The space of ideology

Henri Lefebvre in California

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From 1983 to 1984, the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre spent a semester as a visiting professor in the History of Consciousness programme at the University of California, Santa Cruz.[1] Lefebvre came to California in his 80s, in the final decade of a prolific and adventurous life of thought and political activity.[2] He was accompanied on the West Coast trip by the young French architect Serge Renaudie, who had hoped to write a book with Lefebvre on the concept of complexity.[3] As Renaudie recalls, during their flight to the United States Lefebvre anticipated that he would be barred entry owing to his revolutionary Marxist commitments. He was surprised when he was able to cross the border with ease. A large police officer even helped him through the formalities.

The California that Lefebvre encountered in the 1980s was, by his own assessment, 'no longer the California of radical protest'.[4] It was in fact this historical change that attracted him to the region. In a short report on 'Computing and Urbanisation in California' (*Informatique et urbanisation en Californie*), published the year after his tenure in Santa Cruz, Lefebvre revealed his reason for accepting the offer to teach in California: to study the social and technological developments unfolding there. In France there was at that point already talk of Silicon Valley and the possibility of a new 'modernity', that is, post-modernity. 'Everyone knows', he wrote, 'that there is a shift (*déplacement*) in global activity towards the Pacific'.[5] Such a shift could be detected in the explosion of urban growth along the West Coast of the United States, particularly in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. What lent this urbanisation its distinctive character, Lefebvre observed, was its entwinement with the rise of computing in the region, which he diagnosed as a newly dominant form of territorial production.

Taking into account the historical imbrication of computers and the city, Lefebvre speculated whether California offered a new model for global capitalism, both in terms of the organisation of production and the organisation of space. The development of information technology, in particular, seemed to provide a language for the programming and processing of urban life. But for Lefebvre a further question needed to be posed. Namely, did the California model provide effective knowledge of social reality, or was it rather an inverted, and ultimately truncated, reflection? A decade before Barbrook and Cameron published their famous article on the topic, Lefebvre raised the possibility of a new ideology fermenting along the West Coast.[6] 'To what extent', he asked, 'is there a mythology, an ideology of California?'[7]

This essay reconstructs Lefebvre's encounter with California as a historical vantage point or 'moment' for reconsidering the legacy of his Marxist project. However fragmentary, Lefebvre's observations on the West Coast provide a useful resource for developing the implications of his earlier treatment of the Marxian concept of ideology. In his 1966 work *The Sociology of Marx*, Lefebvre challenged the one-sided view of ideology as a wholly illusory or false representation of social reality.[8] He argued that the concept carries a dual meaning for Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*. On the one hand, ideology 'refracts' – it inverts, distorts and transposes – reality (i.e., praxis) in consciousness via abstract representations and, in this sense, can be understood as a 'collection of errors, illusions, mystifications' which tend to constitute a 'self-sufficient whole'.[9] On the other hand, ideology's refraction of reality does not operate according to some 'mysterious' or 'ontological fate' that 'compels consciousness to differ from being'.[10] In its Marxian

formulation ideology remains inseparable from – elsewhere Lefebvre said it 'reflects', though inadequately – the historical and social conditions that give rise to it, particularly the division of labour and language.[11] Rather than a pure illusion, ideology retains both a starting point and a 'foothold' in reality, that is to say, in real actions and real struggles in the world.

Among Lefebvre's underappreciated contributions, and what is crucial to his analysis of California, is his effort to ground ideology critique in an account of the production of space. In *The Production of Space* (1974), Lefebvre would come to locate the real conditions of ideology in the contradictory character of what he called social space. A complex and multidimensional concept, social space is both the space secreted by social practice and the locus of the social relations of production and reproduction. In Lefebvre's analysis, ideology is rendered coherent and endures over time to the extent that it is enshrined in and through social space:

> What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies? What would remain of a religious ideology – the Judeo-Christian one, say – if it were not based on places and their names: church, confessional, altar, sanctuary, tabernacle? … More generally speaking, what we call ideology only achieves consistency by intervening in social space and in its production, and thus by taking on body therein. Ideology *per se* might well be said to consist primarily in a discourse upon social space.[12]

A few years earlier, in *The Right to the City* (1968) and *The Urban Revolution* (1970), Lefebvre had deployed a similar ideological analysis in his critique of urbanism. Urbanism, he argued, establishes itself as an ideology by placing a premium on technical activities and systematised planning within the space of the city. Dissimulating its capitalist strategies beneath the myth of technocracy, 'urban ideology' is reductive of urban practice: it represents space as a 'place where various functions are carried out, the most important and most hidden being that of forming, realizing, and distributing' generalised surplus value.[13] Through the 'fetishism of space', the ideology of urbanism masks the real conflicts and contradictions of the situation in which it intervenes.[14] For this reason, Lefebvre claimed, it is also an ideology that obstructs the reflection of possibility and historical becoming, transposing 'all that comes from history and consciousness into spatial terms'.[15]
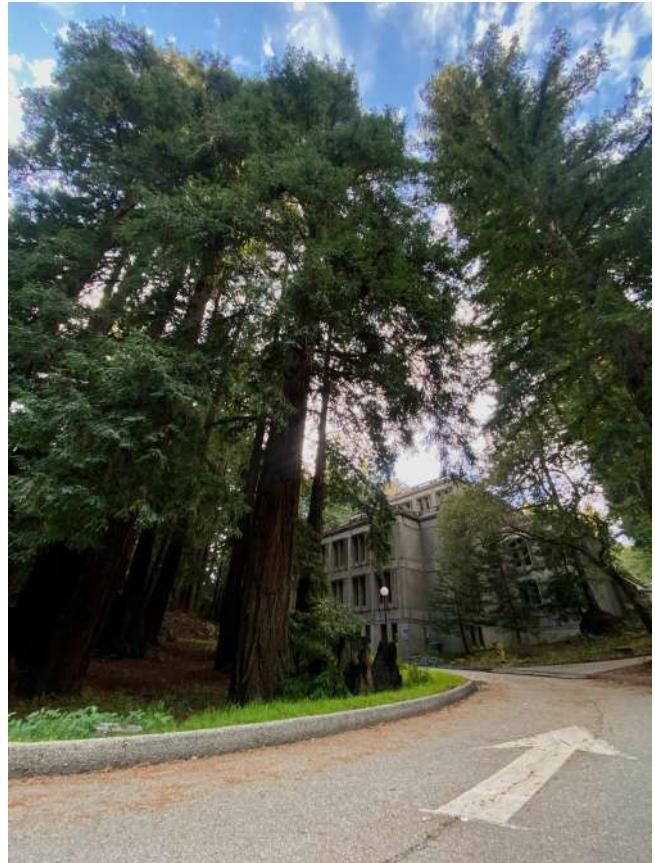

Photo: UC Santa Cruz.

