Habitat and inhabiting: the urgency of an urban poetics.
Henri Lefebvre and practices of appropriation in Brazil

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Henri Lefebvre y las prácticas de apropiación en Brasil

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Habitat et habiter: l'urgence d'une poétique urbaine.
Henri Lefebvre et les pratiques d'appropriation au Brésil

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Abstract

This article proposes a critical rereading of the right to the city based on the distinction between habitat and inhabiting, grounded in Henri Lefebvre's urban philosophy. It argues that the housing crisis cannot be resolved solely through technical-administrative means; rather, it requires the reactivation of inhabiting as a symbolic, sensuous, and creative practice. In dialogue with authors such as Heidegger and Nietzsche, Lefebvre articulates poiesis and appropriation as the foundations of a new urban praxis. From this perspective, the article examines experiences of occupation and self-management in downtown São Paulo, such as Ocupação 9 de Julho, which challenge the logic of property and the functionalization of space. By reconnecting the urban to language and collective creation, these practices not only contest the structures of spatial inequality but also revive the city as a poetic work.

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Resumen

Este artículo propone una relectura crítica del derecho a la ciudad a partir de la distinción entre hábitat y habitar, con base en la filosofía urbana de Henri Lefebvre. Se argumenta que la crisis de la vivienda no se resuelve únicamente por medios técnico-administrativos; antes bien, requiere la reactivación del habitar como práctica simbólica, sensible y creativa. En diálogo con autores como Heidegger y Nietzsche, Lefebvre articula la poiesis y la apropiación como fundamentos de una nueva praxis urbana. A partir de esta clave, el texto examina experiencias de ocupación y autogestión en el centro de São Paulo, como la Ocupação 9 de Julho, que tensionan la lógica de la propiedad y de la funcionalización del espacio. Al reconectar lo urbano con el lenguaje y la creación colectiva, estas prácticas no solo cuestionan las estructuras de la desigualdad espacial, sino que también reavivan la ciudad como obra poética.

Palabras clave: derecho a la ciudad, urbanización, apropiación urbana, poesía, Brasil

Resumo

Este artigo propõe uma releitura crítica do direito à cidade a partir da distinção entre habitat e habitar, com base na filosofia urbana de Henri Lefebvre. Argumenta-se que a crise da habitação não se resolve apenas por meios técnico-administrativos; antes, requer a reativação do habitar enquanto prática simbólica, sensível e criativa. Dialogando com autores como Heidegger e Nietzsche, Lefebvre articula a poiesis e a apropriação como fundamentos de uma nova práxis urbana. A partir dessa chave, o texto examina experiências de ocupação e autogestão no centro de São Paulo, como a Ocupação 9 de Julho, que tensionam a lógica da propriedade e da funcionalização do espaço. Ao reconectar o urbano à linguagem e à criação coletiva, essas práticas não apenas contestam as estruturas da desigualdade espacial, mas também reavivam a cidade como obra poética.

Palavras-chave: direito à cidade, urbanização, apropriação urbana, poesia, Brasil

Résumé

Cet article propose une relecture critique du droit à la ville à partir de la distinction entre habitat et habiter, fondée sur la philosophie urbaine d'Henri Lefebvre. Il soutient que la crise du logement ne se résout pas uniquement par des moyens technico-administratifs ; elle requiert au contraire la réactivation de l'habiter en tant que pratique symbolique, sensible et créative. En dialogue avec des auteurs tels que Heidegger et Nietzsche, Lefebvre articule la poiesis et l'appropriation comme fondements d'une nouvelle praxis urbaine. À partir de cette clé de lecture, le texte examine des expériences d'occupation et d'autogestion dans le centre de São Paulo, telles que l'Ocupação 9 de Julho, qui mettent en tension la logique de la propriété et de la fonctionnalisation de l'espace. En reconnectant l'urbain au langage et à la création collective, ces pratiques ne contestent pas seulement les structures de l'inégalité spatiale, mais ravivent également la ville comme œuvre poétique.

