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Ambiguity, Household and the Global Intimate in the Work of Henri Lefebvre

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Abstract

Households are central to Henri Lefebvre's 1940s-1980s critiques of everyday life. They are the first spaces of everyday modernity that he analyses and include an extended sociology of women's contradictory roles in consumption and nurture. Households perpetuate archaic, patriarchal forms and are incompletely colonized by media and consumerism. On this basis, Lefebvre champions peasant households as repositories of alternative potential which could form the basis for a different socioeconomic order than capitalism. Feminist analysis of 'the global intimate' has seized on this promise but develop beyond Lefebvre's heterosexist and romanticized view of post-World War II women as ambiguous, oppressed and deluded. This paper mines Lefebvre's key texts for his treatment of heterosexual cis-women and men, violence, intimacy, patriarchy, feminism and gender. These dimensions of the household give a more precise understanding of Lefebvre's romanticization of the patriarchal peasant household and community. He is a transitional figure from the Marxist tradition who prefigures feminist analyses of the global intimate. However, households hold promise as a 'margin-within:' an enclaved, nested, alternate spatialisation within the dominant order of social space. The everyday household emerges as a crucible and social form of differences and contradictions that could be extended into a 'differential space' that supports maximal diversity and opportunity with minimal organisation or regression to more oppressive intergenerational, kin and gender relations.

Keywords

Henri Lefebvre, household, feminism, patriarchy, everyday life, global intimate

Introduction

Feminist scholarship on 'the global intimate' (Mountz and Hyndman, 2006; Wilson, 2012; Parikh, 2021; Alfaro, 2021; Sharp, 2022) references Henri Lefebvre's post-World War II *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947; 1961; 1981; collected and translated as Lefebvre, 2014a). However, for many there are more points of divergence than convergence with his work. What precautions need to be kept in mind? This paper reexamines Lefebvre's legacy regarding the household.[1] Specifically this has been to envision the household as multiform and ambiguous, compromised by marketing and consumerism. But nonetheless, the household is an archaic social form that has resisted assimilation by modernity and consumer capitalism (and many feminist reforms). It is thus a key example of resistance, of 'difference' (Kinkaid, 2018, 441). For this tradition, its non-conformance qualifies the household as a counter-space or a 'margin-within' in which solidarities prevail and alternative futures may develop (Simonsen, 2005; Briganti and Mezei, 2012). This legacy stands despite Lefebvre's own refusal of feminism and romanticized defence of precapitalist and marginalised social forms – including patriarchy – as seeds of an alternative to capitalist society.

Households

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, households returned to the centre of attention as a result of CoVid-19 lockdowns. In North America, for example, this provoked a rush to move from apartments to houses with gardens, and from large city centres to suburbs or towns. This is evidence of a wholesale re-evaluation of the requirements of homes that people work from and the relation of residences to not only workplaces but also to nature, even if only a small garden (Aresta and Salingaros, 2021; Fuchs, 2021; Shields et al., 2020). The rhythms that set the workday and workplace apart from the home changed for a significant percentage of people who navigated an expansion of work time into life at home, bifurcating populations. For service sector and skilled workers required to report to a workplace, public space and transit became a daily hazard. Inner-city residents and lower socioeconomic classes with limited accommodations endured police crackdowns on congregating in public parks (labelled 'crowding' and lack of 'social distancing'). For the elderly and those in group housing, apartments became forms of solitary confinement during pandemic lockdowns for months at a time during 2020-22 (Shields et al., 2024).

Outside the 'Global Northwest,' for almost a half-century Central and South America experienced grassroots struggles to maintain households.[2] The domestic and intimate were bulwarks against total exploitation. They were part of a kin-based struggle for the means of collective reproduction under conditions of repression, State withdrawal from public provisioning and privatization of common goods (Dinerstein, 2015; Hesketh, 2020:55).

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[1] This paper was developed from part of a larger presentation at a symposium on 'Henri Lefebvre's Critical Social Theory' organized by the Ioannis Flytzanis and others at the Social Theory Laboratory of the Department of Sociology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. 6-8 June, 2022. I acknowledge the helpful suggestions of participants, my students at University of Alberta and anonymous referees.

[2] I am unable to comment on them here, but acknowledge the significant struggles of and in support of households globally. This is both in apparently 'normal' residences, as well as explicitly in the tents of every refugee camp, encampments of the unhoused, bidonvilles and warzones such as in Gaza, in Aleppo, Syria, in cities and towns of Donetsk, Ukraine and elsewhere.