Lefebvre continued to examine the spatial dimensions of ideology in his study of California. Echoing and extending his critique of urbanism, he asked in 'Computing and Urbanisation' whether the 'managerial use' of advanced technology in the region was capable of systematising urban reality.[16] But Lefebvre was also careful not to take the California ideology on its own terms. As I will argue here, Lefebvre's commitment to the analysis of social production – both in terms of the production of space and the spatialisation of production – led him to investigate newly intensifying contradictions and forms of struggle in California, those which were firmly yet dialectically tethered to the worldwide situation. These contradictions included the disorienting 'implosion-explosion' of urban space, the historical conflict between the production of information and the creative capacity of the body, along with the spatial antagonism between capital and racialised labour. In his

1985 report, for example, Lefebvre explored the potential connection between the programming of space and the programming of segregations, those undergirding the formation of a new 'Anglo-Saxon' elite.[17] He pointed in particular to the incongruity in Silicon Valley between a small number of white-collar 'technicians' and an exploited workforce of Salvadoran migrants and Chicanos. In his assessment of Los Angeles, which I discuss below, Lefebvre was also concerned with what we would today call the offshoring of production, and, in this respect, he began to situate the Golden State, its urban growth and technological advancement, within the global context of uneven development. This line of enquiry offers a promising basis for a critical reappraisal of the problem of 'postmodernism', which was articulated during this period in part through an engagement with California. Rather than the birthplace of a dominant cultural logic, Lefebvre saw California in the 1980s as a regional window into the survival of capitalism, the reproduction of the social relations of production, on a worldwide scale.[18] If there is a California ideology, his work suggests, it is engendered by the planetary unfolding of crisis in the cycles of capitalist reproduction.

Santa Cruz: Disorientation

Lefebvre's stay in California came on the invitation of Fredric Jameson, who was then employed at UC Santa Cruz as a professor of French and History of Consciousness, a position he held from 1983 to 1985. To coincide with the visit, Jameson brought together a group of scholars interested in Lefebvre's arguments about the production of space: David Harvey, Dolores Hayden, Manuel Castells, Richard Walker and others. 'It was an interesting bunch during those meetings', recounted UCLA geographer Edward Soja in 1990, 'and there were a couple of good publications that came out of it, but nothing major'.[19] In late February and early March of 1984, a conference was held at UC Santa Cruz in Lefebvre's honour – titled 'Urban Ideologies, Politics and Culture' – where Jameson presented a version of his first essay on cognitive mapping.[20]

While at UC Santa Cruz Lefebvre held two seminars: a graduate course, 'On the Dialectic', and an undergraduate course, 'The Death of the Avant-Gardes'. Outside the classroom, Lefebvre experienced a sense of disorientation, if not also boredom, in attempting to navigate

the university's spacious campus, which, as Renaudie remembers it, consisted of '800 hectares of meadows and forests, where deer roamed peacefully'.[21] Lefebvre and Renaudie stayed in a small wooden house within a faculty village near the base of campus. According to Soja, Lefebvre had difficulty acclimating to the thickly forested landscape: 'dear old Henri was trying to survive the woodsy environment, sort of walking around saying "Where is the city? I mean these trees are nice but day after day?"'[22]

Lefebvre's former student, Jean Baudrillard, found the campus of UC Santa Cruz similarly disorienting. In *America*, first published in French in 1986, Baudrillard described Santa Cruz as the most 'naturalised' of California's university campuses:

> Lost among the pine trees, the fields, and the rivers (it is an old ranch that was donated to the university), and made up of little blocks, each one out of sight of the others, like the people who live in them: this [campus] is Santa Cruz. It's a bit like the Bermuda Triangle (or Santa Barbara). Everything vanishes. Everything gets sucked in. Total decentring, total community. After the ideal city of the future, the ideal cosy nook.[23]

In its decentralised spaciousness, the Santa Cruz campus seemed to Baudrillard intentionally designed to impede and defuse political conflict. It 'becomes impossible', he surmised, 'to hold a demonstration: where could you assemble? Demonstrations can only go round and round in the forest, where the participants alone can see them'. For Baudrillard, the campus functioned as a fortification rendered natural, an ideal closed in on itself, disconnected from the real world. It is tempting to speculate that Lefebvre felt something similar as he ambled about the grounds of UC Santa Cruz, confronting the monotony of its redwoods. One is perhaps reminded of his own line: 'the sad hinterland of everyday dullness'.[24]

During Lefebvre's residence at UC Santa Cruz, he was interviewed by Kristin Ross, then a professor in the French department.[25] Ross had recently begun reading Lefebvre's work as part of the research that would culminate in her 1988 book *The Emergence of Social Space*, which developed a 'synchronic history' of Rimbaud and the Paris Commune.[26] At one point in her conversation with Lefebvre, which dealt mostly with his relationship with Guy Debord and the Situationist International, Ross asked about the method of the *dérive* ('drift').[27] In

the 1950s, the Situationists had famously developed the *dérive* as a technique or new mode of behaviour for traversing urban space. It was a technique that called for the abrupt suspension of all work and leisure activities – all the 'usual motives for movement and action' – in order to allow oneself to be directed by the terrain and the possible encounters therein.[28]

Photo: Lefebvre and Jameson at UC Santa Cruz, 1984. Courtesy of Special Collections, University Library, University of California, Santa Cruz. Public Information Office Records: Photographs.