Mots-clé : droit à la ville, urbanisation, appropriation urbaine, poésie, Brésil

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Introduction: the Permanence of Habitat

According to critic Charles Jencks, in mid-1972, modern architecture met its symbolic end with the implosion of part of the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex in St. Louis, Missouri. Designed by Minoru Yamasaki and inaugurated in the 1950s, the development incorporated the precepts of modern functional rationality—a recurring feature in various post-war European urban experiments, later replicated in the Americas. Comprising 33 linear blocks housing more than 2,800 residential units, Pruitt-Igoe epitomized the belief in standardized housing units, rigid zoning, and social engineering promoted by modern urbanism.

Today, more than half a century later, it is clear that Jencks' statement, although eloquent, may have been premature or, conversely, overly optimistic. The transformation of dwelling, understood as an urban totality, into habitat, a functional, fragmented, and reductionist unit of the activity of living, came to inescapably define the tone and pace of subsequent urban demands. It is from this divide that this article proposes to interrogate the theoretical and practical ramifications of the radicalization of the differences between habitat and dwelling . In particular, it posits that a dive into the poetic meanings inscribed in dwelling can reveal elements of a creative architectural and urban practice, historically neglected by the technical and functional regimes of space production.

The roots of this problem date back to the postwar period, when the rationalization of housing as a mass policy intensified (Lefebvre, 1968). From that moment on, the production of the city increasingly approached the logic of spatial reproduction of investment and profitability formulas typical of capital accumulation (Arantes, 2009). The fruitful association between economic investment and urban planning, united in a single movement, creates the 'city-as-stage', a scenario in which the planner, transformed into an entrepreneur or investor, acts to consolidate cities as true 'growth machines' or 'wealth producers' (Hall, 2007, pp. 407-15).

Let us look, for example, at some Brazilian cases in which the widespread—and often controversial—expansion of emblematic housing programs, such as Minha Casa, Minha Vida (PMCMV) and particularly in peripheral areas (Amore et al., 2015), not only contradicts Jencks' predictions, but also highlights the consolidation of signs characteristic of a monadic and commodified existence, confined to the habitat. Between 2020 and 2025, two of the largest developments linked to the PMCMV to date were inaugurated: Grand Reserva Paulista (Figures 01 and 02) and Cidade dos Sete Sóis, both located in Pirituba, a peripheral neighborhood in the northern zone of São Paulo.

Developed by the same real estate company, MRV, these projects are true urban colossi that, although promoted under the rhetoric of sustainability, intensely reproduce the paradigms of typological standardization and socio-spatial segregation. The former houses around 7,000 housing units distributed across 48 identical towers; the latter has more than 11,000 apartments organized into 65 blocks with similar characteristics. Although they contain public facilities and green areas inserted as devices to legitimize the intervention, these are contemporary citadels, devoid of any urban connection and operating according to a logic of socio-spatial encapsulation.

This diagnosis guides the reflection developed here on the differences between habitat and inhabiting, by questioning the limits of an architectural rationality that remains entangled in technical-functional lexicon. As Lefebvre warned, the rationality that governs pragmatism anchored in the economic sphere is not the privilege of right-wing thinking, but is ingrained in the left, when it proves incapable of expressing its urban demands except by enunciating the same functionalist grammar to which we are accustomed.

Figures 1 and 2. Grande Reserva Paulista, 2026
Source: Photos by the author.

Thus, urban poverty is evident not only in the precariousness of slums and informal settlements, symbolically contrasted with the fortified enclaves of gated communities (Caldeira, 2000; Rolnik, 2017), but also in the projects conceived by the disciplinary field of Architecture and Urbanism itself, when, under the veil of technical voluntarism, we trace both the formally produced spaces and the contours of what may be desired.

Under the aegis of private property and so-called new enclosures, the commodification of urban space heralds the primacy of profitability and productivity, to the detriment of thinking about architecture and spatial relations themselves (Ferreira, 2012). The resulting urban morphology, necessarily segregating and selective – since "it is not the entire planet that interests capital, but only parts of it" (Chesnais, 1996, pp. 17-8) – is configured based on the guidelines of 'the briefing' (Shimbo, 2010, p. 214). This, in turn, is not only based on budgets and physical-financial schedules: it is also guided by market fluctuations, through various urban indices and coefficients that determine the degree of utilization and the supposed efficiency of the architectural project.

