

# Migration : Reflections from a Looking Glass

*Migração : Reflexos de um Espelho*

William Watson\*

\*Architect and writer practicing in New York. He is co-founder of Castro Watson Architects and a visiting professor at the Pratt Institute and Parsons School of Design. He received an MArch from the University of Texas at Austin and a BA in Economics from Princeton University., wawatson99@gmail.com

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## Abstract

Rodrigo Lefèvre's Master's dissertation, *Project for a Work Encampment: A Utopia*, offers a production model for migrant housing along the periphery of São Paulo based upon mutually enriching collaborations between migrants constructing their dwellings and mentoring technicians. This partnership, an evolution of previous theories on eliminating hierarchical relationships between architects and laborers at building sites, recalls the foundational principles underpinning Lefèvre's earlier collaborations with Sérgio Ferro and Flávio Império under the collective Arquitetura Nova. In his proposed work encampment, these interactions become a mechanism to rebalance cultural transmission away from delegitimizing migrant heritage and towards an equitable and heterogenous urban demography. Though suggested as a utopia, this framework also may be understood as a heterotopia—an alternate yet plausibly concurrent paradigm for the construction of migrant housing. As a heterotopia, Lefèvre's proposal, similar to other texts published by the members of Arquitetura Nova, is simultaneously a critique of prevailing conditions as well as an aspirational solution. And, as both criticism and expectation, Lefèvre's project illustrates the important contributions made by migrants in the development of society and invites us to evaluate and rediscover our empathy towards them.

## Resumo

A dissertação de mestrado de Rodrigo Lefèvre, Projeto de acampamento de obras: uma utopia, oferece um modelo de produção de moradias para migrantes na periferia de São Paulo com base em colaborações enriquecedoras entre migrantes que constroem suas moradias e a assessoria técnica. Esta parceria, uma evolução das teorias anteriores sobre a eliminação de relações hierárquicas entre arquitetos e operários, lembra os princípios fundamentais que sustentam as colaborações anteriores de Lefèvre com Sérgio Ferro e Flávio Império no Grupo Arquitetura Nova. Em sua proposta de acampamento, essas interações tornam-se um mecanismo para equilibrar a transmissão cultural da herança deslegitimadora dos migrantes na perspectiva de um equilíbrio e de uma diversidade demográfica. Embora sugerida como uma utopia, essa proposta também pode ser entendida como uma heterotopia - um paradigma alternativo, mas plausível, para a construção de moradias para migrantes. Como uma heterotopia, a proposta de Lefèvre, assim como de outros textos publicados pelos membros da Arquitetura Nova, é ao mesmo tempo uma crítica às condições vigentes e uma aspiração de solução. E, como crítica e expectativa, o projeto de Lefèvre ilustra as importantes contribuições feitas pelos migrantes no desenvolvimento da sociedade e nos convida a avaliar e redescobrir nossa empatia por eles.

## Migration : Reflections from a Looking Glass

After an already significant career as both professor and architect, Rodrigo Lefèvre returned to the FAU-USP at the age of thirty-eight to pursue a graduate degree in Urban Environmental Structures. During this academic interval, Lefèvre used his Master's dissertation as a reflection on the influences and theories underpinning his work. The resulting text, titled *Project for a Work Encampment: A Utopia*, investigates the plight of migrants in Brazil and proposes to address their misfortune with a system of self-constructed houses supported by an encampment of construction schools. It is an unusual composition of subject [migrants], time [transition], and location [utopia] that epitomizes the layered simultaneity that had been a distinctive feature of Lefèvre's earlier work with Sérgio Ferro and Flavio Império under the collective Arquitetura Nova.