Ross wondered whether the *dérive*, with its emphasis on experimental practice, had been more productive for spatial analysis than a purely theoretical approach to the city. In his affirmative response Lefebvre emphasised that the Situationist *dérive* functioned to reveal and record the increasing fragmentation of the urban form, the dismantling of its organic unity. In his words:

> The experiment [of the *dérive*] consisted of rendering different aspects or fragments of the city simultaneous, fragments that can only be seen successively, in the same

way that there exist people who have never seen certain parts of the city.[29]

From Paris to Amsterdam, the goal of the *dérive* was to grasp the city as a unity of fragments: a 'lost unity, a disappearing unity'.[30]

It appears that Lefebvre conducted his own psychogeographic experiment in California. According to Renaudie, the two had ample free time to leave UC Santa Cruz and explore the surrounding area. They spent long days traveling around Santa Cruz County in a two-seater coupe that Renaudie had purchased second hand. On these 'motorised drifts', as Renaudie calls them, they attempted to find their bearings in a diffuse and fragmented urban landscape, whose fabric melded into the countryside, penetrating at times deep into the redwood forests.[31] What Lefebvre and Renaudie encountered was, in the latter's words, 'a sort of pacified image of the breakup of a historic city that had never existed on this continent'.

Based on Renaudie's account, the California *dérive* seems to have reconfirmed Lefebvre's earlier views on the 'implosion-explosion' of the city in contemporary capitalist society.[32] As Lefebvre argued in the late 1960s and early 1970s, capitalist urbanisation displays a twofold dynamic. On the one hand, the global accumulation of capital generates new forms of urban centrality and industrial agglomeration (as he would document in 'Computing and Urbanisation in California'). On the other hand, as the urban fabric extends across the globe, this historical process shatters the traditional urban centre, exploding the boundaries – while leading to new contradictions and forms of territorial differentiation – between core and periphery, city and country, integration and segregation. In its disorientation, Lefebvre's experience in Santa Cruz also bears a connection to the more pessimistic, and at times arguably nostalgic, view of urbanisation that he would formulate in his brief but pointed 1989 essay, 'Dissolving City, Planetary Metamorphosis', published two years before his death.[33] According to Lefebvre, the 'planetarisation' of the urban form (i.e., its expansion, differentiation and fragmentation on a worldwide scale) had led to the impoverishment of urban life and the severing of the historical bond between the citizen (*citoyen*) and the city dweller (*citadin*).[34] The historic city centre, long a site of activity and production that 'belonged to the workers (*populaire*)', had disappeared.[35] All that re-

mained was 'on the one hand, centres for power and decision making and, on the other, fake and artificial spaces' of consumption, leisure and tourism.

Lefebvre does not mention California in 'Dissolving City', but it is not unreasonable to suspect that the West Coast trip influenced his critique. This is perhaps most evident in the essay's emphasis on the municipal-level implementation of new technologies, such as 'computer cabling and communication networks', geared towards the consumption of information.[36] For Lefebvre, the processes of planetary urbanisation had rendered the modern city dependent on technocracy, part of a larger institutional structure within which the fate of urban life became fixed.

Silicon Valley: Information

On their drifts, Lefebvre and Renaudie journeyed north to Silicon Valley where they learned of advances in information and communication technology. In 'Computing and Urbanisation', Lefebvre admitted that when he arrived in California he believed 'Silicon Valley' was a reference to the quality of ore found in the region. He soon discovered that the name was in fact 'expressly chosen as part of an economic, social, and political project'.[37] By the early 1980s, this project was forming in real time amid the boom in personal computers and the rise of startups such as Apple, whose Macintosh computer was released in 1984. Lefebvre's visit to Silicon Valley also coincided with a major inflection point in the history of the internet. In 1983 the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) was divided into two separate networks: MILNET, to be used by the US Department of Defense, and a civilian version of ARPANET, primarily designed to facilitate communication between research institutions. And while the world wide web would not exist until the 1990s, Renaudie recalls that people in Silicon Valley were starting to talk about it.

The limits to technological progress were, however, also on display. Beginning in 1984, Silicon Valley entered a period of economic crisis that lasted until 1987, during which time the electronics industry would lose nearly 22,000 jobs.[38] Against the libertarian ethos of the California ideology, the splintering off of MILNET was also a reminder of the persistent role of the state in the development and deployment of information technology. For Lefebvre and Renaudie, the clandestine presence of the state, particularly the military, cut through the aestheticised image of California. As Renaudie recollects:

> During one of our motorised strolls along a small, bucolic road that smelled pleasantly of hazelnuts, we suddenly came across barriers and garish signs blocking the road, announcing that this was where military territory began. Suddenly, this Californian ideology of cool and green, which was beginning to anesthetise us, shattered in the face of the semiotic violence of those who owned a good part of the territory. 'Well, do you understand?' said Henri Lefebvre, who at important moments knew how to be surprisingly concise. Indeed, the army still occupied the land ...[39]

Due in part to his ethnographic study of Silicon Valley, Lefebvre's time in California fuelled an interest in the spatial and temporal dimensions of information technology.[40] Upon returning to France, Lefebvre and Renaudie (together with Yann Couvidat, a doctoral student they met at UC Santa Cruz) formed a group dedicated to studying the 'informational society' they had begun to map in California.[41] But it would be a mistake to say that Lefebvre's concern with the problem of information originated on the West Coast. A largely forgotten aspect of his work is its sustained attention to cybernetics and information theory.[42]

As he mentions in 'Computing and Urbanisation in California', Lefebvre had been interested in information theory from its beginnings and worked with those developing it in France, including the mathematicians Benoit Mandelbrot and Marcel-Paul Schützenberger, and later on Abraham Moles. In his 1958 essay 'Marxism and Information Theory' (*Marxisme et théorie de l'information*) Lefebvre urged Marxists to attend closely to the emerging fields of information theory and cybernetics.[43] He insisted that a critical engagement with these 'modern' theories was necessary in order to sharpen the concepts of Marxism and avoid the dead ends of methodological dogmatism. Such recommendations were mostly ignored, due in large part to the Stalinist position that information theory was the historical outgrowth of bourgeois ideology. Nevertheless, information theory and cybernetics remained recurrent themes in Lefebvre's writings, on into the 1980s.

