

HENRI LEFEBVRE

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French philosopher and social theorist Henri Lefebvre (1901–91) was a deeply political figure. A committed Marxist and leading intellectual within the French Communist Party, he perceived philosophy not as some isolated and specialized discipline, but as an activity that should be closely related to political practice. Although he became estranged from the French Communist Party in 1958, as it continued to support Stalinist beliefs, he remained committed to the revolutionary cause. Indeed he is regarded as one of the influential figures behind the events of May 1968, and the highly popular lectures which he gave as a professor of sociology at Nanterre are often viewed as one of the factors that helped to ignite the subsequent student uprisings.

Lefebvre set his philosophy in opposition to many of the dominant trends. Yet, although critical of structuralism, positivism, critical theory and certain strands of existentialist thought, he successfully appropriated elements of each along with aspects of psychoanalysis into his own philosophy, such that it is difficult to locate him within any particular category. Comparisons may be drawn with Situationist thought. Lefebvre developed, for example, the concept of the 'moment', a fleeting, intensely euphoric sensation which appeared as a point of rupture which revealed the totality of possibilities of daily existence. This was not dissimilar to the 'situation' in Situationist thought, although the Situationists criticized Lefebvre's 'moment' as being passive and temporal, in comparison with their active, spatio-temporal 'situation'.

Lefebvre's philosophy was one of lived experience, and his preoccupation with the urban environment as the location of this experience was a logical consequence of his concerns. In *The Production of Space* Lefebvre calls for a critique of space. He notes how the privileging of the image has led to a impoverished understanding of space, turning social space into a fetishised abstraction. The image 'kills' and cannot account for the richness of lived experience. Architects, in Lefebvre's eyes, are complicit within the whole alienating nature of contemporary existence. Not only are architects dominated by the dictates of bourgeois capitalism, but with their abstracted methods of representation they have reduced the world to a domain of blue-prints. Lefebvre calls instead for a restoration of concern for the body. Space should be experienced through all the senses. Nor can it be captured by the 'codifying approach of semiology'. 'What we are concerned with here,' Lefebvre observes, 'is not texts but texture.'

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THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE (EXTRACTS)

Lefebvre

THE MONUMENT

For millennia, *monumentality* took in all the following aspects of *spatiality* . . . : the perceived, the conceived and the lived; representations of space and representational spaces; the spaces proper to each faculty, from the sense of smell to speech; the gestural and the symbolic. Monumental space offered each member of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage. It thus constituted a collective mirror more faithful than any personal one. Such a 'recognition effect' has far greater import than the 'mirror effect' of the psychoanalysts. Of this social space, which embraced all the above-mentioned aspects while still according each its proper place, everyone partook, and partook fully – albeit, naturally, under the conditions of a generally accepted Power and a generally accepted Wisdom. The monument thus effected a 'consensus', and this in the strongest sense of the term, rendering it practical and concrete. The element of repression in it and the element of exaltation could scarcely be disentangled; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the repressive element was metamorphosed into exaltation. The codifying approach of semiology, which seeks to classify representations, impressions and evocations (as terms in the code of knowledge, the code of personal feelings, the symbolic code, or the hermeneutic code),¹ is quite unable to cover all facets of the monumental. Indeed, it does not even come close, for it is the residual, the irreducible – whatever cannot be classified or codified according to categories devised subsequent to production – which is, here as always, the most precious and the most essential, the diamond at the bottom of the melting-pot. The use of the cathedral's monumental space necessarily entails its supplying answers to all the questions that assail anyone who crosses the threshold. For visitors are bound to become aware of their own footsteps, and listen to the noises, the singing; they must breathe the incense-laden air, and plunge into a particular world, that of sin and redemption; they will partake of an ideology; they will contemplate and decipher the symbols around them; and they will thus, on the basis of their own bodies, experience a total being in a total space. Small wonder that from time immemorial conquerors and revolutionaries eager to destroy a society should so often have sought to do so by burning or razing that society's monuments. Sometimes, it is true, they contrive to redirect them to their own advantage. Here too, use goes further and deeper than the codes of exchange.