For Lefebvre (1991), this is a society that has renounced its creative capacity, surrendering itself to endless repetition, a symptom of a mindset that, as Milton Santos (1993) warned, remains trapped in the economic matrix, unable to develop an alternative civic and spatial model. In Brazil, this dynamic is widely analyzed by critical literature that highlights the worsening of urban inequalities under neoliberal hegemony, in which financialization and globalization—traits of the "longest phase of uninterrupted capital accumulation" (Chesnais, 1996, p. 34)—transform housing and urban space into assets for profit and income (Fix & Paulani, 2019).

In this context, participation and the right to the city, once expressions of concrete disputes and urban uprisings, are assimilated by the logic of private property and become autonomous: participation is naturalized in consumption, understood as the only authentic element of the city (Tafuri, 1985); the right to the city is reduced to a technocratic agenda focused on housing provision, which shifts its radical content to a conciliatory and operational vocabulary (Tavolari, 2015); and the appropriation of space is formalized as behavior (Lefebvre, 1991). As Lefebvre himself points out (1991, p. 162), demands relating

to housing, work, leisure, and education tend to be inscribed in a 'moral and legal plan' and, co-opted as part of the state strategy, become incapable of breaking with the hegemonic code imposed on the city.

This is not a matter of reiterating the already widely discussed arguments about the commodification and financialization of housing and urban space. The starting point in this case is a provocation by Henri Lefebvre, formulated back in the 1960s: "technological alienation is now common to both socialism and capitalism" (Lefebvre, 1969, p. 271). Even then, the philosopher laid bare the workings of a process of globalization that, paradoxically, presented itself as a world stagnated by technicality, "full of techniques and human machines, empty of authentic life" (Lefebvre, 1969, p. 259). In this dialectical movement, the process of accumulation, by expanding globally —by becoming the world itself— implied a narrowing of the horizons of everyday life, imagination, and desires. And this was true on both the right and the left.

This diagnosis guides the reflection developed here on the differences between habitat and inhabiting, by questioning the limits of an architectural rationality that remains entangled in technical-functional lexicon. As Lefebvre warned, the rationality that governs pragmatism anchored in the economic sphere is not the privilege of right-wing thinking, but is ingrained in the left, when it proves incapable of expressing its urban demands except by enunciating the same functionalist grammar to which we are accustomed.

Focusing on Brazil and based on the recognition of the conceptual key that has been widely disseminated here to meet urban demands, the article draws attention to the urgency of considering the poetic sphere in the production—and creation—of cities. In particular, it criticizes approaches that subordinate the urban experience to the technical logic of housing provision, assuming that simple access to housing would, as a consequence, resolve the set of demands of living.

The Right to the City in Brazil: the Normative Imaginaries of Living

To understand how urban transformations have been linked to discourses of citizenship and the normative imaginaries that structure contemporary political action, it is necessary to revisit the conceptual trajectory of the right to the city in Brazil, especially its appropriation during the processes of redemocratization. As a starting point, we highlight an observation by James Holston that summarizes the confluence between critical intellectual production and political action at this moment:

More important to the "turn to rights" in urban social movements was the influence of Henri Lefebvre's work on the "right to the city" and "everyday life" as arenas for political struggle, Manuel Castells' work on "the urban question and social movements," and David Harvey's work on "social justice and the city." These ideas captured the imagination of planners, architects, lawyers, and social scientists, who promoted urban social movements and eventually became leaders of NGOs and local governments. Furthermore, I would emphasize the importance of classical liberal arguments in defense of the rule of law and respect for private property rights and political citizenship, which also accommodated a broad coalition against dictatorship and helped legitimize rights as the currency of a national democratization project. (Holston, 2013, p. 438, note 9)

This critical approach leads us to the central question posed by the author: why did Brazilian society constitute itself on the basis of discourses of rights, even in the face of the tensions and contradictions internal to this project, especially in light of intellectual debates anchored in the Marxist tradition? This in a context in which the vulgar and normative use of Marx had been questioned for almost a decade (Schwarz, 1999). The answer is structured around a myriad of articulations that traverse theoretical shifts, political inflections, and disciplinary reconfigurations.