The relationship between information and ideology, in particular, would assume an important role in the third

volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life*, written between 1980 and 1981. The book's final section includes an analysis of the 1978 Nora-Minc report on 'The Computerization of Society', a document that helped set the agenda for French telecommunications policy and called for the creation of an 'informational agora' on the scale of the nation.[44] What the report revealed for Lefebvre was that 'a new ideology is looming on the horizon'.[45] This 'information ideology', as he named it, was gaining traction among the New Left, along with optimists who believed that advancements in information technology would lead straight away to cultural revolution, to a completely planned society in which each individual would be rendered 'fully conscious' of 'general constraints'.[46] Earlier on, in the 1960s and 1970s, Lefebvre had associated this ideology with structuralism, which he accused, on account of its overemphasis on structure and 'systems', of reflecting state technocracy and of expunging history in favour of the synchronic.[47]

In the third volume of his *Critique*, Lefebvre underscored two aspects of the ideological character of information. First, he noted that information theory aimed to be general or unitary, in the style of classical philosophy. This accent on the unitary concealed the discontinuities and contradictions that lay at the heart of the cybernetic paradigm, particularly the tension between order and disorder, and the possibility of a negative entropy: 'instants in which energy is revived and possibilities spring up'.[48] Second, Lefebvre observed a confusion between production and creation, namely the tendency to consider the production of information as a metamorphosis, rather than a programming, of everyday life. Against Marshall McLuhan's thesis regarding the creative capacity of communication, Lefebvre maintained its status as mimetic production: 'today, communication *reflects* – nothing more, nothing less'.[49] To think otherwise, he argued, was to endorse a naively optimistic thesis that failed to grasp communication's reinforcement of everyday life in capitalist society, along with the 'mounting danger of catastrophe' it harboured at its core.

Productive but not creative, information technology did not, in Lefebvre's assessment, herald a new mode of production. Rather, it 'perfects the existing mode of production' by shoring up the complexity of the world market and by driving the commodity to its ultimate conclusion as a system of equivalents.[50] For Lefebvre, the

historical emergence of information ideology corresponded with the irruption of a 'supreme commodity', which presented itself not as a human product but under the romantic halo of a great 'human adventure'.[51] As he recognised, this ideology contained major political implications. For one, the reduction of positive knowledge to information signalled the end of critical and conceptual thought. From the perspective of information ideology, knowing no longer involved the use of concepts (which 'disappear in the face of the facts') but instead amounted to the reception, accumulation and memorisation of content without gaps.[52] This position in turn spelled an end to politics as such, to the extent the latter was consigned to the procedural domain of administrators, technicians and technocrats.[53]

Four years later, in 'Computing and Urbanisation in California', Lefebvre would acknowledge that there remained something conceptually opaque about information theory. The issue centred on the oppositional relation it establishes between information and redundancy. On the one hand, as he had discussed in *Metaphilosophy* (1965), information theory places redundancy at the core of its concept of intelligibility. The intelligibility of a 'message' is understood as constituted by redundancy, that is, by the repetition of elements in a repertoire. Redundancy is therefore held as 'indispensable to all communication'.[54] On the other hand, and in contrast to redundancy, information comes as novelty or complete surprise. This poses a problem for intelligibility: 'At the upper threshold, the excess of novelty and surprise makes the message unintelligible and also destroys it as such'.[55] Without redundancy, Lefebvre observed in 'Computing and Urbanisation', information would be entirely undecipherable. To address this tension there emerged a historical need to ground the novelty of information in a structure of repetition: 'a new code [of intelligibility] must be discovered'.[56] Lefebvre suspected that this code could be found in the monotony of architecture and urban planning: 'For a long time I have wondered if there is not a relationship, a connection, first practical and empirical, then revealed by information theory, between architectural and urban practice and this search for the repetitive, the redundant, which establishes an intelligibility', that is to say, 'total intelligibility in urban space'.

Concerned with the infrastructural basis of informa-

tion, Lefebvre began to trace what his former assistant at Paris Nanterre University, Manuel Castells, would call the 'informational city'.[57] It was in California, where the application of computing to the urban process was in full effect, that the spatial dimensions of information technology presented themselves most forcefully. In 'Computing and Urbanisation', Lefebvre delineated three aspects of the relationship between information technology and urban space in need of further research. First was the issue of production within Silicon Valley, including the intensifying antagonism between 'technicians' and exploited migrants. Second was the managerial use of information, which included the array of corporations – marketing agencies, insurance companies, banks, and so on – that had sprung up around the production of high technology. Third was the use of computing (software packages, data processing, etc.) in urban planning, in the actual programming of city life. In Renaudie's view, what was at stake for Lefebvre was not merely the local development of technology. Instead, Lefebvre sought to trace a historical transformation occurring within the spatial organisation of capital accumulation at the worldwide level. 'Our visits to the new and old urban areas of San Francisco and Los Angeles', Renaudie writes, 'allowed us to understand that the "informational city" was not a technological trend but a new urban distribution of modes of production and consumption on a planetary scale and at the same time a spatial and cultural upheaval redistributing territories'.[58].

We should consider the possibility, however, that Renaudie's reconstruction of the California trip projects his then-present concerns onto the space of the past. In Lefebvre's own analysis, the connection between regional development and the transformation of capitalism at the planetary level remains cursory and unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, we might speculate that Lefebvre's emphasis on new spatial contradictions and social conflicts provides a starting point for developing the global dimensions of his California study. As he witnessed in the area around San Jose and San Francisco, the intensity of urban growth had begun to confront the scarcity of space, which led, in turn, to issues of spatial organisation. At the end of his report, Lefebvre addressed a further problem raised by the proliferation of computing: the problem of the body. In a society increasingly organised by information technology this question became press-

ing: 'what do we do with our bodies?'[59] What Lefebvre observed in Silicon Valley was a deepening antagonism between an Anglo-Saxon elite 'located at the cutting edge of technology and capitalism' and an oppressed and exploited Latino workforce. But a dialectical reversal was underway. The Anglo-Saxons possessed technology, capital and political authority, but did they, Lefebvre asked, know how to live? It was rather the Latino counterculture, in its capacity to infiltrate everyday life, that held the potential for 'a new discovery of the body'. In this way, as Lefebvre saw it, the oppressed class enacted a 'kind of revenge' on the disembodied technocrats of Silicon Valley. Beneath the smooth surface of information, the land (*pays*) remained saturated with elements that clashed – and that exposed the limits of computer action as a means of organising daily life.

