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# A Study on Cyber Culture in the Works of Lefebvre Henri and Arjun Appadurai

Dr. K. Balraj

Assistant Professor (C) of English, Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences, JNTUH University College of Engineering, Hyderabad, Kukatpally, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

**ABSTRACT:** Henri Lefebvre (16 June 1901 – 29 June 1991) was a French Marxist philosopher and sociologist, best known for pioneering the critique of everyday life, for introducing the concepts of the right to the city and the production of social space, and for his work on dialectical materialism, alienation, and criticism of Stalinism, existentialism, and structuralism. In his prolific career, Lefebvre wrote more than sixty books and three hundred articles.<sup>[4]</sup> He founded or took part in the founding of several intellectual and academic journals such as *Philosophies*, *La Revue Marxiste*, *Arguments*, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, *Espaces et Sociétés*.<sup>[5]</sup> Lefebvre was born in Hagetmau, Landes, France. He studied philosophy at the University of Paris (the Sorbonne), graduating in 1920. By 1924 he was working with Paul Nizan, Norbert Guterman, Georges Friedmann, Georges Politzer, and Pierre Morhange in the *Philosophies* group seeking a "philosophical revolution".<sup>[6]</sup> This brought them into contact with the Surrealists, Dadaists, and other groups, before they moved towards the French Communist Party (PCF).

Lefebvre joined the PCF in 1928 and became one of the most prominent French Marxist intellectuals during the second quarter of the 20th century, before joining the French resistance.<sup>[7]</sup> From 1944 to 1949, he was the director of Radiodiffusion Française, a French radio broadcaster in Toulouse. Among his works was a highly influential, anti-Stalinist text on dialectics called *Dialectical Materialism* (1940). Seven years later, Lefebvre published his first volume of *The Critique of Everyday Life*.<sup>[8]</sup> His early work on method was applauded and borrowed centrally by the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960). During Lefebvre's thirty-year stint with the PCF, he was chosen to publish critical attacks on opposed theorists, especially existentialists like Sartre and Lefebvre's former colleague Nizan,<sup>[9]</sup> only to intentionally get himself expelled from the party for his own heterodox theoretical and political opinions in the late 1950s. He then went from serving as a primary intellectual for the PCF to becoming one of France's most important critics of the PCF's politics (e.g. immediately, the lack of an opinion on Algeria, and more generally, the partial apologism for and continuation of Stalinism) and intellectual thought (i.e. structuralism, especially the work of Louis Althusser).<sup>[10]</sup>

In 1961, Lefebvre became professor of sociology at the University of Strasbourg, before joining the faculty at the new university at Nanterre in 1965.<sup>[11]</sup> He was one of the most respected professors, and he had influenced and analysed the May 1968 student revolt.<sup>[12]</sup> Lefebvre introduced the concept of the right to the city in his 1968 book *Le Droit à la ville*.<sup>[13][14]</sup> (the publication of the book predates the May 1968 revolts which took place in many French cities). Following the publication of this book, Lefebvre wrote several influential works on cities, urbanism, and space, including *The Production of Space* (1974), which became one of the most influential and heavily cited works of urban theory. By the 1970s, Lefebvre had also published some of the first critical statements on the work of post-structuralists, especially Michel Foucault.<sup>[15]</sup> During the following years he was involved in the editorial group of *Arguments*, a New Left magazine which largely served to enable the French public to familiarize themselves with Central European revisionism.<sup>[16]</sup>

Lefebvre died in 1991. In his obituary, *Radical Philosophy* magazine honored his long and complex career and influence:

the most prolific of French Marxist intellectuals, died during the night of 28–29 June 1991, less than a fortnight after his ninetieth birthday. During his long career, his work has gone in and out of fashion several times, and has influenced the development not only of philosophy but also of sociology, geography, political science and literary criticism.<sup>[17]</sup>

Arjun Appadurai (born 1949) is an Indian-American anthropologist recognized as a major theorist in globalization studies. In his anthropological work, he discusses the importance of the modernity of nation states and globalization.<sup>[1]</sup> He is the former University of Chicago professor of anthropology and South Asian Languages and



Civilizations, Humanities Dean of the University of Chicago, director of the city center and globalization at Yale University, and the Education and Human Development Studies professor at NYU Steinhardt School of Culture.

