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Lefebvre's teachings: Pedagogical formulations for political problems

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Abstract
This editorial provides an introduction to the special issue, 'Lefebvre's teachings'. It articulates the drive of the issue by presenting Lefebvre not just as a thinker, but as a teacher who compels an excessive response from his readers. It surveys the six articles contained in the issue, identifying the commitment to living life together beyond capital as their unifying thread.

Keywords
Anti-capitalism, educational theory, Henri Lefebvre, space, time

To engage with the thought of Henri Lefebvre is to respond to a call, to accept the invitation to an encounter. While the process of reading is always a conversation, reading Lefebvre requires much more than interpretation and translation; it demands action. By this I don't mean that Lefebvre compels his readers to take to the streets (if this were the case, there would be many more activists in academia). What I mean is that Lefebvre's writing exerts a pedagogical force that truly disrupts and disturbs, prods and provokes. This goes not only for his ideas, but more so for his mode of engagement, his style of presentation, and his *oeuvre's* incongruity. As Neil Smith (1991) put it in his foreword to the English translation of Lefebvre's *The Urban Revolution*: "his writing can come across as a stream of philosophical consciousness that mixes coherent analytical agendas with fascinating diversions, apparently casual or completely intended, that might double back or end abruptly, before picking up the thread of the argument again—or stretching for a related thread that the reader must struggle to connect" (p. xxii). This is a much more generous reading than Lefebvre's student and later antagonist Manuel Castells (1997) gave in an interview in *City*, where he said his ideas "were so powerful that, in spite of the fact that he had not the slightest idea about the real world . . . he had a genius for intuiting what really was happening. Almost like an artist. And I think that's invaluable" (p. 146).

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Both of these appraisals ring true for me. Lefebvre is a kind of ignorant genius. He has a way of crystallizing historical epochs and moments in ways that explain clearly even as they confuse, or of proposing a set of politics that inspire even as they cast doubt. As a result, one is never quite finished with Lefebvre. In my own life, he has been a ceaseless affliction, something I haven't been able to shake even though I have tried, a thinker I can wrestle some dry spots from but can't quit. Sometimes I read a book of his and can't believe anyone ever took him seriously, let alone published him. Other times I read the same thing and gain clarity and a whole new research agenda.

Hence, the reason for this special issue's title: 'Lefebvre's teachings'. Rather than, say, 'Lefebvre's lesson', which would imply that we are after precisely what it is Lefebvre meant by this or that proposition, to ask after 'Lefebvre's teachings' is to absorb the blows of his text and struggle to recompose ourselves and our thought in response. To take Lefebvre seriously as a teacher—and not as a philosopher, sociologist, and so on—is to allow Lefebvre's ideas not to guide or influence our thinking, but rather to truly *intervene* in our thinking through disordering and muddying our conceptual frameworks for understanding. This doesn't mean that we take Lefebvre's word on its own or that we accept all of his propositions and conclusions, but it does mean that we seriously engage them, in all of their difficulty.

Lefebvre's thought has been most influential in geography and urban studies, animating key debates around, for example, the primary and secondary circuits of capital, industrialism versus urbanism, and spatial production more generally. It is primarily this body of secondary literature that has helped Lefebvre's thought spread outward. Relatedly, his work on the right to the city has sparked a whole host of academic debates and policy formulations, and even some political coalitions. The growing importance of struggles over space in protest, social, and resistance movements across the globe has, to be sure, energized this interest. Yet educational theory, research, and policy have yet to engage with Lefebvre's vast body of work in a sustained manner. The articles in this issue of *Policy Futures in Education*, the first special issue dedicated to Lefebvre's work, each lay the groundwork for and advance a meaningful and measured engagement with Lefebvre.

Sue Middleton begins the issue with a wide-ranging introduction to and synthesis of Lefebvre's works available in English. She mines these works to argue that Lefebvre should be taken seriously as an educational theorist, and not as a sociologist or philosopher whose ideas can only be applied to education. Whereas many think of Lefebvre as the theorist of the urban, Jason Cervone thinks with Lefebvre in order to provide ammunition in the struggle over and for rural education. He gives a historical and theoretical reading of rural spaces, providing an understanding of these spaces not as natural or inevitable, but as existing only in relation to the mode of production. Thus, the rural can be conceived of and experienced differently, as more than a host for parasitical cities, and Cervone proposes a 'right to the rural' to work toward this goal.

In his contribution, Curry Malott challenges a core feature of Lefebvre's Marxism: his rejection of the state, and thus his rejection of Marxism as it has actually existed in the real world. Wrestling with Lefebvre's essays on the state and space, Malott argues that Lefebvre's Marxism is really a left anti-communism that rests on an ahistorical understanding of the state, a critique he also levels against critical pedagogy. Zane Wubbena's piece turns to the 2011 Chilean student movement to show the visual nature of spatial pedagogy. Wubbena considers the movement as one over education, yet also shows how it embodied its own particular pedagogy. Visually analyzing the protests and actions that comprised the

movement, Wubbena builds on a spatial pedagogical framework to examine what learning, studying, and teaching truly looked like as they took place in conceived, perceived, and lived space.

David Roof takes the distinctions between conceived, perceived, and lived spaces to critically understand the relationship between asylums and schools in the United States. This relationship is one based on shared knowledges and pedagogical practices expressed through architecture, a way in which spatial practices inform ideological ones. In the concluding article, Jason Wozniak leaves us with what is perhaps the most pressing political problem of our time: indebted life. Much more than a financial relation, debt is a constituting structure of contemporary subjectivity, and Wozniak deploys rhythm analysis to uncover the temporality of debt. The political problem of debt calls, in turn, for an educational movement: a pedagogical arrhythmia that could inaugurate new structures of living together beyond capital. Indeed, this is the question that ultimately ties together this issue, which could have perhaps have been more accurately titled, 'Lefebvre's teachings against capitalism'.

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