Lefèvre's selection of migrants as his subject is not surprising. Since his initial experiences working with Sérgio Ferro on two residential buildings in Brasília, Lefèvre had been appalled by the living and working conditions endured by the migrants constructing Brazil's new capital. These laborers, desperate for work, were subject to both a lack of housing and a surplus of risk as they toiled on the large and complicated concrete buildings that delineated the new capital. Without adequate accommodations provided by the government, these migrants quickly fell into a tradition of self-constructed housing. "For many members of the lower strata of Brasília's population, squatting was simply the only possibility," David Epstein observes, "for they were blessed neither with political influence...and lacked the money to resolve their problem in the tiny private real estate market" (Epstein, David, 1976, p. 112).

In seeing migrants as the protagonists of social change, Lefèvre and Arquitetura Nova made a noteworthy break from the methodologies of an earlier generations of Brazilian architects. That older group, influenced by their involvement with the PCB, had proposed a hierarchical and sequential form of development wherein the middle class would initiate political change that would subsequently foster social improvements for the lower classes. Arquitetura Nova, part of a younger generation of more radical Communists, hoped to move away from this 'stagism' by advocating strategies that simultaneously confronted inadequacies of the political system as well as inequalities endured by the workers. Such rejection of linear theorizing in

favor of nonhierarchical, multidirectional methods became a fundamental principle of Arquitetura Nova's theories, writings, and projects.

Referencing the work of anthropologists Eunice Durham and Cláudia Menezes, as well as folklorist Marcel Jules Thiéblot, Lefèvre argues for migrants as utopian agents because they are motivated by a quest for something better. To support this hypothesis, he borrows a structure developed by Durham, categorizing such motivations into two types—subjective and concrete. Subjective motivations are the personal desires to improve living conditions that encourage individuals to make specific, local decisions of displacement in search of a better life. Referencing Menezes, Lefèvre offers that, "change means, for the migrant, a search for improvement, in its broadest sense: better conditions for working, housing, transportation, comfort, entertainment, access to consumer goods, education, health care. All of this is what is necessarily found elsewhere, not where it is" (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 141). In contrast, concrete motivations are the larger socio-economic forces that regulate displacement within a systematic process of shift and balance. Referencing Durham, Lefèvre introduces that, "migration was explained...as a response to problems created by the structure of national society and which are fundamentally economic. ...this migration, which appears as a solution to problems that affect the family...is a process conditioned by the types of social organizations in rural society" (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 151). Through migration, the family structure is often fragmented, such that, "the migration of a person is not an isolated fact, but an aspect of a process that involves the successive movement of different people and can be extended for a considerable time" (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 151). In effect, the subjective motivations are guided and propelled by the concrete motivations.

By distinguishing between these subjective and concrete motivations, Lefèvre addresses the simultaneity of the migrants' agency as well as the forces that drive change and progress. In this way, the subjective relationships and concrete relationships become symbiotic. Pedro Arantes explains that, "the migrant is the subject in transition, which contains the contradictions and the possibilities of overcoming Brazilian history and, at the same time, is the reverse of our 'miracle' of a modern country" (ARANTES, Pedro Fiori, 2002, p. 134). The migrant is both the vehicle of development and its consequence.

To acknowledge the relationship between migrants and their context, Lefèvre inserts a second protagonist into his production model—the advanced degree technician. The polarity between the arriving migrants and these technicians is intended to foster an exchange of information. Outwardly, the technicians satisfy a traditional role as advisers to the migrants on proper building practices. Technicians are needed because, “the self-constructed house, due to its condition of being produced without proper technical knowledge, can be an object that barely meets the minimum physical needs for the conservation and reproduction of the work force” (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 32). Yet, the virtue of Lefèvre’s proposal resides in the reciprocity he imagines for his protagonists; the migrant is meant to have an equally important impact on the technician. Borrowing on the pedagogies of Paulo Freire, Lefèvre explains that, “the participation of higher level technicians in the model of a production has some purposes: to place the elements of bourgeois culture in discussion within the model in comparison with the elements of culture of the people brought by the migrants” (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 65). “The retraining of higher education technicians,” Lefèvre imagines, will foster the “search of knowledge, of science, of a more correct technology for the construction of a new society” (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 65).