A first dimension of this answer emerges when, as Evelina Dagnino (1998) observes, between the 1970s and 1980s, important sectors of the left and social movements in Brazil underwent a theoretical and political inflection. The hegemony of the classical Marxist approach was gradually replaced by a Gramscian perspective, more attentive to the articulation between culture and politics. This shift catalyzed more pragmatic interpretations of democracy, bringing it closer to the notion of law as an instrument of struggle and inclusion.

It was in this same context of theoretical and political reorientation that the manifesto Le Droit à la ville was translated into Portuguese and Spanish in 1969, just one year after its original publication in French, in an unusual publishing move for Lefebvre's work. This early dissemination coincided with the resurgence of military dictatorships in Latin America and, simultaneously, with the efforts of academic and student groups to incorporate new theoretical references to interpret urban disputes (Jorge & Lelis, 2012). Faced with this scenario of repression and the search for alternatives, many contexts began to adopt—or resign themselves to—less abrupt forms of protest, more in line with the frameworks of democratic institutionality.

The ambivalent reception of Lefebvrian thought in Brazil can also be explained by other factors. On an inter-

national scale, Henri Lefebvre's work was progressively marginalized after the ebb of the May 1968 revolts, eclipsed by the rise of Althusserian structuralism and post-structuralism – both in the field of social theory and, more specifically, in architecture and urbanism, with authors such as Massimo Cacciari, Manuel Castells, and Manfredo Tafuri (Anderson, 1985; Shields, 2002).

Perry Anderson (1985, pp. 35-8) points out that the intellectual scene in Latin Europe witnessed a 'frontal defeat' of Marxism in the face of structuralism, leading, almost inevitably, to the isolation of Lefebvre, who continued to produce "unflappable and original work on themes typically ignored by much of the left". Rob Shields (2002), in turn, adds that although Lefebvre criticized the limits of orthodox Marxism and broadened the debate to include space and everyday life, his work remained relatively oblivious to emerging discussions about social identities, ethnic-racial oppression, and multiculturalism. This gap, combined with a strongly philosophical and not very empirical approach, may have contributed to the limited reception of his thinking in contexts such as Brazil.

Given this, as Tavolari (2015) points out, at a time when struggles for housing were gaining centrality in the agenda of urban movements, authors such as Manuel Castells and David Harvey, more aligned with structural Marxism, began to exert decisive influence. In this context, the right to the city began to operate as an emblem that brought together heterogeneous agendas, giving cohesion to struggles that sought to incorporate historically marginalized agendas into the leftist field: ethnic-racial, gender, and cultural. The 'struggle for rights' thus appeared to be conditioned by the "struggle for the right to have rights" (Dagnino, 1998, p. 47), equating the notions of democracy and citizenship with urban living.

However, as the right to the city became more widespread in the form of access to urban services and facilities, the conceptual mismatch between Lefebvre and Castells became apparent: while the former gave housing a privileged place as an anchor for social mobilizations, the latter saw it as a secondary—and even deleterious—element in the face of the need for a broader critique of the production of urban space, a difference that is ultimately expressed in the opposition between habitat and habitation.

Although social movements played a decisive role in the redemocratization of several Latin American countries, their institutionalization led to significant tensions. As Dagnino (2004a) argues, the excessive emphasis on the institutional insertion of social struggles often led to the prioritization of agendas compatible with the frameworks of representative democracy under construction. Dissident proposals or those that escaped this normative lo-

gic were often discarded or devalued. In this context, a technocratic and functionalist approach prevailed, centered on "institutional engineering" (Dagnino, 1998, p. 46), which operated as a filter for what was useful for democratic consolidation.

This created a veritable "system of alibis" – to use Lefebvre's terminology – which acted as an ally of a "mode of managerial domination" (Boltanski, 2013, p. 448). These devices, called "connectionists for justice" or "reintegrationists," are typical of the "city by projects" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2020), in an environment that relegates city dwellers to the status of "participants in increasing commodification," as warned by Tafuri (1985, p. 57).