Struggles over land and housing still dominate as rural areas continue to be enclosed or deliberately depopulated by all sides of conflicts (Guevara, 2015; Alfaro, 2021).

During and post-pandemic, the equivocal nature of the study-from-home and work-from-home household became clear. The contemporary status of the household as a collaboration around child rearing, partners' pursuit of accumulation, care and support of spouses, parents and extended Others, including renters, couch surfers and extended family is an important element in understanding the flexibility of societies. It anchors the geographical 'tensility' (stretch and reach (Shields, 2013, Ch. 5-6)) of transnational social relations (see Sevilla-Buitrago, 2022). These topologies include households where members work at a distance to support others through remittances. These are not simply interpersonal transfers but often contributions to the construction and maintenance of households as infrastructures of care and intimacy (Sharp, 2022). From the perspective of the household, intimacies extend not only in the present and locally but across distance, from the past and also toward the future; home are return destinations, places of retirement and incubators of future generations (Lopez, 2015; Lozanovska, 2019; Schönhofer, 2018).

House, home and family are important concepts, but these terms describe generalities and elicit frozen stereotypes. The banal and everyday home and house is an aggregation of very different elements: the intersection of bodies, everyday life, consumption and urban dwelling as well as socioeconomic categories (Paquot, 2005). Assumptions, norms and stereotypes mask the diversity and realities of households as well as their functions: there is often an assumption that family units of bodies related by blood map directly onto households and homes but the members of households include pets and domestic animals, servants and even in the contemporary world may still include slaves or those who are indentured or virtually enslaved.

The family household is an institution, convention and social space that nonetheless maintains an ambiguous status and is thus available for reimagining (Lloyd and Vasta, 2017). It is both within the economic and social spaces of capitalist modernity as a site of consumption, production, surrogacy and paid reproduction; but it is also outside of these as it both predates capitalism and takes on more forms than modernity admits.

Lefebvre's Critical Sociology of Everyday Family Life

Henri Lefebvre, better known for his 1960s studies of *The Production of Space* (1981), The Right to the City (1968c; see 1995a) and *Urban Revolution* (2003; 1970) wrote extensively on households as exactly such an interstice and intersection point that had been neglected by Marxists (Lefebvre, 1947). Writing in the postwar decades, Lefebvre anticipated the struggles and violence around the late Twentieth Century opening up of the heterosexual cis-family. Confronting the consumption-oriented, legally defined, patriarchal family unit with the then still-existing family life of the French peasantry at the end of World War II, he saw the modern nuclear family through an historical lens as much more complex than was admitted. Not a stereotypical family unit, but households that are thus more unpredictable than ideologues allowed. For Lefebvre, the post-war French family and the bourgeois household were still characterized by 'patrimonial links' that predated capitalist modernity.

> We can talk of the Islamic family, the Christian family or the secularized family. Institutions intervene vigorously to prohibit cases of deviance, blatant survivals

> and transitions towards anything new: they impose a defined structure upon the family. At the same time, the family retains unmediated links which originate in the distant past, before the development of modern society, such as patriarchal links and feudal relations of subordination. ...if its situation is de facto ambiguous, it also accrues defined motivations and recognizable attitudes. The 'modern' and the 'archaic' confront each other in the family (Lefebvre, 2014a, 514-5 [II, 221]).

The private worlds of households are a key site of everyday life. This is theorized through Lefebvre's literary and sometimes experimental writing as an unsystematized residuum of affect and social relations that capitalist forms constantly try to 'colonize' and mine.[3] The household is one of the most prominent sites that spatialises Lefebvre's sense of the everyday as a culturally laden status quo filled with both joys and monotony; the site of potential and repressive codes and normative pressures.

The household is the first physical and social space observed by Lefebvre in his oeuvre. In the first volume of *Critique of Everyday Life*, originally published in 1947, Lefebvre begins from a position which privileges forms of autonomy reflected in, for example, 'the patriarchal peasant home' (2022, 18). In some of these communities, membership is not simply a question of kinship ties to ancestral land (*Gemeinschaft*) but a diversity of solidarities and obligations, transcending any public-private division. For example, membership may be defined by ongoing participation over the life course in collective activities and rituals that ensure the perpetuation of the community (Lefebvre, 1947; 1991, 117ff.), the fertility of the land, or the health of the inhabitants and their livestock. To such populations and households, capitalism offers progress, but fatalistically: progress is often only in the service of profit for others.