The most beautiful monuments are imposing in their durability. A cyclopean wall achieves monumental beauty because it seems eternal, because it seems to have escaped time. Monumentality transcends death, and hence also what is sometimes called the 'death instinct'. As both appearance and reality, this transcendence embeds itself in the monument as its irreducible foundation; the lineaments of atemporality overwhelm anxiety, even – and indeed above all – in funerary monuments. A *ne plus ultra* of art – form so thoroughly denying meaning that death itself is submerged. The Empress's Tomb in the Taj Mahal bathes in an atmosphere of gracefulness, whiteness and floral motifs. Every bit as much as a poem or a tragedy, a monument transmutes the fear of the

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Monumental 'durability' is unable, however, to achieve a complete illusion. To put it in what pass for modern terms, its credibility is never total. It replaces a brutal reality with a materially realized appearance; reality is changed into appearance. What, after all, is the durable aside from the will to endure? Monumental imperishability bears the stamp of the will to power. Only Will, in its more elaborated forms – the wish for mastery, the will to will – can overcome, or believe it can overcome, death. Knowledge itself fails here, shrinking from the abyss. Only through the monument, through the intervention of the architect as demiurge, can the space of death be negated, transfigured into a living space which is an extension of the body; this is a transformation, however, which serves what religion, (political) power and knowledge have in common.

In order to define monumental space properly,² semiological categorization (codifying) and symbolic explanations must be restrained. But 'restrained' should not be taken to mean refused or rejected. I am not saying that the monument is not the outcome of a signifying practice, or of a particular way of proposing a meaning, but merely that it can be reduced neither to a language or discourse nor to the categories and concepts developed for the study of language. A spatial work (monument or architectural project) attains a complexity fundamentally different from the complexity of a text, whether prose or poetry. As I pointed out earlier, what we are concerned with here is not texts but texture. We already know that a texture is made up of a usually rather large space covered by networks or webs; monuments constitute the strong points, nexuses or anchors of such webs. The actions of social practice are expressible but not explicable through discourse: they are, precisely, *acted* – and not *read*. A monumental work, like a musical one, does not have a 'signified' (or 'signifieds'); rather, it has a *horizon of meaning*: a specific or indefinite multiplicity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy in which now one, now another meaning comes momentarily to the fore, by means of – and for the sake of – a particular action. The social and political operation of a monumental work traverses the various 'systems' and 'subsystems', or codes and subcodes, which constitute and found the society concerned. But it also surpasses such codes and subcodes, and implies a 'supercoding', in that it tends towards the all-embracing presence of the totality. To the degree that there are traces of violence and death, negativity and aggressiveness in social practice, the monumental work erases them and replaces them with a tranquil power and certitude which can encompass violence and terror. Thus the mortal 'moment' (or component) of the sign is temporarily abolished in monumental space. In and through the work in space, social practice transcends the limitations by which other 'signifying practices', and hence the other arts, including those texts known as 'literary', are bound; in this way a consensus, a profound agreement, is achieved. A Greek theatre presupposes tragedy and comedy, and by extension the presence of the city's people and their allegiance to their heroes and gods. In theatrical space, music, choruses, masks, tiering – all such elements converge with language and actors. A spatial action overcomes conflicts, at least momentarily, even though it does not resolve them; it opens a way from everyday concerns to collective joy.

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by means of admitted oppression and repression. When the subject – a city or a people – suffers dispersal, the *building* and its functions come into their own; by the same token, *housing* comes to prevail over *residence* within that city or amidst that people. The building has its roots in warehouses, barracks, depots and rental housing. Buildings have functions, forms and structures, but they do not integrate the formal, functional and structural 'moments' of social practice. And, inasmuch as sites, forms and functions are no longer focused and appropriated by monuments, the city's contexture or fabric – its streets, its underground levels, its frontiers – unravel, and generate not concord but violence. Indeed space as a whole becomes prone to sudden eruptions of violence.