Some of his most important works include *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule* (1981), *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy* (1990), of which an expanded version is found in *Modernity at Large* (1996), and *Fear of Small Numbers* (2006). He was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1997.<sup>[2]</sup>

**KEYWORDS:** Henri Lefebvre , cyber culture, radical philosophy, intellectual, humanities, education, studies

## I. INTRODUCTION

Appadurai was born in 1949, into a Tamil family in Mumbai (Bombay), India and educated in India. He graduated from St. Xavier's High School, Fort, Mumbai, and earned his Intermediate Arts degree from Elphinstone College, Mumbai, before moving to the United States. He then received his B.A. from Brandeis University in 1970. Appadurai taught for many years at the University of Pennsylvania, in the departments of Anthropology and South Asia Studies. During his years at Penn, in 1984, he hosted a conference through the Penn Ethnohistory program; this conference led to the publication of the volume called *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (1986). Later he joined the faculty at the New School University. He currently is a faculty member of New York University's Media Culture and Communication department in the Steinhardt School. Some of his most important works include *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule* (1981), *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy* (1990), of which an expanded version is found in *Modernity at Large* (1996), and *Fear of Small Numbers* (2006). In *The Social Life of Things* (1986), Appadurai argued that commodities do not only have economic value; they have political value and social lives as well.<sup>[3]</sup> He was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1997.<sup>[4]</sup>

His doctoral work was based on the car festival held in the Parthasarathi temple in Triplicane, Madras. Arjun Appadurai is member of the Advisory Board of the Forum d'Avignon, international meetings of culture, the economy and the media. He is also an advisory member of the journal *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*.<sup>[5]</sup>

In 2004, after a brief time as administrator at Yale University, Appadurai became Provost of New School University. Appadurai's resignation from the Provost's office was announced 30 January 2006 by New School President Bob Kerrey. He held the John Dewey Distinguished Professorship in the Social Sciences at New School.<sup>[6]</sup> Appadurai became one of the more outspoken critics of President Kerrey when he attempted to appoint himself provost in 2008.<sup>[7]</sup>

One of Lefebvre's most important contributions to social thought is the idea of the "critique of everyday life", which he pioneered in the 1930s. Lefebvre defined everyday life dialectically as the intersection of "illusion and truth, power and helplessness; the intersection of the sector man controls and the sector he does not control",<sup>[18]</sup> and is where the perpetually transformative conflict occurs between diverse, specific rhythms: the body's polyrhythmic bundles of natural rhythms, physiological (natural) rhythms, and social rhythms (Lefebvre and Régulier, 1985: 73).<sup>[19]</sup> The everyday was, in short, the space in which all life occurred, and between which all fragmented activities took place. It was the residual.<sup>[20]</sup> While the theme presented itself in many works, it was most notably outlined in his eponymous three-volume study, which came out in individual installments, decades apart, in 1947, 1961, and 1981.

Lefebvre argued that everyday life was an underdeveloped sector compared to technology and production, and moreover that in the mid 20th century, capitalism changed such that everyday life was to be colonized—turned into a zone of sheer consumption. In this zone of everydayness (boredom) shared by everyone in society regardless of class or specialty, autocritique of everyday realities of boredom vs. societal promises of free time and leisure, could lead to people understanding and then revolutionizing their everyday lives. This was essential to Lefebvre because everyday life was where he saw capitalism surviving and reproducing itself. Without revolutionizing everyday life, capitalism would continue to diminish the quality of everyday life, and inhibit real self-expression. The critique of everyday life was crucial because it was for him only through the development of the conditions of human life—rather than abstract control of productive forces—that humans could reach a concrete utopian existence.<sup>[21]</sup>

Lefebvre's work on everyday life was heavily influential in French theory, particularly for the Situationists, as well as in politics (e.g. for the May 1968 student revolts).<sup>[22]</sup> The third volume has also recently influenced scholars writing about digital technology and information in the present day,<sup>[23]</sup> since it has a section dealing with this topic at length, including analysis of the Nora-Minc Report [fr] (1977); key aspects of information theory; and other general discussion of the "colonisation" of everyday life through information communication technologies as "devices" or "services".