Lefebvre admires postwar French families' ambiguous status that includes the archaism of traditions and historical forms of conjugal, parental and kin relationships. As a social form and organization of reproduction found in the rural contexts he was concerned with, the family as a social form retained ancient paternalistic hierarchies, models which he assumes are consistent in the past also. Families continue to maintain traditions and are the sites and social forms that enable and 'host' seasonal rituals, feast days, celebrations anchored in lunar and solar cycles that may have vanished from the urban public sphere of consumer capitalist societies. 'Patriarchal life...possessed a certain beauty and grandeur in spite of its limitations.... Today, we find deep-seated residues and even a certain consolidation of the patriarchal family' (2022, 19, 30-31). But for whom? Despite his attention to women's lives and 'sensitivity to feminist concerns... and to the...pernicious role phallocentrism plays in the marginalization of women' (Stewart, 1995, 617), Lefebvre is clearly neither offering an

[3] As a 'colonised' site, the household is an important laboratory for Lefebvre's critique of everyday life. The metaphors of colonisation and references to migrant poverty highlight the importance of coloniality in Lefebvre's own development and the potential of a decolonial critique to contribute to the struggle for equality and equity not only in colonial societies but also the Global North. To focus on the household, this paper does not pursue a critique of Lefebvre's Eurocentric metaphorics of colonisation Goonewardena and Kipfer (2013) consider Lefebvre and his peers' extension of relations of domination through an appeal to the colonial, but this falls short of a reflexive critique of colonial metaphors that blur and flatten some of the specifics of both the relation between the private domestic sphere and the public official political sphere and between colonizer and colonized in European empires of the past century.

orthodox sociology nor a feminist critique even if his target is the middle-class urban household of the post-war decades in which, following Reich, 'women, children and domestic servants are *both* exploited *and* dominated' (1976, 49; see Reich, 1946).

Critique of Household Life

The traditional household might thus be a crucible of quite unanticipated alternative futures for the entirety of society, despite its limitations. Lefebvre's extension of Marxist critique from the economy to the household *oikos* examined an underdeveloped domestic milieu which not only seemed to lag in terms of modernity but reflected peoples' mixture of disillusionment, misplaced hopes and alienation from the project of modernization. From the inchoate quality of the postwar French household, he both critiques and celebrates the archaic elements of everyday domesticity as a reservoir of potential alternatives to the capitalist organization of societies according to productivity and efficiency.

> Constantly staring us in the face, mundane and therefore generally unnoticed... is this fact: that *life is lagging behind what is possible*... Compare an 'average' house in one of our towns, not with an ostentatious and absurd palace, nor with some characteristically grotesque dwelling of the haute bourgeoisie, but rather with a 'modern' industrial installation–a power station, for example. Here we find hyper-precise technology, light, and a dazzling cleanliness; power methodically condensed into strictly contoured appliances (Lefebvre, 1991 [1947], 129–30).

The household is not only variable in terms of its membership but was no ideal cradle of care: he critiqued the anxious consumerism promoted by media and capitalistic interests. The household serves as a space in which there is an attempt to fuse everyday life experience with advertising-inspired desires. They were and are targeted for increased consumption, surveillance and rationalization, while the social labour of reproduction and care still coexists, but outside of the official realm of economic production. This highlights tensions at the heart of the domestic *oikomene*.

Lefebvre revived the critical stance of Engels and Marx's studies on affect, the family and home in *The Holy Family* (Marx and Engels, 1956) and *The Origins of Family, Private Property and the State* (Engels, 1902). In the household, the labour of social reproduction on which Capitalism still depends is motivated by affects of desire and love; however love is a passion, 'that is sensually manifest' (Marx and Engels, 1956, 31), notes Marx in his critique of idealists. Love is located in and of the body. Engels and Marx counterpose a shared sense of attachment between partners, 'sex-love,' against ideologies of marital bliss and its institutionalized legal forms (Arnett, 2017; Engels, 1902, 34) – to which Lefebvre adds a critique of romantic novels and fashion magazines of his day, and to which we might add the culture industries around Valentines Day or Fathers and Mothers Day, to cite just a few examples.