In Brazil, the convergence between the theoretical contributions of Henri Lefebvre and Manuel Castells proved particularly fruitful in the process of drafting and consolidating the City Statute. While Lefebvre's conception of the right to the city offered a robust symbolic and political horizon, the demands for housing and access to public services, based on Castells' analyses, provided operational guidelines for institutional action. However, in this process of legal and political standardization, Lefebvre's contribution was absorbed mainly as a symbolic statement—converted into a slogan, conceptual "umbrella," or "battle cry" (Schmid, 2012, p. 42)—disconnected from its more radical philosophical implications. This dissociation helps explain the widespread use of the term in Brazil, precisely because of its plasticity and adaptability to institutional agendas, even when disconnected from the structural criticism that originally underpinned it (Tavolari, 2015).

The panorama outlined above allows us to understand how, in the Brazilian context, the notion of habitat began to operate within a logic of symbolic substitutions, in which terms such as participation, citizenship, and rights—emptied of their original political content—function as mere alibis. This helps to elucidate why the right to the city was gradually reduced to the search for technical solutions to what Gabriel Bolaffi (1986) called a 'false problem'. This shift dates back to the period of military dictatorship, when the ideal of home ownership was consolidated to the detriment of other forms of urban policy and land regulation (Bonduki, 2016) – widely instrumentalized by state mechanisms, labor laws, and real estate credit and financing mechanisms, which engendered a form of life planning based on a kind of biopolitics of debt (Martins, 2019).

Even with redemocratization, these instruments remained in place, becoming true 'political facts' with high electoral value (Rolnik, 2017, p. 293). In the 1980s and 1990s, housing began to be treated as a deficit to be overcome through policies that linked "making every Brazilian a

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homeowner" to the revitalization of market transactions, the stimulation of the civil construction industry, and the attraction of international capital (Rolnik, 2017, p. 269). The City Statute, approved in 2001, enshrines housing as a constitutional right—a corollary of this process, which continues to this day.

In recent years—and particularly intensely during the COVID-19 pandemic—spatial confinement and domestic isolation have intensified the effects of functionalist logic, revealing the limits of urban life organized around the housing unit. From the family and professional reconfiguration of the indebted subject, through the architectural design of increasingly compact and functional apartments, to the retraction of the public sphere in favor of the alienated seclusion of the monadic home, everything obeys this rationality. There is an ongoing systematic training, supported by various compensatory mechanisms that attempt to conceal both the precariousness of the urban experience and the suppression of the possibilities of collective existence—or the 'common world', to use Arendtian terminology.

Ultimately, it is the city that suffers, and with it, one of the most fundamental dimensions of living. The proportion and speed with which these projects are designed and executed, associated with multiple economic and political interests, reproduce urban models historically marked by spatial fragmentation: the rigid separation between center and periphery, monofunctional zoning, socio-spatial segregation, exclusionary verticalization, gentrification, and the proliferation of privatized and fortified spaces. This results in a city marked by fear, by the absence of common spaces, and by the rarefaction of public arenas for coexistence and conflict—everything that contradicts Lefebvre's conception of dwelling as collective praxis and poiesis.

In one of the rare passages in which he more precisely defines the right to the city, Lefebvre defines it as the right "to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to the rhythms of life and uses of time that allow for the full and complete use of these moments and places" (Lefebvre, 2016a, p. 139). Nevertheless, as an inseparable part of the urban form, the "right to difference" is also affirmed—that is, "the right not to be forcibly classified into categories determined by homogenizing powers" (Lefebvre, 1973, p. 38). As the author himself emphasizes, this right to difference is not granted by decree, but is achieved in practice and in struggle:

> The right to difference does not guarantee any right that has not been won through hard struggle. This "right" is valid only because of its content, as opposed to the right to property, which is valid because of its logical and legal form, the principle of the code of normal relations within the capitalist mode of production. (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 457, our translation)

This shift in the understanding of violence reveals the totalizing—and, why not say, fascist—logic that permeates not only the cultural industry and the media, but also contemporary modes of production of space and reproduction of everyday life. It is a silent and structural violence, anchored in the homogenization of the city and in the single thought that guides its configuration. A violence that does not eliminate inequality or welcome difference, but transforms them into functional fragments, converting them into raw material for the profitable machinery of capitalist urbanization. Instead of resolving conflicts, this logic absorbs and neutralizes them, shaping behaviors and subjectivities according to market imperatives.