## II. DISCUSSION

Lefebvre dedicated a great deal of his philosophical writings to understanding the importance of (the production of) space in what he called the reproduction of social relations of production. This idea is the central argument in the book *The Survival of Capitalism*, written as a sort of prelude to *La Production de l'espace* (1974) (*The Production of Space*). These works have deeply influenced current urban theory, mainly within human geography, as seen in the current work of authors such as David Harvey, Dolores Hayden, and Edward Soja, and in the contemporary discussions around the notion of spatial justice. Lefebvre is widely recognized as a Marxist thinker who was responsible for widening considerably the scope of Marxist theory, embracing everyday life and the contemporary meanings and implications of the ever-expanding reach of the urban in the western world throughout the 20th century. The generalization of industry, and its relation to cities (which is treated in *La Pensée marxiste et la ville*), *The Right to the City* and *The Urban Revolution* were all themes of Lefebvre's writings in the late 1960s, which was concerned, among other aspects, with the deep transformation of "the city" into "the urban" which culminated in its omnipresence (the "complete urbanization of society").

Lefebvre contends that there are different modes of production of space (i.e. spatialization) from natural space ('absolute space') to more complex spaces and flows whose meaning is produced in a social way (i.e. social space).<sup>[24]</sup> Lefebvre analyzes each historical mode as a three-part dialectic between everyday practices and perceptions (*le perçu*), representations or theories of space (*le conçu*) and the spatial imaginary of the time (*le vécu*).<sup>[25]</sup>

Lefebvre's argument in *The Production of Space* is that space is a social product, or a complex social construction (based on values, and the social production of meanings) which affects spatial practices and perceptions. This argument implies the shift of the research perspective from space to processes of its production; the embrace of the multiplicity of spaces that are socially produced and made productive in social practices; and the focus on the contradictory, conflictual, and, ultimately, political character of the processes of production of space.<sup>[26]</sup> As a Marxist theorist (but highly critical of the economic structuralism that dominated the academic discourse in his period), Lefebvre argues that this social production of urban space is fundamental to the reproduction of society, hence of capitalism itself. The social production of space is commanded by a hegemonic class as a tool to reproduce its dominance (see Antonio Gramsci).

(Social) space is a (social) product ... the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action ... in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power.<sup>[27]</sup>

Lefebvre argued that every society—and, therefore, every mode of production—produces a certain space, its own space. The city of the ancient world cannot be understood as a simple agglomeration of people and things in space—it had its own spatial practice, making its own space (which was suitable for itself—Lefebvre argues that the intellectual climate of the city in the ancient world was very much related to the social production of its spatiality).<sup>[28]</sup> Then if every society produces its own space, any "social existence" aspiring to be or declaring itself to be real, but not producing its own space, would be a strange entity, a very peculiar abstraction incapable of escaping the ideological or even cultural spheres.<sup>[29]</sup> Based on this argument, Lefebvre criticized Soviet urban planners on the basis that they failed to produce a socialist space, having just reproduced the modernist model of urban design (interventions on physical space, which were insufficient to grasp social space) and applied it onto that context:

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.<sup>[30]</sup> In 2008 it was announced that Appadurai was appointed Goddard Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication at the NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.<sup>[8]</sup> Appadurai retired as emeritus from the department in 2021.