The balance of forces between monuments and buildings has shifted. Buildings are to monuments as everyday life is to festival, products to works, lived experience to the merely perceived, concrete to stone, and so on. What we are seeing here is a new dialectical process, but one just as vast as its predecessors. How could the contradiction between building and monument be overcome and surpassed? How might that tendency be accelerated which has destroyed monumentality but which could well reinstitute it, within the sphere of buildings itself, by restoring the old unity at a higher level? So long as no such dialectical transcendence occurs, we can only expect the stagnation of crude interactions and intermixtures between 'moments' – in short, a continuing spatial chaos. Under this dispensation, buildings and dwelling-places have been dressed up in monumental *signs*: first their facades, and later their interiors. The homes of the moneyed classes have undergone a superficial 'socialization' with the introduction of reception areas, bars, nooks and furniture (divans, for instance) which bespeak some kind of erotic life. Pale echoes, in short, of the aristocratic palace or town house. The town, meanwhile, now effectively blown apart, has been 'privatized' no less superficially – thanks to urban 'decor' and 'design', and the development of fake environments. Instead, then, of a dialectical process with three stages which resolves a contradiction and 'creatively' transcends a conflictual situation, we have a stagnant opposition whose poles at first confront one another 'face to face', then relapse into muddle and confusion.

There is still a good deal to be said about the notion of the monument. It is especially worth emphasizing what a monument is *not*, because this will help avoid a number of misconceptions. Monuments should not be looked upon as collections of symbols (even though every monument embodies symbols – sometimes archaic and incomprehensible ones), nor as chains of signs (even though every monumental whole is made up of signs). A monument is neither an object nor an aggregation of diverse objects, even though its 'objectality', its position as a social object, is recalled at every moment, perhaps by the brutality of the materials or masses involved, perhaps, on the contrary, by their gentle qualities. It is neither a sculpture, nor a figure, nor simply the result of material procedures. The indispensable opposition between inside and outside, as indicated by thresholds, doors and frames, though often underestimated, simply does not suffice when it comes to defining monumental space. Such a space is determined by what may take place there, and consequently by what may not take place there (prescribed/proscribed, scene/obscene). What appears empty may turn out to be full – as is the case with sanctuaries, or with the 'ships' or

Lefebvre naves of cathedrals. Alternatively, full space may be inverted over an almost heterotopic void at the same location (for instance, vaults, cupolas). The Taj Mahal, for instance, makes much play with the fullness of swelling curves suspended in a dramatic emptiness. Acoustic, gestural and ritual movements, elements grouped into vast ceremonial unities, breaches opening onto limitless perspectives, chains of meanings – all are organized into a monumental whole.

The affective level – which is to say, the level of the body, bound to symmetries and rhythms – is transformed into a 'property' of monumental space, into symbols which are generally intrinsic parts of a politico-religious whole, into co-ordinated symbols. The component elements of such wholes are disposed according to a strict order for the purposes of the use of space: some at a first level, the level of affective, bodily, lived experience, the level of the spoken word; some at a second level, that of the perceived, of socio-political signification; and some at a third level, the level of the conceived, where the dissemination of the written word and of knowledge welds the members of society into a 'consensus', and in doing so confers upon them the status of 'subjects'. Monumental space permits a continual back-and-forth between the private speech of ordinary conversations and the public speech of discourses, lectures, sermons, rallying-cries, and all theatrical forms of utterance.

Inasmuch as the poet through a poem gives voice to a way of living (loving, feeling, thinking, taking pleasure, or suffering), the experience of monumental space may be said to have some similarity to entering and sojourning in the poetic world. It is more easily understood, however, when compared with texts written for the theatre, which are composed of dialogues, rather than with poetry or other literary texts, which are monologues.

Monumental qualities are not solely plastic, not to be apprehended solely through looking. Monuments are also liable to possess acoustic properties, and when they do not this detracts from their monumentality. Silence itself, in a place of worship, has its music. In cloister or cathedral, space is measured by the ear: the sounds, voices and singing reverberate in an interplay analogous to that between the most basic sounds and tones; analogous also to the interplay set up when a reading voice breathes new life into a written text. Architectural volumes ensure a correlation between the rhythms that they entertain (gaits, ritual gestures, processions, parades, etc.) and their musical resonance. It is in this way, and at this level, in the *non-visible*, that bodies find one another. Should there be no echo to provide a reflection or acoustic mirror of presence, it falls to an object to supply this mediation between the inert and the living: bells tinkling at the slightest breeze, the play of fountains and running water, perhaps birds and caged animals.