Poiesis: Appropriation, Not Ownership

The starting point for a critical reinterpretation of the right to the city, in our hypothesis, lies in poiesis. Although linked to the Marxist tradition, Lefebvre does not shy away from critically dialoguing with authors such as Heidegger and Nietzsche, proposing a y conception of space anchored in Topos and Logos—that is, in place as code and as language.

We take as our theoretical inflection the provocation formulated by Heidegger (2012a, p. 140): "however difficult and distressing, however overwhelming and threatening the lack of housing may be, the crisis of dwelling itself is not primarily to be found in the lack of housing". This reflection was already outlined in the essay "... Poetically, man dwells..." (Heidegger, 2012b) – quoted by Lefebvre –, resulting from the philosopher's first seminars, whose title refers to a passage by Friedrich Hölderlin. The text begins with a central question: "Is dwelling incompatible with the poetic? Our dwelling is suffocated by the housing crisis," since "what is understood today as dwelling is driven by work, stirred up by the pursuit of advantages and success, bewitched by organized leisure and rest" (Heidegger, 2012b, 165).

Heidegger urges us to seek the essence of dwelling, understanding that it only becomes accessible and effective on the horizon of language. Returning to the original meaning of the word bauen—from German, translated as "to build," but also as "to dwell," "to cultivate," "to protect"—the philosopher argues that the act of building should not be reduced to its technical, instrumental, or teleological dimension. Dwelling constitutes the core of human existence and, although it involves the practice of building, it cannot be emptied of its original semantic density. The multiple meanings of dwelling – cultivating, protecting – necessarily lead us to consider the relationships between everyday life and language – its codes, symbols, paradigms, that is, what we perceive as 'habitual' (Heidegger, 2012a, pp. 127-128).

The passages cited here, sometimes marginalized in critical readings, propose a radical inversion between dwelling and building, for: "we do not dwell because we build. On the contrary: we build and cultivate as we dwell, that is, as we are like those who dwell" (Heidegger, 2012a, p. 128). It is at this point that Heidegger offers a decisive contribution. More than denouncing the shortage of housing, he points to the forgetting of what it means, in essence, to dwell. The housing crisis, understood in this way, reveals itself as a symptom of a deeper uprooting, which compromises the very condition of being-in-the-world—it arises because we have unlearned how to dwell. For the habitat crisis is neither recent nor merely circumstantial—it precedes wars or population explosions. Habitat, reduced to a technical-administrative object, becomes a veil that hides the real problem: the crisis of dwelling itself.

Inhabiting refers to living in its deepest sense: remaining, staying, "lingering with things" (Heidegger, 2012a, p. 131), making room, finding shelter, making it your own—that is, appropriating it.

Placing dwelling in the realm of language and everyday experience allows us to understand, at least in part, Lefebvre's critique of the neutralization of urban experience. By stating that "by intervening in the housing issue, the State changed the practice, but not the code" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 162), the author reveals the inadequacy of technical-administrative solutions that ignore dwelling as a symbolic and sensitive practice. Even so, Lefebvre (2016b) considers Heideggerian reflection to be excessively abstract and nostalgic, with little adherence to contemporary urban reality. He therefore proposes a rapprochement between poiesis and praxis, seeking a concrete anchorage—not only material, but above all social.

The emergence of cities offers a paradigmatic example of the joint action between poiesis and praxis in a creative process. The former shapes concrete reality—its forms, codes, symbols, and meanings—while the latter organizes human and social actions, establishing modes of coexistence and collective structures. Completing this triad, mimesis acts as mediation: repetition or imitation that allows the creative movement of poiesis (the poetics of content) to be articulated with the need to establish stable points of anchorage—the social forms that sustain practice. It is only at a later stage that these instances separate, in the context of the bureaucratized repetition of everyday life. At this point,

> Poiesis forgets that it is also praxis: action on men through works and speech, education, training, foundation. As for praxis, it is established on the plane of exchanges through discourse, commerce, and contracts. It forgets that it was initially poiesis: the creation of an inhabited and habitable human world, the dwelling place of truth in the community. (Lefebvre, 2016b, p. 152, our translation)

As for mimesis, it is reduced to monotonous repetition, to mechanical reproduction that empties the original meaning of creation.