Marx and Engels argue that for most of its history, sex-love has existed only informally and often outside of marriage which was a duty or imposed arrangement (Engels, 1902, 40).[4]

[4] Developing the historical conditions of heterosexual monogamy, slavery, and private wealth that arose out of the economic necessities of feudal property holders, Engels compares the hierarchized structure of patriarchal gender relations in households to a familiar economic divide between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat: the

DeCerteau, for example, highlights the many ways these institutions and rituals are reappropriated by individuals and hijacked for more authentic use (DeCerteau, 1984). But Lefebvre highlights the ways in which these contradictory arrangements are not only obviously compromised in the eyes of many participants, but they are also a repository of hints and the remaining residues of authentic affects and spontaneous desires (Lefebvre, 1991; Buckley and Strauss, 2016). In a manner distinct from rational-legalistic institutions, the household integrates and spatialises the intimate-passionate,' the 'lived, the carnal, the body' (Lefebvre, 2004, 68) in a spatial and temporal institution (Brighenti and Kårnholm, 2018, 7). Family-households expand the sex-love affective structure of the couple into the bonds of familial and intergenerational solidarity that are true structures of intimacy, support and caring for children and also for family members beyond the stereotypical nuclear couple-with-children (grandparents, grandchildren, for example). However, violence – as in intimate partner violence – is missing from Lefebvre's critique, an aspect of social interaction that is underplayed across his oeuvre.

The Household *Insoumise*

As part of the modernization process that occurred after World War I in France, 'Shifts in everyday routine were elicited through sites and practices including the household [and] personal hygiene…' (Ross, 1995, 77). Nonetheless, capitalism remains captive to this multiplicitous form for the social reproduction of labour. This is not just a matter of 'families' or 'family life' which he criticized as defined by State social services and social sciences but is a sort of eddy in the flow of our reality in which bodies, traditions, affects and social structures come together. This tension makes the household a margin or counter-space that frustrates the possibility of complete dominance by socioeconomic order and authority. That is, Lefebvre not only critiques the colonization of the private sphere, but presents the household as a key opportunity and site of resistance, especially in its more recalcitrant and obdurate forms.

Anglophone theoretical examination of 'everyday life' as a concept has been unsatisfying and the term often remains mysterious or shallow (despite the work of Ross (e.g. 1995)): 'the Lefebvre that survived in this tradition was also radically reduced, barely recognizable…' (Kipfer et al., 2008, 8). Lefebvre deliberately emphasizes the in-process, un-concluded and ambiguous qualities of 'everydayness,' refusing to offer definitions and thereby defying easy translation. Unlike Lukács, who originated the critical use of the term *Alltäglichkeit* (1911), Lefebvre's *quotidien* is not just alienated life. Is it banal? Boredom? The mundane? The interstitial? He makes it a 'both-and' conception, adding virtualities, such as the set of emergent potentials and repressed, latent alternatives, to the sense of taken-for-granted routines. Everyday life is an ineffable and changing continuity of sounds, smells, rhythms, mannerisms and collective social tics. Everydayness, *quotidiennité,* is that status quo we face when we get out of bed to face each morning: both the potential of a new day and

heterosexual, 'Monogamous family…clearly reveals the antagonism between the man and the woman expressed in the man's exclusive supremacy, it exhibits in miniature the same oppositions and contradictions as those in which society has been moving, without power to resolve or overcome them, ever since it split into classes at the beginning of civilization' (Engels 1902, 36).

the burden of chores, obligations and expectations. Blanchot characterizes the everyday obliquely as 'what we are first and most often' (Blanchot, 1992, 238; see Davis, 2009).

Drawing on his personal involvement with avant-garde movements – Dada, Surrealism and Situationism – Lefebvre disrupted social science conventions with the inclusion of poetry, rhetorical questions, dramatic scenarios, and literary excurses to detonate instrumental appropriation of his texts. In this he was closer to contemporaries such as the literary figure Maurice Blanchot than to geographical scientists such as Paul Claval. The everyday is defined as those elements that are analytically resistant. This allows it to play its role as the Other of Modernity. It must cause us to rethink and to pause practice as usual. In effect, Lefebvre was pointing to fugitive, insurgent, fleeting and performative spaces and moments that subverted the logic of capitalist modernity and the society of 'bureaucratized consumption,' as he called it. In post-war France, there was still hope that they could avoid becoming a site of organised desire and consumption. Households would be a prima facie example of worlds premised on traditional, spiritual and local logics that resist being totally annealed to the dominant power of capitalism but instead maintain the possibility of difference and differentiated times, spaces and lives. These spaces hide in plain view, sanctioned by institutions such as the Church, or following and marking family and local traditions, yet not fully conforming to their dictates either. Clearly, patriarchy would then be a central part of these traditions. The contemporary hope is that this approach might also allow a queering, radicalizing and stretching of family and household. Could these institutions and social forms be radicalised yet remain themselves (see Hamalainen, 2019; Roane, 2023)?