Locating the transfer of ideas within a construction site revisits the theories developed earlier by *Arquitetura Nova* concerning the architect and the laborer. In contrast to the conception of architect as controlling figure, a working methodology favored by modernist architects, *Arquitetura Nova* imagined a design and construction process where inspiration and responsibility intermingled amongst all participants at the site. In effect, the responsibilities of the architect were to be demystified and allowed to migrate to the laborers. This shift would transform a ‘hierarchical’ job site into a ‘collaborative’ one. Instead of imagining construction as sequential—design followed by execution—inspiration would be generated from both sides of the project. The design input of the architect and construction worker would happen simultaneously and symbiotically.

Architecturally, a notable result of this migration of ideas was the disciplined and deliberate exposure of work by the ‘trades’. Plumbing pipes, ventilation ductwork, and electrical wiring all were exposed to promote an appreciation for the project’s infrastructure and its installers. For example, plumbing pipes were overtly displayed

in many of Lefèvre’s experimental residential projects—including those that animate the facade of Casa Dino Zammataro (Figure 1) and the interior of Casa Perry Campos (Figure 2).



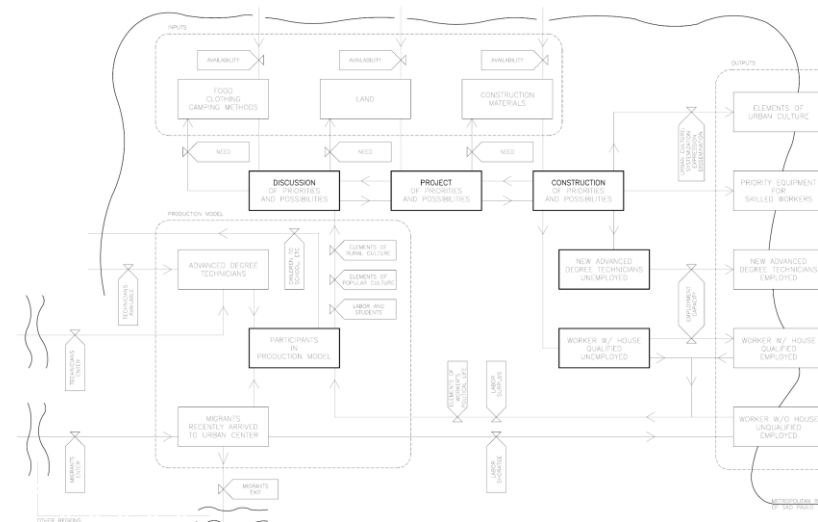
**Figure 1.** Casa Dino Zammataro, Rodrigo Lefèvre, São Paulo, 1970. Source: TATEWAKI NIO, 2019.

This technique not only led to greater efficiency on the job site, it is an architectural migration: the systems originally concealed by outmoded hierarchies of construction are able to move back into a location of notice and appreciation. The architectural design and the necessary engineering systems are seen and understood concurrently.



**Figure 2.** Casa Pery Campos, Rodrigo Lefèvre e Nestor Goulart Reis Filho, São Paulo, 1970.  
Source: TATEWAKI NIO, 2019.

into the metropolitan infrastructure is imagined along the right side of the scheme.



**Figure 3.** Scheme of Blocks Illustration of the Model of a Production, In the Time of Transition, Project for a Work Encampment: A Utopia, Rodrigo Lefèvre, Master's Dissertation, 1981, p. 57.  
Source: Redesigned by the Author.