From our present standpoint, what seems strikingly absent from the 1985 report is the extent to which this landscape of conflict extended beyond California. Beginning in the late 1960s, as the costs of manufacturing increased, high-tech firms in Silicon Valley began relocating parts of the production process outside of the region, including overseas in Southeast Asia.[60] Indeed, the first companies in the US to establish assembly factories in Southeast Asia were from Silicon Valley.[61] This process accelerated in the mid-1980s, as US chip companies switched to a design-only ('fabless') business model, outsourcing the capital-intensive process of semiconductor fabrication to specialised foundries often located in China and Taiwan. By the 1990s, few manufacturing operations remained in Silicon Valley. To resume Lefebvre's analysis in the contemporary moment is to

confront the material explosion of California, its contradictions, beyond the limits of its own territory. If the California ideology is worth revisiting today, analysis of it must be lodged within a more profound understanding of the global infrastructure of exploitation that tethers Silicon Valley to the plights of workers at Foxconn factories in China, cobalt and copper miners in the Congo, informal e-waste pickers in India – in other words, to a worldwide terrain of struggle.

Los Angeles: Contradiction

In March 1984, following the 'Urban Ideologies' conference in Santa Cruz, Lefebvre and Renaudie travelled south to reconvene with Fredric Jameson and Edward Soja in Los Angeles.[62] A student of Lefebvre's at UC Santa Cruz, Andrea Mueller, had offered to drive them in her car, which was larger than Renaudie's two-seater coupe. In Los Angeles, Soja proposed to guide the group on a tour of the city, a tour he would give to many others, including Baudrillard.[63] Together the five of them piled into the car: Mueller at the wheel, Renaudie in the front seat, Jameson, Lefebvre and Soja all wedged in the back, talking at length. Jameson and Soja wanted to demonstrate that Los Angeles, unlike the traditional European city, lacked an urban centre. As Mueller manoeuvred through the seemingly endless streets, the American theorists maintained that what they were witnessing before them was a postmodern revolution: the dissolution of the centre-periphery distinction, the transfiguration of capitalism.

Listening to Jameson and Soja's analysis of postmodernism, Lefebvre responded a few times with 'yes, but …' (*mouais*). After more than an hour of drifting around in the car, he asked the decisive question: 'But where are the places of production?'[64] According to Renaudie, Lefebvre was persistent about this point, repeatedly enquiring into the location of productive activity. Eventually Soja capitulated and announced that they would make a detour to the Goodyear Tire plant in South Central Los Angeles. But when they arrived at the 74-acre site, what they found was an 'abandoned city': the plant had been shuttered since 1980. Once again, Lefebvre pressed the question of production. As Renaudie writes:

> Postmodernism in Los Angeles meant the abandonment of traditional industry and the arrival of clean industry,

the one born of computers. But Henri wasn't thrown off, he asked, 'And where have the Goodyear factories gone?' Our guides didn't have the answer, explaining that Goodyear had closed because it was in crisis. 'Yes, but where are the factories now? Because there are still tires?' Henri insisted. Two questions were enough to stop the flow of postmodernist arguments. The tires might have been made in Asia, Latin America, or Central America … their place of production had moved to another continent.[65]

Twenty years earlier, in a lecture titled 'The State and Society', Lefebvre had voiced a similar criticism against arguments heralding the birth of a consumer society. For proponents of the view that industry was giving way to generalised consumption, the relations of production held a diminishing significance. This was a modern myth, according to Lefebvre, analogous to the ideology of individualism that pervaded the era of free market capitalism.[66]

It was perhaps in the space of downtown Los Angeles that other modern myths could be discovered. During the tour with Soja, Lefebvre and the others strolled through the glass-clad towers of the Bonaventure Hotel, which had opened in 1976.[67] Jameson's analysis of the hotel would occupy a prominent position in his 'Postmodernism' essay, published later that year in *New Left Review*.[68] Focusing on 'mutations in the lived experience of built space', Jameson famously argued that the Bonaventure expressed a populist form of spatial domination homologous to the world space of multinational capital.[69] This spatial language was evident in the bewildering layout of the hotel's multiple entryways, which, unmarked and appearing at differing levels, suggested a 'new category of closure governing the inner space of the hotel itself'.[70] In this respect, the Bonaventure aspired towards a total space – 'a complete world, a kind of miniature city' – as confirmed by the reflective glass skin of the building's exterior, repelling the city outside. Corresponding to this space was a novel collective practice: 'a new mode in which individuals move and congregate, something like the practice of a new and historically original kind of hyper-crowd'.[71]

In its descriptive, almost phenomenological, account of the disorientations of movement and perception, Jameson's reading of the Bonaventure placed an emphasis on the failure of what is sometimes called the spatial imagination, i.e. the subject's capacity to rep-

resent its relationship to the spatial environment. According to Soja, Los Angeles was formative for Jameson in this regard: 'It was at the moment when Jameson explored the Bonaventure Hotel that he suddenly expressed and discovered in print the power of the spatial imagination'.[72] In Jameson's lexicon, the experience underlined the political urgency of an aesthetic of cognitive mapping, which would endow the individual subject with 'some new heightened sense of its place in the global system'.[73] It was precisely this project of totalising thought that the Bonaventure foreclosed. The building's spaces 'confuse an effective cognitive mapping', Soja wrote a few years after his visit with Jameson and Lefebvre.[74]