As a taken-for-granted site of banal everydayness, when Lefebvre searches for the richness, dignity and potential in everyday life, privileging the household gives the everyday an intimate scale that opposes the extensiveness of abstract space, which tends to foreground relations stretching beyond the horizon. The everyday is 'spatialised' or cast as the household – which also gives it temporal scale and rhythmicity of generations. Belem cites Mosquera-Velljo to argue that scale is 'a conjunction of stories that allow us to delineate a "territorial space through time' (Bleger, 2021). As a space-time unit, the everyday household is a juxtaposition in the space of the present of events that extend into the past and future (Reboratti, 2001, p. 87). It is a site not only of consistency but of differences and contradictions that could be extended into a 'differential space' that supports maximal diversity and opportunity with minimal organisation. Throughout his works from the 1950s onward. Lefebvre stakes out the power of these interstitial, excluded and marginalised situations, referring to these residua as the 'remainder' ('*le reste*' as in an arithmetical division). The 'margin-within' is an enclaved, nested, spatialisation within the dominant order of social space. As such it holds the potential and promise to support alternate practices and relations: difference. The tug of the divergent temporal and spatial character of any household has the potential to dislocate it from the official social spatial and temporal regime to create a disjunctive topology which is, in Lefebvre's view, always a latent threat to the dominant orders. In these sites, revolution simmers and hence they are subject to surveillance and repression.

Consumerism and the 'Women's Press' in France

Beginning in his works of the 1940s and 1950s, Lefebvre is one of the first to observe the creation of new needs by advertising that takes the form of self-improvement (Lefebvre, 1991, 31, 145; 2009; Ross, 1995). Unfortunately, Lefebvre is read in translation as one of the

popularizers of the trivializing trope of 'the bored housewife' whose ennui is the result of capitalist economic relations, on one hand, and ideologies of consumption, on the other.

Despite his diagnostic engagement with the magazines and novels of the French 'women's press' of the 1950s and 60s, his presentation of these households is fuzzy on the specifics of its inhabitants. They are an anchoring milieu from which political actors launch themselves each day (Lefebvre, 1991, 186). On one hand, he endorses a household politics of individual erotic sovereignty; yet, Lefebvre's texts assume heterosexuality, patriarchy and a racial and cultural Eurocentrism which renders them blind to the embodied specifics of households. In as much as he does not comment on the Roma, but offers an endless discussion of Roman practices, Lefebvre has a historian's eye rather than an anthropologist's readiness for including Otherness. He hardly mentions everyday life outside France despite extensive travel especially in Germany, the Balkans and Brazil, the US and Canada.

'Consumption was the wife's province – and the importance of her function is still increasing…' (Lefebvre, 1971, 34; 1968a). Women, domesticity and the political economy of the household, Ross argued, were the particular subjects of an everyday politics of difference that resisted state-led modernization. In the Postwar period, French women were subjected to efforts to both discipline and orient them around the consumption of commodities and the provision of free domestic labour that created common goods such as home comforts consumed by (often male) waged labourers, relatives and children. These common goods were and are more than material. They include intangibles such as care, as well as occasions and routines such as convivial family mealtimes beyond merely food, parenting beyond merely supervising school homework up to the creation of comfort in the home beyond its mere cleaning and provisioning. Changes in how this was accomplished in the domestic sphere were central to modernity as a culture and its attendant mode of production, such as steadily more bureaucratized capitalism and neoconservative economic globalization in the last decades of the Twentieth Century.

What is certain is that gender analysis is a hallmark that distinguishes Lefebvre's 1940s oeuvre onward at a time when social scientists tended to look on their research subjects with a cool and unsympathetic eye.

> The image of the total woman is distinctly reformist and apolitical, confused and syncretic. It has the backing of this great force: newness, the effect of surprise, plus confusion and syncretism. The total woman becomes everything because she does everything. She produces and directs consumption. She has children, she brings them up and educates them. She governs the family. She allows men to devote themselves to sterile games… yet artists create for her, woman, and about her (Lefebvre, 2014a, 376).