This overview offered by Lefebvre allows us to elucidate at least two fundamental aspects related to architecture and habitation. First, poiesis, in addition to creatively shaping the material world, is linked to thought and its representations. In this second sense, it implies a true "play with institutions" – that is, the ability to strain, deform, and transform rigid normative patterns – manifesting itself as creative impulse and openness to the new. This leads us to the second point: when we talk about representations, we cannot ignore the decisive role of imagination – a central, though often neglected, element in the field of architecture and the experience of dwelling. Lefebvre deepens this understanding:

> Poiesis is, therefore, the creator of works [oeuvres]. It includes the founding of institutions and decisions with unlimited consequences, even if they sometimes go unnoticed for long periods. Thus, not all creation is poiesis, but all poiesis is creation. "Poetry" restricts the meaning of the word. [...] technology and technical invention will remain outside the field of poiesis. Technologies may well dominate "nature" (the external world) and therefore be necessary, but they are not sufficient to enable human beings to appropriate their own nature. This is a vital distinction in determining the limits of technology within modernity and in correctly defining technological alienation. (Lefebvre, 2016b, p. 27, our translation)

By bringing this appeal to the fore, poetic-philosophical thinking reopens the horizon of appropriation not as possession, function, or domination (technical), but as a creative gesture: a shared transformation of the common world and its own meanings. In a sense, we can understand appropriation as the very process of subjectivation of the world—a central element of modernity (Ferry, 2003)—in which heteronomous norms are broken in order to trace a possible horizon of emancipation.

Possible Images of Urban Poetry: Occupations

In a metropolis as contradictory as São Paulo—where the number of vacant private properties exceeds the number of homeless people—urban occupations reconfigure social imaginaries of housing, challenging the normative logic of private property and opening paths for urban poetic action. An exemplary case is that of the July 9 Oc-

cupation, located in the city center and organized by the Downtown Homeless Movement (MSTC), which goes beyond the paradigm of functional shelter and asserts itself as a space for symbolic production and political and poetic experimentation.

Particularly on weekends, the boundaries of housing are blurred, as the building is filled with shared daily activities, workshops, cultural events, and various graphics that are inscribed on the building's materiality (Figures 03 to 05). The Occupation Kitchen, organized according to principles of self-management and solidarity economy, transforms the act of feeding into a political and community gesture, while the work of women such as Carmen Silva—urban planner, teacher, and one of the leaders of the MSTC—highlights the micro-political power of these practices and the emergence of protagonists historically eclipsed in the urban debate. Such dynamics challenge regimes of recognition and exclusion (Butler, 2019), redistribute regimes of sensitivity – the "sharing of identities, activities, and spaces" in Rancière's common world (2009, p. 17) – and reconfigure the regimes of visibility that shape the perception of urban poverty and segregation, highlighting space as a mediator of disputes over legitimacy and an instrument of praxis (Lussault, 2022).

Other emblematic experiences include the Dandara, Maria Domitila, Cambridge, and Lord occupations, all located in downtown São Paulo, which were supported by collectives and technical architecture advisors, thus highlighting the power of collaborative work in the requalification of existing urban structures. The leaders involved in the housing struggles include, in addition to the MSTC, the Unification of Slum and Housing Struggles Movement (ULCM), the Housing Struggle Front (FLM), and the Central and Regional Housing Movement (MMCR), as well as civil society associations and organizations. The MMCR alone is responsible for four other occupations in the city center: José Bonifácio, Caetano Pinto, Rio Branco, and Ipiranga.

It is worth noting that, in most of these cases, the regularization processes have taken place through the Minha Casa Minha Vida Program Entities (PMCMV-E), which is guided by a logic that is not only participatory but also self-managed in all stages of project design and execution. This modality has been more significant in the last twenty years and, although its production is still quite modest—especially when compared to the large housing complexes mentioned at the beginning of this text—it points to a strategic field to be contested. This becomes even more relevant in the context of urban occupations, which are often the target of stigma and defamation in a country where questioning private property—whether in terms of legality or legitimacy—remains a real taboo.