Two 'primary processes', as described by certain psychoanalysts and linguists, might reasonably be expected to operate in monumental space: (1) displacement, implying metonymy, the shift from part to whole, and contiguity; and (2) condensation, involving substitution, metaphor and similarity. And, to a degree, this is so. Social space, the space of social practice, the space of the social relations of production and of work and non-work (relations which are to a greater or lesser extent codified) – this space is indeed condensed in monumental space. The notion of 'social condenser', as proposed by Russian architects in the 1920s, has a more general application. The 'properties' of a spatial texture are focused upon a single point: sanctuary, throne, seat,

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presidential chair, or the like. Thus each monumental space becomes the metaphorical and quasi-metaphysical underpinning of a society, this by virtue of a play of substitutions in which the religious and political realms symbolically (and ceremonially) exchange attributes – the attributes of power; in this way the authority of the sacred and the sacred aspect of authority are transferred back and forth, mutually reinforcing one another in the process. The horizontal chain of sites in space is thus replaced by vertical superimposition, by a hierarchy which follows its own route to the locus of power, whence it will determine the disposition of the sites in question. Any object – a vase, a chair, a garment – may be extracted from everyday practice and suffer a displacement which will transform it by transferring it into monumental space: the vase will become holy, the garment ceremonial, the chair the seat of authority. The famous bar which, according to the followers of Saussure, separates signifier from signified and desire from its object, is in fact transportable hither and thither at the whim of society, as a means of separating the sacred from the profane and of repressing those gestures which are not prescribed by monumental space – in short, as a means of banishing the obscene.

All of which has still not explained very much, for what we have said applies for all 'monumentality' and does not address the question of what particular power is in place. The obscene is a general category of social practice, and not of signifying processes as such: exclusion from the scene is pronounced silently by space itself.

THE SPACE OF ARCHITECTS

Cases are legion where the empirical approach to a given process refuses to carry its description to a conceptual level where a dialectical (conflictual) dynamic is likely to emerge. For example, countries in the throes of rapid development blithely destroy historic spaces – houses, palaces, military or civil structures. If advantage or profit is to be found in it, then the old is swept away. Later, however, perhaps towards the end of the period of accelerated growth, these same countries are liable to discover how such spaces may be pressed into the service of cultural consumption, of 'culture itself', and of the tourism and the leisure industries with their almost limitless prospects. When this happens, everything that they had so merrily demolished during the *belle époque* is reconstituted at great expense. Where destruction has not been complete, 'renovation' becomes the order of the day, or imitation, or replication, or neo-this or neo-that. In any case, what had been annihilated in the earlier frenzy of growth now becomes an object of adoration. And former objects of utility now pass for rare and precious works of art.

Let us for a moment consider the space of architecture and of architects, without attaching undue importance to what is said about this space. It is easy to imagine that the architect has before him a slice or piece of space cut from larger wholes, that he takes this portion of space as a 'given' and works on it according to his tastes, technical skills, ideas and preferences. In short, he receives his assignment and deals with it in complete freedom.

That is not what actually happens, however. The section of space assigned to the architect – perhaps by 'developers', perhaps by government agencies – is affected by calculations that he may have some intimation of but with which he

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Lefebvre is certainly not well acquainted. This space has nothing innocent about it: it answers to particular tactics and strategies; it is, quite simply, the space of the dominant mode of production, and hence the space of capitalism, governed by the bourgeoisie. It consists of 'lots' and is organized in a repressive manner as a function of the important features of the locality.

As for the eye of the architect, it is no more innocent than the lot he is given to build on or the blank sheet of paper on which he makes his first sketch. His 'subjective' space is freighted with all-too-objective meanings. It is a visual space, a space reduced to blueprints, to mere images – to that 'world of the image' which is the enemy of the imagination. These reductions are accentuated and justified by the rule of linear perspective. Such sterilizing tendencies were denounced long ago by Gromort, who demonstrated how they served to fetishize the facade – a volume made up of planes and lent spurious depth by means of decorative motifs.³ The tendency to make reductions of this kind – reductions to parcels, to images, to façades that are made to be seen and to be seen from (thus reinforcing 'pure' visual space) – is a tendency that degrades space. The facade (to see and to be seen) was always a measure of social standing and prestige. A prison with a facade – which was also the prison of the family – became the epitome and modular form of bourgeoisified space.

It may thus be said of architectural discourse that it too often imitates or caricatures the discourse of power, and that it suffers from the delusion that 'objective' knowledge of 'reality' can be attained by means of graphic representations. This discourse no longer has any frame of reference or horizon. It only too easily becomes – as in the case of Le Corbusier – a moral discourse on straight lines, on right angles and straightness in general, combining a figurative appeal to nature (water, air, sunshine) with the worst kind of abstraction (plane geometry, modules, etc.).