He introduces the figure of the postwar 'total woman,' a Nietzschean *ubermensch* that he critiques as an advertising illusion (in contrast to his positively valued figure of the 'total man' in later work). The 'total woman' is a utopian but illusory notion of the feminine that transcends the cis-gendered limits of female subjectivity and embodiment. She 'has risen above the level of her own physiological and social function, which hitherto had defined her… she is no longer limited by her own alienation…. who can fight time and create a new time… who gives us hope for "modernity"' (Lefebvre, 1995b, 152). Yet, 'Together with the family, woman belongs to the category of ambiguity. As an informal social group, the only way "women" can be understood

and situated is as the embodiment of ambiguity' (Lefebvre, 1992, II, 211; Lefebvre, 2014a, 515).

What is cis-womens' ambiguous status in commercial images and everyday life? Reading across Lefebvre's oeuvre, ambiguity is not limited to women and is discussed at length and repeated in texts such as *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment* (2014b) and *Critique of Everyday life* (Vol. 1, 1947; 2014a). On one hand, ambiguity is presented in relation to Marx's discussions of contradictions of class interests, for example the middle class or the petit bourgeoisie (e.g., Lefebvre 1976, 21-6; 1968b). He also and consistently argues that women of his era found themselves in an ambiguous position with respect to wage labour (e.g., 2014b, 168-9). But at the same time, he appears to elide the female and feminine with a lack of clarity and critical consciousness: 'the embodiment of ambiguity.' For example:

> We have already noted the ambiguity of women's status today. Everyday life, to which they are consigned, is also their stronghold from which they try, nevertheless, to escape by the roundabout method of eluding the responsibilities of consciousness; whence their incessant protests and clumsily formulated, directionless claims (Lefebvre, 2022, 94).

Already critiqued as a fascination with women's 'mystery' by de Beauvoir in *Le Deuxième sexe* (1949), Lefebvre's stress on ambiguity risks displacing women from the category of the self-determining, concrete and logical agent that is associated with the male worker-citizen. Nonetheless, queer, trans and indigenous activists have widely claimed the importance of strategic opacity, or a right to silence. To 'not explain' leverages a practice and politics of intimacy against a universalizing knowledge politics that often serves societies of control.

Patriarchy and Anti-Capitalism?

Such quotations from Lefebvre add up to a tactical bet that traditional patriarchal forms amount to a residuum of resistance and refusal of reforms that he sees as integrated into organised consumerism, including the domestic hygiene, fashion, tourism and holiday industries. Beyond the focus of this paper, this is worth critical analysis in the contemporary context of a working-class male rejection of the status quo, but in the 1960s, the changing status of women was correlated with an expanded labour force of women wage earners who also performed labour and care as mothers. His stance casts feminism as one of the ideological handmaids of the expansion of wage labour to more deeply colonize women's lives. In this either/or position, archaic paternalistic family relations represent his alternative to capitalist relations of ruling that, contrary to commonsense, may provide a base for the emergence of progressive alternatives to capitalist social relations.

Indeed, in the gendered terms of Lefebvre's analysis, he highlights the contradictory role of women in French families as 'heads of consumption,' not the injustice of their limited social role or unpaid status, which he was again more likely to see as a promising alternative to wage relations. Similarly, the social and political lack of recognition for women hinted at options and social forms outside of bureaucratized consumption. Although he has not been translated in such terms and his work has not been engaged with as a critique of the welfare state, Lefebvre's criticism is thus of the relationship between the form and the modus operandi taken by the 20th-century European state and its intrusion on intimacy, reduction of

human complexity and denigration of spontaneity in favour of monetized modes of satisfying human needs.

While he celebrates their divergence from official norms, Lefebvre does not consider the household as a space in which differently sexed, aged and able bodies intermix following cultural, raced and ethnically specific norms. Looking backward privileges those households that have produced descendants, hence the cis-family home of whatever class. He does acknowledge that these relations of mutuality and care are always specific even when considered in 'modern' households. The divisions of labour within the household are gendered and the contradictory position of women as wife and mother, sex object and moral guardian, muse and drudge is constantly evoked in his texts on the *Critique of Everyday Life*. But his analysis neither recognizes patriarchy nor men as gendered. The Lefebvrean *paterfamilias* is an abstract figure. For example, it has little insight to add on the topic of the patronizing arrogance of contemporary 'tech bros' nor the patriarchal rage of those men and 'proud boys' who feel disenfranchised, disempowered and unheard. Lefebvre does not establish the age-sex-ability power dimensions, nor violence and abuses within the family, which fracture the household itself. For this position, illustrated in his own persona, French feminist founders such as Françoise d'Eaubonne viscerally critiqued and lampooned this work (1958).