In his dissertation, Lefèvre introduces his production model using a block digram (Figure 3). The left side of the diagram introduces his protagonists—the migrant and the advanced degree technician. The migrants arrive to the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (RMSP) from other regions of Brazil while the technicians may enter the production model from both local and non-local sources. These participants, through an exchange of culture, education, and labor, will collaborate on the periphery of the city to produce an encampment of common infrastructure and self-constructed houses. Their collaboration is displayed at the top of the block diagram where the production is imagined as a process of discussion, project, and construction. This provides the migrants with housing and the advanced degree technician with new experiences and influences. Following their transformations, the participants, along with their newly developed culture and infrastructure, are available to enter the general production workforce. The resulting integration of the protagonists

Lefèvre's diagram is reminiscent of the exposed plumbing pipes that distinguish his residential projects—the flow of process imagined as conduits that circulate through a system controlled by valves representing causes and influences. He explains that, “in these arrows there will be elements that are representations of arresting or releasing the flow between situations or elements so that it happens in greater or lesser amounts and in more or less time” (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo. 1981, p. 58). Some of these valves have elementary titles such as ‘employment capacity’ while others offer more emphatic descriptions such as ‘elements of worker’s political life’ or ‘urban culture: systemization, expression, dissemination’. The equal attention given to the ‘blocks’ and the ‘valves’ embeds importance in both the served and servant elements in the production model and corresponds to the proposed equality of the migrants and technicians.



Analogies to building construction are further evident in the methods of evaluation that Lefèvre applies to his production model, borrowing the terms 'cross section' and 'longitudinal section' from architectural drawings. Lefèvre defines the cross section as, "the set of relations existing at a given moment in the development of the work, relations between things and phenomena" (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 70). In contrast, he defines the longitudinal section as "the whole set of relationships and elements that are changing over time, due to natural causes and/or human intervention" (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 72). Using these two sectional methods, Lefèvre suggests that his production model should be imagined in several ways, at several scales, and at several moments in times. Such a viewpoint makes the multifaceted and simultaneous meaning of each component more discernible. Lefèvre explains, "each element can be seen by three basic aspects: as a product of a production...as a means of production...and as an element that triggers another" (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 73). Each element has not only a specific role to perform, at a specific time, but also a generative impact on the production model over time. This form of evaluation highlight the migrants' critical role in the operative evolution of the system.

Lefèvre's proclivity for nonhierarchical and multifaceted relationships, whether in layered methods of explanation or analysis, is a cognition deeply rooted in his earlier work with Arquitetura Nova. It is fundamental to his working method and manifests itself at all levels, including even the format of his writing. Throughout the dissertation, Lefèvre presents his research sources through an unusual stitching together of quotations, switching back and forth between authors, and frequently presenting their findings out of sequence from the referenced material. Over this patchwork of citations, Lefèvre offers an additional narrative through selectively underlining important phrases within the quotations (Figure 4).

grupo (a que pertenceram) ou de outro (ao qual desejam pertencer). Dentro deste esquema de explicação torna-se mais fácil entender porque, ao lado da imagem distorcida do homem rural, algumas declarações deixam entrever uma outra configuração, que não é tão nítida, mas onde ficam salientadas algumas características positivas especialmente a 'esperteza' e 'educação' das pessoas da roça. Os migrantes procuram superpor à figura caricatural projetada pelas categorias, uma outra, onde - por detrás de uma aparência de 'bobo' - se esconde uma pessoa esperta e espirituosa, que contrabalança a falta de 'cultura' por um grande bom senso e pelo conhecimento advindo da experiência."

### 3. Condições concretas de migração

(Eunice, p. 136) - "Nenhuma migração pode ser compreendida exclusivamente como um deslocamento geográfico. As migrações representam também uma movimentação no universo social e é deste ponto de vista que elas nos interessam de modo particular. Mesmo porque, a própria definição do espaço e do ambiente geográfico é condicionada culturalmente. Para uma população analfabeta e sem escolarização, a migração não pode ser concebida como um deslocamento no mapa."

(Cláudia, p. 18) - "No entanto, mudar representa uma solução ambígua porque, se de um lado significa a possibilidade de satisfazer suas aspirações, de outro implica em 'custos'. Esta qualidade pode ser indicada como um dos componentes do processo, tal como é visto pelos migrantes. Embora vejam a mudança como uma forma de 'melhorar de vida', no

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Figure 4. Project for a Work Encampment: A Utopia, Rodrigo Lefèvre, Master's Dissertation, 1981, p. 150. Source: FAU-USP collection.