In 2021, Appadurai was appointed Max Weber Global Professor at the Bard Graduate Center, though he is based in Berlin and teaches remotely.<sup>[9]</sup>

Appadurai is a co-founder of the academic journal *Public Culture*;<sup>[10]</sup> founder of the non-profit Partners for Urban Knowledge, Action and Research (PUKAR) in Mumbai; co-founder and co-director of Interdisciplinary Network on Globalization (ING); and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has served as a consultant or advisor to a wide range of public and private organizations, including the Ford, Rockefeller and MacArthur foundations; UNESCO; the World Bank; and the National Science Foundation.



Appadurai has presided over Chicago globalization plan, at many public and private organizations (such as the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, UNESCO, the World Bank, etc.) consultant and long-term concern issues of globalization, modernity and ethnic conflicts.

Appadurai held many scholarships and grants, and has received numerous academic honors, including the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (California) and the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, as well as individual research fellowship from the Open Society Institute (New York). He was elected Arts and Sciences in 1997, the American Academy of Sciences. In 2013, he was awarded an honorary doctorate Erasmus University in the Netherlands. He holds concurrent academic positions as a Mercator Fellow, Free University and Humboldt University, Berlin; Honorary Professor in the Department of Media and Communication at Erasmus University, Rotterdam; and Senior Research Partner at the Max-Planck Institute for Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Gottingen.

He also served as a consultant or adviser, extensive public and private organizations, including many large foundations (Ford, MacArthur and Rockefeller); the UNESCO; UNDP; World Bank; the US National Endowment for the Humanities; National Science Foundation; and Infosys Foundation. He served on the Social Sciences jury for the Infosys Prize in 2010 and 2017. He currently serves as the Asian Art Program Advisory Committee members in the Solomon Guggenheim Museum, and the forum D 'Avignon Paris Scientific Advisory Board

In his book *The Urban Question*, Manuel Castells criticizes Lefebvre's Marxist humanism and approach to the city influenced by Hegel and Nietzsche. Castells' political criticisms of Lefebvre's approach to Marxism echoed the structuralist Scientific Marxism school of Louis Althusser of which Lefebvre was an immediate critic. Many responses to Castells are provided in *The Survival of Capitalism*, and some such as Andy Merrifield<sup>[31]</sup> argue that the acceptance of those critiques in the academic world would be a motive for Lefebvre's effort in writing the long and theoretically dense *The Production of Space*.

In "Actually-Existing Success: Economics, Aesthetics, and the Specificity of (Still-)Socialist Urbanism," Michal Murawski critiques Lefebvre's dismissal of actually existing socialism by showing how socialist states produced differential space.<sup>[32]</sup>

### III. RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS

In his best known work 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy' Appadurai lays out his meta theory of disjuncture. For him the 'new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order'.<sup>[11]</sup> This order is composed of different interrelated, yet disjunctive global cultural flows,<sup>[12]</sup> specifically the following five:

1. ethnoscapas; the migration of people across cultures and borders
2. mediascapas; the variety of media that shape the way we understand our world
3. technoscapas; the scope and movement of technology (mechanical and informational) around the world
4. financescapas; the worldwide flux of money and capital
5. ideoscapas; the global flow of ideas and ideologies

Appadurai articulated a view of cultural activity known as the social imaginary, which is composed of the five dimensions of global cultural flows.

He describes his articulation of the imaginary as:

The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is somewhere else), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. This unleashing of the imagination links the play of pastiche (in some settings) to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors. The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order.<sup>[13]</sup>



Appadurai credits Benedict Anderson with developing notions of imagined communities. Some key figures who have worked on the imaginary are Cornelius Castoriadis, Charles Taylor, Jacques Lacan (who especially worked on the symbolic, in contrast with imaginary and the real), and Dilip Gaonkar. However, Appadurai's ethnography of urban social movements in the city of Mumbai has proved to be contentious with several scholars like the Canadian anthropologist, Judith Whitehead arguing that SPARC (an organization which Appadurai espouses as an instance of progressive social activism in housing) being complicit in the World Bank's agenda for re-developing Mumbai.

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