Lefebvre attempts a systematic but radical sociology of women's changing social roles. Partly this is a response to the second-wave feminism of Simone de Beauvoir (1949; see Lefebvre, 2014a, 306, 868 n9, n10) and the translation of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* into French. He critiques any movement away from socioeconomic class analysis as a 'paradox that half the human race and organized society constitute a group defined by gender, which is to a certain extent distinct, with its own aspirations, demands and strategies' (Lefebvre, 1992, II, 211; Lefebvre, 2014a, 515). For Lefebvre, masculinity stands outside of gender and this undercuts the possibility of a gender critique in his work.

Ambiguousness, Archaism, Obduracy

Despite these limitations, Lefebvre offers a model that mobilizes the ambiguous as an important operator. It characterizes not only the family as a multifaceted concept and institution, but also governs the shifting, dialectical relation of the domestic with public space and the life of the city and community. As a complex, intersectional entity, the family and household are boundary objects (Schaffter, Fall, and Debarbieux, 2010; Star and Gerson, 1986). They are spaces and social forms that link bodies, kinship lineages, proximate neighbour relations, mental mappings and built, architectural spaces. For Lefebvre, ambiguity points to dialectical tensions. These may not be taken into account in people's everyday life but demand analysis as their flexibility and ability to accommodate contradictions may account for the family form's resistance to capitalist social forms.

> Uncertainty is not without its charm or interest; it can never last long. It maintains ambiguity, keeping what is possible in a state of possibility...Hence the infinitely complex, profound and contradictory character of life is given an element which is always new, and which is indeed constantly being renewed by knowledge.
>
> To put it more clearly or more abstractly, ambiguity is a category of everyday life, and perhaps an essential category. It never exhausts its reality; from the

> ambiguity of consciousnesses and situations spring forth actions, events, results, without warning (Lefebvre, 1991, 18)

As a result, everyday life in the household exceeds the social economic and symbolic efforts to give it structure and predictability. It is a fugitive world, a niche time-space escaping the limits of rational and political economic analysis. The domestic is a richly textured but contradictory world, where we may wink at the ways 'real life' contradicts the discourses of how life and relationships are supposed to be conducted. This anomic divergence of the practised and lived from the stereotypical representations of domestic life are evidence of creativity and resilience. Pragmatically, everyday home life is both colonized but also a reservoir or space of potential, of what 'could be.' Its ambiguity results in a certain illegibility of the space to power, even while unsanctioned, hybrid and unorthodox house-holding becomes an ongoing site of struggle, policing and biopolitical discipline by landlords, social work and other State professions. Such households exceed the normative politics of the day by offering what Lefebvre called 'moments' of flourishing (Smith, 2020b; 2020a). This includes the everyday and utterly routine but impugned households of the sexually marginalized, of absent-parent and expatriate families extended through digital communications, the mobile, the fugitive, the unhoused.

Summative Comments

Lefebvre struggles to both render legible women's class and cultural roles yet maintain their status outside the disciplinary categories of social management he was critiquing. In retrospect, the result is weirdly patronising in the land of nationalistic images of *Marianne* in public on the barricades, not of housewives at home. He is also critical of modern masculinity and patriarchy as 'violence...phallic brutality...of the means of constraint: police, army, bureaucracy. Phallic erectility...proclaiming phallocracy as the orientation of [abstract] space (Lefebvre, 1981, 287). However this directness is missing from his treatment of cis-women and hetero-patriarchy (see also Revol and Shields, 2023).

To simultaneously critique and celebrate is to romanticize.

Lefebvre did not critique gendered oppressions and violence within the patriarchal relations of rule that prevailed in French households. Nostalgia for a peasant world in which public and private are combined is the basis for his critique of the 'housewife.' However, this frames and traps his analysis of urban and suburban households at the scale of the patriarchal cis-gendered family home which the global intimate looks beyond (Conroy, 2023, 8). When one looks beyond his texts on Marxism, the city and urban-rural-national territory, a broader disconnection of women from public politics in favour of the private sphere is apparent in their absence from his own copious output of introductions to biographies of historical figures and editions of philosophers and romantic writers.