In these cases, what shifts is not only the way housing is produced, but the very field of desire: if, before, the horizon of possibility was restricted to access to habitat —understood as property and functional unit—, occupations reinscribe the desire to inhabit the city, that is, to collectively appropriate its spaces and uses. In this context, architecture ceases to operate as an instance of functional resolution of a previously defined agenda to act as spatial mediation of conflicts and desires not yet fully formulated. Although often framed as technical assistance, the practice of the architect begins to operate in a poetic and political field, straining the limits of what can be desired in urban space.

An indication of this is the Prestes Maia building, currently recognized as the largest vertical occupation in Latin America (Santandeu, 2018), which stands out for having recently been classified as a "social housing retrofit" (São Paulo City Hall, 2025). After decades marked by conflict, this achievement strains the boundaries between possession and use, between legality and legitimacy, and inscribes collective appropriation as a legitimate form of urban production — capable of disputing meanings and places in the face of private property.

In the examples listed here, the right to the city is not limited to mere access to housing or urban facilities — although essential, these elements still operate within the logic of survival and spatial economy (Lefebvre, 2000). What the occupations reveal is another possibility for urban existence, in which the city is once again understood as a work of art and space as a place of invention. By destabilizing institutional norms and operating in the interstices of legality, these practices activate a genuinely poetic sense of the urban: a transformation of code, sign, and use, capable of converting ruins into symbols of resistance and collective desire. In effect, the usual paradigms of our urban grammar—inside and outside, public and private, legal and illegal, self and other, individual and common—cease to operate as we are accustomed to, being displaced by ways of life that invent new rules, meanings, and belongings in the space of the city.

As Lefebvre observes, the space of capital operates under a logic of distancing and segmentation—an abstract, silent, apparently neutral space that hides class struggle under the ideology of consensus. In it, the strategy of property reigns supreme: "what is yours is not mine, places and things" (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 69, our translation). And yet, common places, shareable spaces —cafes, squares, monuments— remain, whose symbolic and collective appropriation resists total privatization.

Given the limitations of conventional democratic channels, spatial subversion takes on the contours of legitima-

Figures 03 and 04. July 9 Occupation, 2025
Source: Photos by the author.

te political practice. Occupations expose the asymmetry of urban conflict and affirm that, more than a mere stage, space is an agent, instrument, and mediator of the dispute. In this sense, the right to the city is not merely an institutional demand, but an insurgent gesture: a poetics of inhabiting that, even under threat, insists on opening gaps for a common world.

Final Considerations

Reclaiming the right to the city, in Lefebvre's view, requires more than specific public policies or technical-administrative solutions: it demands a change in language, code, and sensibility. By distinguishing habitat as a functionalized space of housing and dwelling as a symbolic, poetic, and collective dimension, Lefebvre's thinking invites us to reimagine the city as a work—and not as a

product. It is in this sense that the notion of poiesis takes center stage: as a creative impulse that connects doing to meaning, experience to language, and reopens architecture to the possibility of acting not only as a provisioning technique, but as mediation in the invention of the common.

In urban occupations—and in so many other everyday forms of resistance and reinvention—there pulsates a poetics of space that resists the oblivion and commodification of life. There, inhabiting ceases to be a mere function and becomes expression, use value, sensitive enjoyment. In times of expropriation and uprooting, marked by urbanization reduced to repetitive monotony—where a single note reigns supreme—perhaps it is precisely in the poetry of space and the practice of appropriation that our most concrete chance to rebuild the common world lies: a space where other voices can resonate.

Figure 05. July 9 Occupation, 2025
Source: Photo by the author.

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LISTA DE ABREVIAÇÕES USADAS NESTE ARTIGO

FLM: Frente de Luta pela Moradia

MSTC: Movimento Sem Teto do Centro

MMCR: Movimento de Moradia Central e Regional

PMCMV: Programa Minha Casa, Minha Vida

PMCMV-E: Programa Minha Casa, Minha Vida Entidades

ULCM: Unificação das Lutas de Cortiços e Moradias