Within the spatial practice of modern society, the architect ensconces himself in his own space. He has a *representation of this space*, one which is bound to graphic elements – to sheets of paper, plans, elevations, sections, perspective views of facades, modules, and so on. This *conceived* space is thought by those who make use of it to be *true*, despite the fact – or perhaps because of the fact – that it is geometrical: because it is a medium for objects, an object itself, and a locus of the objectification of plans. Its distant ancestor is the linear perspective developed as early as the Renaissance: a fixed observer, an immobile perceptual field, a stable visual world. The chief criterion of the architectural plan, which is 'unconsciously' determined by this perceptual field, is whether or not it is realizable: the plan is projected onto the field of architectural thought, there to be accepted or rejected. A vast number of representations (some would call them 'ideological' representations, but why bother with a term now so devalued by misuse?) take this route; any plan, to merit consideration, must be quantifiable, profitable, communicable and 'realistic'. Set aside or downplayed from the outset are all questions relating to what is too close or too distant, relating to the surroundings or 'environment', and relating to the relationship between private and public. On the other hand, subdivisions (lots) and specializations (functional localizations) are quite admissible to this practically defined sphere. Much more than this, in fact: though the sphere in question seems passive with respect to operations of this kind, its very passive acceptance of them ensures their operational impact. The division of labour, the

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division of needs and the division of objects (things), all localized, all pushed to the point of maximum separation of functions, people and things, are perfectly at home in this spatial field, no matter that it appears to be neutral and objective, no matter that it is apparently the repository of knowledge, *sans peur et sans reproche*.

Let us now turn our attention to the space of those who are referred to by means of such clumsy and pejorative labels as 'users' and 'inhabitants'. No well-defined terms with clear connotations have been found to designate these groups. Their marginalization by spatial practice thus extends even to language. The word 'user' (*usager*), for example, has something vague - and vaguely suspect - about it. 'User of what?' one tends to wonder. Clothes and cars are used (and wear out), just as houses are. But what is use value when set alongside exchange and its corollaries? As for 'inhabitants', the word designates everyone - and no one. The fact is that the most basic demands of 'users' (suggesting 'underprivileged') and 'inhabitants' (suggesting 'marginal') find *expression* only with great difficulty, whereas the *signs* of their situation are constantly increasing and often stare us in the face.

The user's space is *lived* - not represented (or conceived). When compared with the abstract space of the experts (architects, urbanists, planners), the space of the everyday activities of users is a concrete one, which is to say, subjective. As a space of 'subjects' rather than of calculations, as a representational space, it has an origin, and that origin is childhood, with its hardships, its achievements and its lacks. Lived space bears the stamp of the conflict between an inevitable, if long and difficult, maturation process and a failure to mature that leaves particular original resources and reserves untouched. It is in this space that the 'private' realm asserts itself, albeit more or less vigorously, and always in a conflictual way, against the public one.

It is possible, nevertheless, if only in a mediational or transitional way, to form a mental picture of a primacy of concrete spaces of semi-public, semi-private spaces, of meeting-places, pathways and passageways. This would mean the diversification of space, while the (relative) importance attached to functional distinctions would disappear. Appropriated places would be *fixed, semi-fixed, movable* or *vacant*. We should not forget that among the contradictions here a not unimportant part is played by the contradiction between the ephemeral and the stable (or, to use Heidegger's philosophical terminology, between Dwelling and Wandering). Although work - including a portion of household production (food preparation, etc.) - demands a fixed location, this is not true of sleep, nor of play, and in this respect the West might do well to take lessons from the East, with its great open spaces, and its low and easily movable furniture.

In the West the reign of the facade over space is certainly not over. The furniture, which is almost as heavy as the buildings themselves, continues to have facades; mirrored wardrobes, sideboards and chests still face out onto the sphere of private life, and so help dominate it. Any mobilization of 'private' life would be accompanied by a restoration of the body, and the contradictions of space would have to be brought out into the open. Inasmuch as the resulting space would be inhabited by *subjects*, it might legitimately be deemed 'situational' or 'relational' - but these definitions or determinants would refer to sociological content rather than to any intrinsic properties of space as such.

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