude of Modernism against its later legacy in which 'the social importance of the experimental avant-garde is apparently less than that of the pseudo-modernist tendencies which don't even bother to pretend to seek change'. See Guy Debord, 'Report on the Construction of Situations', in *The Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2007), pp. 25–45 (p. 33). In addition, see Lara Schrijver, 'Utopia and/or Spectacle? Rethinking Urban Interventions through the Legacy of Modernism and the Situationist City', *Architectural Theory Review*, 16.3 (2011), 245–58.
 62. Cathy Turner has argued that, for Lefebvre, 'the politics of the earlier experimentation under its first director, Walter Gropius (1919–28), is elusive, complex and various'. See Turner, *Dramaturgy and Architecture*, p. 113.
 63. 'My idea of the architect as a coordinator—whose business it is to unify the various formal, technical, social and economic problems that arise in connection with building—inevitably led me on step by step from study of the function of the house to that of the street; from the street to the town; and finally to the still vaster implications of regional and national planning.' See Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, trans. by P. Morton Shand (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), p. 98.
 64. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, pp. 99–100.
 65. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
 66. Henri Lefebvre, 'Right to the City', in *Writings on Cities*, ed. and trans. by Eleanore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 63–181 (p. 151).
 67. *Ibid.*

68. Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, 'Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics', in # *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avenassian (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), pp. 349–62 (p. 353).
69. Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (London: Routledge, 2004).
70. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, p. 184.
71. The 'social condenser' is most famously associated with Constructivist architect Moisei Ginzburg and his Narkomfin building. See Michal Murawski and Jane Rendell, 'The Social Condenser: A Century of Revolution through Architecture, 1917–2017', *The Journal of Architecture*, 22.3 (2017), 369–71.
72. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, p. 184.
73. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 54.
74. Ibid.
75. David Cunningham has called for the 'emancipatory architectural or urban planning project's association with the "Modern" rather than, as many contemporary "ultra-leftists" seem to wish to do, to escape from it'. For Cunningham, this approach 'would, in turn, require more complex historiographies of the "successes" and "failures" of those past modernities'. See David Cunningham, 'Architecture, the Built and the Idea of Socialism', in *Can Architecture Be an Emancipatory Project? Dialogues on Architecture and the Left*, ed. by Nadir Lahiji (Alresford: Zero Books, 2016), pp. 15–32 (p. 30).
76. Lefebvre, cited in *The Universitas Project*, ed. by Ambasz, p. 370.
77. Ibid.