Lefebvre's own remarks on Los Angeles depict a similar sense of disorientation. In his 1986 article, 'No Salvation Away from the Centre?', he described the city as 'appalling and unlivable' for a European (he preferred Florence for pleasure and Paris to live in).[75] He lamented: 'you can't get around without a car and you pay exorbitant sums to park it'. But if Los Angeles was detestable it was, by the same token, immensely fascinating. What drew Lefebvre to the city was less the problem of spatial imagination than that of spatial contradiction. On the one hand, Lefebvre recalled empty streets lined with exclusive luxury shops: 'They are shut and you have to give them advance warning by phone if you want to visit them. They enquire after your bank account, offer you champagne and you make your purchase'.[76] Not far away,

> you have a street, a neighbourhood where 200,000 Salvadorean immigrants are exploited to death in cellars or lofts. A parallel and underground illegal economy. But there, there is singing and dancing. There is something stupendous and fascinating. You are and yet are not in the city. You cross a series of mountains and you are still in the city, but you don't know when you are entering it or leaving it. It stretches for 150 km, twelve million inhabitants. Such wealth! Such poverty![77]

In 'Computing and Urbanisation', Lefebvre drew a distinction between Los Angeles and other urban areas in California, including Silicon Valley but also cities such as San Diego, where the attempt to manage space through information technology was more apparent. What was at stake, he suggested, were two competing models of capitalist development: one based on the programming of urban space and the other based on a process of 'free' urbanisation, exemplified by Los Angeles's sprawling growth. While the programmed city maintained the importance of an organising centre, the latter model gave way to a more polycentric urban form.

The diffusion of the city did not, however, entail the defusing of class conflict. In underscoring the social contradictions manifest in the landscape, Lefebvre described what Mike Davis, in his classic 1990 text *City of Quartz*, would refer to as the 'Dickensian social polarization between rich and poor' in Los Angeles.[78] With relevance to Lefebvre's experience, Davis's trenchant analysis of this polarisation demonstrated how the defence of luxury lifestyles in Los Angeles was premised on the production of new forms of repression. These repressions were achieved through enclaving and the militarisation of urban space, its fortification against poor, predominantly black or Latino, neighbourhoods.

Within and beyond Los Angeles, the contradictory character of the California landscape has long been noted. In the first decades of the twentieth century, members of the International Workers of the World spoke of 'California, the Beautiful – and the Damned' in tracing a con-

nection between the pastoral imagery and the brutal reality of California's agricultural industry.[79] As Marxist geographer Don Mitchell has emphasised in his historical study of migrant farmworkers, the aesthetic landscape of California, its spectacular image as a place of beauty and abundance, has been achieved only through the concealment of the infrastructure of labour that renders it possible.[80] This includes the material systems of surplus value extraction, both regional and global, that undergird the production of the landscape, such as the exploitation of agricultural workers in rural areas or, to consider Lefebvre's commentary, of migrant workers in the city.

But Lefebvre's reflections on Los Angeles are also significant in that they locate, within the terrain of contradiction, the residues of the possible. As in his analysis of Silicon Valley, Lefebvre finds within the everyday life of the oppressed and exploited – he focuses again on Salvadoran migrants and Chicanos – a creative praxis that undercuts the postmodern sheen of Los Angeles: 'You feel that the Hispanics have a counter culture, and they make the society, the music, painting …' While the political implications of Lefebvre's observations remain underdeveloped, one can begin to connect these observations to his revolutionary commitments. Attending to the aesthetic expression of the body in space ('singing and dancing') Lefebvre recalls, in particular, his attempt in *The Production of Space* to delineate an 'orientation' towards the total transformation of everyday life on a worldwide scale. 'We are concerned', Lefebvre writes in the final lines of that work, 'with what might be called a "sense": an organ that perceives, a direction that may be conceived, and a directly lived movement progressing towards the horizon'.[81] At the heart of Lefebvre's Marxist project, this orientation towards the possible cannot be understood as utopian in the traditional sense, since it is grounded in the daily rhythms of class struggle. Amid the postmodern confusion of Los Angeles, Lefebvre begins to chart such a political path – through a critical reckoning with the impoverishment, obstruction and persistence of everyday life.

Coda

In 1985, in his essay 'Architecture and the Critique of Ideology', Jameson remarked on the unrealised possibilities of Lefebvre's conception of space. In the 'one great prophetic vision of these last years of discouragement and renunciation', Lefebvre treated space as the fundamental category not only of politics but of the dialectic itself: an insight whose 'pathbreaking implications' had yet to be worked out.[82] In *Valences of the Dialectic*, Jameson approaches this problem in a more sustained manner, following Lefebvre's insistence on the historical need to rework the dialectic in spatial terms. According to Jameson, the legitimacy of a spatial dialectic hinges not only on its relevance to the contemporary conditions of global capitalism but on the ability to transpose the older temporal categories of Hegelian and Marxist dialectics onto a properly spatial axis: 'What is a spatial contradiction, in other words? What can be the spatial equivalent of the negative or of negation? How do Hegel's "determinations of reflection" fit into a spatial and eventually global scheme?'[83]

Lefebvre's encounter with California offers several clues for developing such a dialectic. Beneath the California ideology, Lefebvre maps out a space of contradiction. On the one hand, California in the early 1980s appeared as the nodal point of a world-historical project aimed at the entwinement of information technology and urbanisation. On the other hand, California's 'exceptional' growth was clearly underpinned by a process of uneven development detectable within the region itself, most forcefully in the daily struggles of exploited migrants in Silicon Valley, Los Angeles and elsewhere. Lefebvre saw California, I would suggest, not as an absolute exception or singularity but as the intensified expression of a general upheaval inherent to global capitalism. Even at the putative epicentre of technological progress it was still the case that, as he observed decades earlier, 'everyday life lags behind what is technically possible'.[84] To locate this historical fact is to expose the illusory nature of the California ideology.