Lefebvre's oeuvre is a veritable *Boy's Own* of French cultural heroes.

Lefebvre was forced to defend his position against the post-war feminist programme. In his own sexual and family relations he was pressed to recognize the agency of women although he does not acknowledge his female companions' contributions to his work (whether as typists, managers of his correspondence and social network, or as inspiration for the themes of his books that shift with his serial relationships). Over time, these women, many

of whom are authors, translators, artists and editors in their own right, play a more and more prominent role in his authorship and activism.

The role of Lefebvre's female partners as team members supporting his work has been under valued.

The legacy of the critiques of everyday life is that they establish the household as social and spatial form, a site where abstract discourses on consumption and 'the good life' are realized and actualized as material goods, as appliances and thus of social relations, roles and routines that are adjusted around affording these purchases. Despite the limitations of his approach, his analysis does establish that the household serves as a key site of intimacy and affect. As such, it is a latent challenge to social order while hiding in plain sight as everyday life at home (see Roane, 2023). The domestic sphere is the ultimate bulwark against, and test of, any social change or revolutions. Linda Peake and others have noted how this has been overlooked in much subsequent urban analysis (Peake, 2016). To this, the global intimate is an important rejoinder. Lefebvre confronts the urban, national and planetary scales of abstract spatialisations with the household 'counter-scale' as a key site of everyday life. However, it was his assumptions about the public and private as a dualism that subsequently allowed most readers to exclude the household from their analysis, repressing the domestic private sphere in geographical and social research on cities. The household continues to be cast as a margin to the political economic sphere of public space. If it emerges as a counter-space and counter-spatialistion, the domestic tends to be examined only as a site of consumption and the locus of the creation of new needs. This is despite the role of postwar North American models of suburbia as a domestic environment in racially fragmenting populations, culture and consumption (Marinic, 2020, 90; Schaffter, Fall, and Debarbieux, 2010; Star, 1995). For example, discourses of 'white flight' to suburbia overlooked the complexity of suburbanisationn (see Shields, 2022) and added to middle-class, white heterosexual stereotypes of the suburban household, homes and their interiors (Silverstone, 1997; Park, 2014).

The household is a counter-space, a margin-within and counter-spatialisation.

Topologically, while suburbia was understood to be a (racialised) urban periphery and contrasted in horizontal geographical space to the public sphere and civic diversity of a city centre (Shields and Keil, 2013), the household deserves recognition as a private, internal 'margin-within,' nested in the official public spatialisation (see also Serres, 1982 on the logic of the parasite, unfortunately beyond the scope of this article). The household offers an alternate time-space world. It is a spatialisation that can be used to materialise the possibility of difference and diversity excluded from the official public order.

In the hands of contemporary feminists, queer and trans theorists, the household as a 'differential site' and a counter-space of actually possible worlds extends Lefebvre's logic (Markusen, 1980; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2022; Conroy, 2023). The global intimate validates the multigenerational and expanded membership of many migrant households, and the house-holding and parenting of matriarchal Indigenous and cultural minorities in which grandmothers and also local 'aunties' often play a determinant role (Anderson, 2011).

Jepson argues home and household are important staging spaces for all those denied dignity in public spaces (2005) despite continued patriarchal relations of ruling. Despite his paternalistic position favouring heterosexual cis-family relations, Lefebvre understood the

household as a global counter-space of intimacies: a site of active reinvention which allows people to engage in a dynamic process of transmutation. The household is not a stable space nor a static set of temporal moments and rhythms which can be completely governed, 'colonised' by capital and the State. Lefebvre adds a spatial and class analysis to feminist critiques of the 1960s 'global configuration' of modern capitalism (Lefebvre, 1976, 73). The household as a liminal, ambiguous and even insurgent space is one element distinguishing it from the norms of public life. What it supports is a bottom-up spatial ethics which extrapolates from raising children to elder care to supporting neighbours to the local political ecology of, for example, community gardens as collective visions and thence onwards to the city as a reef-like actualisation of a living collective. Bringing the household into urban analysis allows one to better see the continuities of politics and intimacies which do not stop at the doorstep.

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