He describes this technique as, "a mosaic...a collage made up of excerpts...with phrases or words underlined by me, as they compliment each other, confirm themselves, and sometimes deny themselves" (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 124). This technique, prescient of hypertexts, establishes a three-dimensional relationship between the citations and Lefèvre's arguments that imbues his writing with both

the empathy and complexity that manifested in the earlier work of Arquitetura Nova. It also demonstrates how methodology and process are vital to the development and evolution of innovative ideas.

Lefèvre's production model is an acceptance of migrant settlements around the periphery of the São Paulo as well as a proposal to improve them. By advocating for these forms of settlement, Lefèvre continues a prolonged argument about the virtue of self-constructed housing. His proposal is in contrast to both 'dualist' theories that believe migrant laborers to be too archaic and therefore in opposition to Brazil's industrialization as well as Marxist theorists that argue self-constructed houses will lower the prevailing wage for the working class. The surplus capital earned by migrants through building their own houses will reduce their financial needs, which will subsequently allow prevailing labor rates to be lowered. Effectively, any savings achieved by the migrants will be transferred to their employers. Lefèvre acknowledges and alleviates these criticisms by locating his production model in a 'time of transition' where the 'state' is given control of the 'means of production'. Lefèvre explains that, "only there, in the time of transition, where some economic and political relations are altered, can I accept to participate in a large-scale self-construction process" (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 31). In this new economic system, where market-driven forces are replaced with a more socialist framework, the devaluation of labor caused by self-constructed houses would be avoided. Lefèvre's decision to locate his production model during a 'time of transition' also may be intended to suggest a utopian quality in a proposal that is otherwise notable for its feasibility. Miguel Buzzar explains that, "all the references...are within the reach of an immediate effectiveness...self-managed self-construction was not a utopia...and the model said to be 'utopian', despite reporting at another time, maintains an operative relationship with the present" (BUZZAR, Miguel Antonio, 2019, p. 255).

Another possibility is that Lefèvre's production model is less a traditional utopia, oriented towards an aspirational and potentially unattainable destination, and more the provocation of an opposing yet concurrent reality. That is, Lefèvre is not presenting a replacement to the existing model but rather a synchronous alternative in the hopes of establishing dialogue. In this regard, Lefèvre's encampment is more equivalent to a heterotopia as introduced by Michel Foucault. These types of 'other'

spaces may be classified, according to Foucault, into two main categories—places of crisis and places of deviation, with both groups experiencing some type of separation from society. Lefèvre's dissertation offers substantial evidence on the displacement of migrants, and analyzes how the altered social structures caused in their displacements constitute a crisis for both the migrants and their families. In addition, the migrants' likely removal to the periphery of the city is a mechanism of both deviation and crisis. Arantes explains that, "by defining the migrant as a subject, the state as the provider and the periphery as a planning site, Rodrigo is realizing that the rapid urbanization process must be faced quickly before the scale of the problem begins to invalidate any solution." (ARANTES, Pedro Fiori, 2002, p. 134).

Foucault posits that heterotopias provide precise and determined functions that are symptomatic to the society in which they exist. In answer to criticism that migrants settling on the edges of the city represent a failure to assimilate into modern urban society, Epstein explains that this viewpoint is "largely incorrect and misleading...squatters are economically deprived, but, far from being marginal, they [are] central in the new capital's construction. ...The squatments are not a carryover from rural Brazilian life but rather a fundamental...mode of urban expansion" (EPSTEIN, David, 1973, p. 15). Lefèvre's proposal to positively address and facilitate these encampments, instead of erasing or alleviating them, is an acknowledgment of their heterotopic function.