But it would be erroneous in itself to dismiss the California ideology as a complete illusion. For Lefebvre, as I have argued here, ideology maintains a foundation and 'foothold' in reality through its intervention into social space. Such a view contains significant, if still underdeveloped, philosophical and political ramifications, particularly at a time when once dominant ideologies, such as the ideology of California, begin to disintegrate in the face of global crisis. What Lefebvre wrote in 1966 retains its force in the present: 'It is incumbent on crit-

ical thought and revolutionary action to salvage what is valid from the wreckage of collapsing systems and crumbling ideologies'.[85] With regard to the California ideology, we might say that the task of critique and struggle is to reclaim the possibilities it simultaneously signals and obstructs. This would require the production of a planetary space, not of ideology, but of revolution.

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Notes

1. To mark the occasion of Lefebvre's California residency in History of Consciousness, UCLA geographer Edward Soja thought that the programme ought to be temporarily renamed 'Spatiality of Consciousness'. Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 105.

2. According to Soja, there was some uncertainty at the time concerning Lefebvre's exact age. Born in 1901, Lefebvre was famously evasive about the year of his birth. During his stay at UC Santa Cruz, rumours circulated that his passport had a birthdate of 1896. On a visit to UCLA's Graduate School of Urban Planning, Lefebvre is suspected to have 'corrected' his date of birth in the library catalogue from 1901 to 1905. Soja, *Thirdspace*, 28. On Lefebvre's long and intellectually energetic life see Michael Kelly's obituary: 'Henri Lefebvre, 1901–1991', *Radical Philosophy* 60 (1992), 62–63.

3. The book never materialised, despite many late-night discussions in Santa Cruz replete with California wine. Renaudie's recollections of the trip to California can be found here: Serge Renaudie, 'Henri Lefebvre: le réel et la société informationnelle', *Chroniques d'Architecture*, 17 April 2018, https://chroniques-architecture.com/henri-lefebvre-societe-informationnelle/. All unattributed translations are my own. I am grateful to Matt Smith for his assistance.

4. Henri Lefebvre, 'Informatique et urbanisation en Californie', in *Crise de l'urbain, futur de la ville: colloque de Royaumont*, ed. Jacques Le Goff and Louis Guieysse (Paris: Economica, 1985), 20.

5. Lefebvre, 'Informatique et urbanisation en Californie', 20.

6. Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, 'The Californian Ideology', *Mute* 1:3 (1995). A revised version was published in *Science as Culture* 6:1 (1996), 44–72.

7. Lefebvre, 'Informatique et urbanisation en Californie', 20.

8. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Sociology of Marx*, trans. Norbert Guterman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 [1966]), 59–88.

9. Lefebvre, *The Sociology of Marx*, 69, 64.

10. Lefebvre, *The Sociology of Marx*, 69, 66.

11. In his 1958 foreword to the *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre insisted that the critique of ideology must account for the gap between reflection (consciousness) and what it reflects (social being). 'The problem of ideologies', he claimed, 'is as follows: how can consciousness at all levels (individuals, groups, classes, peoples) be mistaken about itself and its content – its being – when it is that very content and that very being which determine it?' Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume I: Introduction*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 1991), 94.

12. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]), 44.

13. Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003 [1970]), 156. An overemphasis on function (i.e., functionalism) is only one dimension of ideology in Lefebvre's account. As he stressed in *The Right to the City*, and in other works of the same period, the three concepts of form, function and structure constitute relatively autonomous elements within an open totality. To place a premium on only one of them is to lapse into ideology, which dogmatically affirms 'functions which are impoverished, structures which are homogeneous, forms which are frozen'. Henri Lefebvre, 'The Right to the City', in *Writings on Cities*, ed. and trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996 [1968]), 190.

14. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 161. Earlier in the text, Lefebvre discusses the rise of 'urban guerrilla activity' in the *barrios* of Latin America as well as revolts in the black ghettos of the United States, see 145–146.

15. Lefebvre, 'The Right to the City', 99.

16. Lefebvre, 'Informatique et urbanisation en Californie', 21.

17. Lefebvre, 'Informatique et urbanisation en Californie', 22.

18. In his 1973 book *The Survival of Capitalism*, Lefebvre argued that capitalism had been able to mitigate its internal contradictions in the century since Marx's *Capital*, and thus ensure the reproduction of the relations of production, by occupying and by producing a new space. But in the process new contradictions became intensified. These included spatial contradictions between centre and periphery, but also, most crucially, the mounting tension between the fragmentation of space and the capacity to produce space on a planetary and even interplanetary

scale. Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*, trans. Frank Bryant (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976 [1973]).

19. Gareth Evans, Tara McPherson and Edward Soja, 'Watch This Space: An Interview with Edward Soja', *Discourse* 14:1 (1991–92), 47.

20. Donald Preziosi, 'La Vi(ll)e en Rose: Reading Jameson Mapping Space', in *In the Aftermath of Art: Ethics, Aesthetics, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2006), 14. The paper had been delivered a few months prior at the Marxism and Interpretation of Culture conference at the University of Illinois, where Lefebvre, also in attendance, had quipped: 'I cannot believe what cheap wine these American Marxists drink'. Quoted in Cary Nelson, *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical* (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 194.

21. Renaudie, 'Henri Lefebvre'.

22. Evans, McPherson and Soja, 'Watch This Space', 47.

23. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1989 [1986]), 44.

24. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume II: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2002 [1961]), 356.

25. Kristin Ross and Henri Lefebvre, 'Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview', *October* 79 (1997), 69–83.

26. Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (London: Verso, 2008 [1988]), 10.

27. Lefebvre recounted his week-long collaboration with the Situationists in 1961, which took place in his home town of Navarrenx in the French Pyrenees. The article they produced together, 'You Will All Be Situationists', emerged from ideas that had been 'tossed around on a little country walk I took them on – with a nice touch of perversity I took them down a path that led nowhere, that got lost in the woods, fields, and so on'. It was, as Ross suggests, a rural *dérive*. Ross, 'Lefebvre on the Situationists', 80.

28. Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive', in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006 [1958]), 62.

29. Ross and Lefebvre, 'Lefebvre on the Situationists', 80.

30. Ross and Lefebvre, 'Lefebvre on the Situationists', 81.

31. Renaudie, 'Henri Lefebvre'.

32. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*; Lefebvre, 'The Right to the City'. For a detailed analysis of Lefebvre's concept of implosion-explosion see Neil Brenner, 'The Urban Question as a Scale Question: Reflections on Henri Lefebvre, Urban Theory and the Politics of Scale', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24:2 (2000), 361–378.