Another principle of heterotopias is that they juxtapose different, sometimes incompatible, spaces in one site. This juxtaposition is fundamental to Lefèvre's production model where dissimilarity in the ideas of space-making and construction brought by migrants and technicians creates a dialogue that motivates their respective transformations. The migrants themselves also are sites of juxtaposition as they merge their rural traditions with the urban culture of their newly adopted home. Lefèvre cites Menezes when he writes that migrants "demonstrate that they are seeking to identify with the model they formulate of the urban man, the basic motivation for this being the fact that they are living in the city. This identification necessarily implies the negation of the previous reality" (LEFÈVRE, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 149).

Foucault also suggests that heterotopias are "linked to slices in time...at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (FOUCAULT, Michel and MISKOWIEC,

Jay, 1986, p. 26). These heterochronic ruptures may be defined as either transitory (such as festivals and vacation villages) or accumulatory (such as museums and libraries). Migrant encampments along the edges of the city offer a transitory quality that is the direct result of migrants' need for expediency and flexibility in accommodations. Epstein explains that, "the Brasilia in-migrant, arriving with little capital, can construct a very small, primitive barrack in a few hours or days, and immediately set forth on his main task, earning money in one way or another" (EPSTEIN, David, 1976, p. 111). It also is worth noting that Lefèvre's overtly suggests a break with traditional time by locating his production model in a 'time of transition'.

Heterochronic relationships are fundamental to understanding the theories of Arquitetura Nova. Unlike dualist theses, wherein the primitive aspects of Brazil are considered to be in direct opposition to its modernization, Arquitetura Nova argued that the industrial development of the country must be embraced simultaneously with the primitive and historic characteristics that underpin it. Dualist theses defended, "industrialization against... 'feudal' backwardness," Ana Koury explains, "for which the rural heritage corresponded to a feudal mode of production that would be overcome by bourgeois modernization" (Koury, Ana Paula, 2019, p. 24). In contrast, Arquitetura Nova advocated pedagogies that foresaw "an approach to the urban problems of underdevelopment, proposing an engagement with the historical realities in which architects worked"<sup>1</sup> (KOURY, Ana Paula, 2019, p. 26). By advocating for both the transitory aspects of society, in their focus on migrant populations, and the accumulatory aspects of society, in their favoring of history and traditional building techniques, Arquitetura Nova and Lefèvre imagined progress less as a binary model and more as a heterochronic one.

The most potent characteristic of heterotopias is that "they have a function in relation to all the space that remains" (FOUCAULT, Michel and MISKOWIEC, Jay, 1986, p. 27). That is, in being both real and illusionary, they become a mirror—two spaces joined by vision during an instant reflection. Foucault writes, "the mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal" (Foucault, Michel and MIS-

KOWIEC, Jay, 1986, p. 24). Lefèvre's proposal may be seen as both solution and critique. The heterotopia is inversionary so that the relationship between the 'other spaces' and the 'spaces that remain' opens a gap by which a migration of ideas may occur.

It is only appropriate that members of Arquitetura Nova eventually became migrants themselves—Sérgio Ferro emigrated to France, following the political difficulties created by the military government after the coup of 1964, and Rodrigo Lefèvre left for Guinea-Bissau soon after the completion of his dissertation. While in West Africa, working on a health care system that he designed while employed by Hidroservice, Lefèvre was killed in an automobile accident at the age of forty-six. Decades later, as appreciation of Rodrigo Lefèvre and Arquitetura Nova develops outside of Brazil, a new migration is occurring. Their theories acknowledge the fundamental role that migrants play in the construction of society and provide essential examples of empathy in all its forms. Furthermore, Lefèvre's proposed utopia is a mirror that reflects our own subjectivity back upon ourselves, allowing us to rediscover our humanity. A discussion of utopia, and the significant contribution that migrants may supply in its creation, offers us the potential for a new epoch of transition.

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<sup>1</sup>"uma aproximação com os problemas urbanos do subdesenvolvimento, propondo um engajamento com a realidade histórica na qual atuavam os arquitetos."