33. Henri Lefebvre, 'Dissolving City, Planetary Metamorphosis', trans. Laurent Corroyer, Marrianne Potvin and Neil Brenner, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32:2 (2014 [1989]), 203–205.

34. Lefebvre, 'Dissolving City', 205.

35. Lefebvre, 'Dissolving City', 203.

36. Lefebvre, 'Dissolving City', 205.

37. Lefebvre, 'Informatique et urbanisation en Californie', 21.

38. Manuel Castells, 'The Real Crisis of Silicon Valley: A Retrospective Perspective', *Competition & Change* 3:1–2 (1998), 110.

39. Renaudie, 'Henri Lefebvre'.

40. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, 'Introduction', in Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 33–34.

41. In presenting their aims to the French Ministry of Public Works the group's ambitions were stymied: '[The Ministry] mocked our naïveté for believing that the development of networks could one day extend beyond the perimeters of Silicon Valley'. Renaudie, 'Henri Lefebvre'.

42. Dominique Routhier suggests that a careful rereading of Lefebvre's writings on modernity would reveal cybernetics as a fundamental concern shaping the trajectory of his Marxist project and its revolutionary commitments. See Dominique Routhier, *Within and Against: The Situationist International in the Age of Automation* (London: Verso, 2023), 231.

43. Henri Lefebvre, 'Marxisme et théorie de l'information', in *Au-delà du structuralisme* (Paris: Anthropos, 1971 [1958]), 51–75.

44. Simon Nora and Alain Minc, *The Computerization of Society: A Report to the President of France* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980 [1978]), 140.

45. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume III: From Modernity to Modernism (Towards a Metaphilosophy of Everyday Life)*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2008 [1981]), 138.

46. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume III*, 148. Lefebvre is referring here to the claims advanced in the 1978 Nora-Minc report. See Nora and Minc, *The Computerization of Society*, 136.

47. See *Metaphilosophy*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2016 [1965]); *Au-delà du structuralisme* (1971); *L'idéologie structuraliste* (Paris: Seuil, 1975). On Lefebvre's engagement with structuralism, including his confrontation with Althusser, see Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (London: Continuum, 2004), 22–27.

48. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume III*, 140. Lefebvre suggests that an attention to negative entropy allows us to 'glimpse a *dialectic* of information technology that envelops its *logic*'.

49. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume III*, 143.

50. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume III*, 145.

51. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume III*, 146.

52. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume III*, 149.

53. Lefebvre makes similar arguments about the reign of technocrats in *Metaphilosophy* (2016 [1965]) and especially in *Position: contre les technocrates* (Paris: Gonthier, 1967).

54. Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophy*, 170.

55. Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophy*, 255.

56. Lefebvre, 'Informatique et urbanisation en Californie', 19.

57. Manuel Castells, *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring, and the Urban-Regional Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

58. See Serge Renaudie's biography on his website: https://serge-renaudie.com/spip.php?article1

59. Lefebvre, 'Informatique et urbanisation en Californie', 22.

60. See Clair Brown and Greg Linden, 'Offshoring in the Semiconductor Industry: A Historical Perspective', *Brookings Trade Forum* (2005), 279–333.

61. Richard Walker, 'Tech City: Myths of Silicon Valley and Globalization', *Annales de Géographie* 723–724, (2018), 574.

62. Lefebvre's trip to Los Angeles is likewise recounted in Renaudie, 'Henri Lefebvre'.

63. Evans, McPherson and Soja, 'Watch This Space', 47.

64. Renaudie, 'Henri Lefebvre'.

65. Renaudie, 'Henri Lefebvre'.

66. 'I think nowadays that this consumer society, which brackets and ignores the relations of production, this consumer society is the current myth corresponding to what individualism was in the time of free, competitive capitalism'. Henri Lefebvre, 'The State and Society', in *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, eds. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, trans. Gerald Moore, Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009 [1964]), 63. My thanks to Pablo Escudero for bringing this passage to my attention.

67. Edward W. Soja, 'Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in the Citadel–LA', in *Postmodern Cities & Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 21.

68. Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review* I/146 (July/August 1984), 53–92.

69. Jameson, 'Postmodernism', 58.

70. Jameson, 'Postmodernism', 81.

71. Jameson, 'Postmodernism', 81.

72. Evans, McPherson and Soja, 'Watch This Space', 46. Soja claimed that Jameson's analysis of the Bonaventure Hotel marked a crucial shift in his work, from the diachronically oriented approach of *The Political Unconscious* (1981) to a more spatially informed method of historicising cultural production.

73. Jameson, 'Postmodernism', 92.

74. Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 243.

75. Henri Lefebvre, 'No Salvation Away from the Centre?' in *Writings on Cities*, 205–208.

76. Henri Lefebvre, 'No Salvation', 208.

77. Henri Lefebvre, 'No Salvation', 208. As Soja recalls, Lefebvre was 'fascinated particularly by the Estrada Courts public housing project, where nearly all the walls are covered with murals, the most notable being a stark picture of Che with the admonition "We are not a Minority!"' Personal communication cited in Andy Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 73–74.

78. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 2018 [1990]), 129.

79. Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 17.

80. See Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*; Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle Over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

81. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 423.

82. Fredric Jameson, 'Architecture and the Critique of Ideology', in *Architecture, Criticism, Ideology*, ed. Joan Ockman (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985), 53.

83. Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 68.

84. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume I*, 8. This line comes from Lefebvre's 1958 foreword to the second edition of the *Critique*. He advanced a similar argument in the original 1947 publication of the text (see page 230), where he emphasised the temporal gap between modern technical progress and the reality of everyday life.

85. Lefebvre, *The Sociology of Marx*, 72. He was speaking in particular of 19th-century German philosophy. While the latter transposed praxis to the domain of metaphysics, it also gave 'expression to some new concepts – among others, the concept of dialectical change – which were eventually integrated in scientific theory and revolutionary praxis'.