Speculative proposal for renovation of housing block in Paris. From Actuel 12 (September 1971).

Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment

HENRI LEFEBVRE · INTRODUCTION BY ŁUKASZ STANEK

HENRI LEFEBVRE'S THEORIES—of the everyday, of the city, of space—are integral to our understanding of contemporary life and urban experience. Yet, remarkably, the full breadth of the late French philosopher's thinking on the built environment was unknown until 2008, when scholar Łukasz Stanek rediscovered a forgotten manuscript penned by Lefebvre some forty years ago. A rethinking of the spaces and politics of leisure as much as a consideration of enchanting structures ranging from Roman baths to the Alhambra, that book-length study, *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment*, will be published for the first time in May by the University of Minnesota Press. Here, Stanek introduces a sneak preview for *Artforum*, situating the "architecture of enjoyment" within the arc of Lefebvre's groundbreaking oeuvre.

"ARCHITECTURE OR REVOLUTION," warned Le Corbusier in 1923. Some fifty years later, critics including Manfredo Tafuri and Bernard Huet returned to this dichotomy—only to read it militantly against the grain. For these thinkers, writing in Italy and France around 1968, architecture was not an instrument of progress but a means by which to perpetuate capitalism's depredations: Far from making revolution unnecessary, the discipline actively blocked radical change. This critique produced such influential works as Tafuri's 1973 *Architecture and Utopia*, which proposed that contemporary architecture, beneath its reassuring progressivism, was in a state of perpetual crisis and trauma resulting from its inability to alter the staus quo, and was increasingly consigned to a condition of "sublime uselessness." If this challenge to received notions of modernism was urgently needed, it also contributed to the foreclosure of Marxist architectural history and theory, which was proving less and less able to conceptualize architecture's political and social relevance in the here and now.

Considered against this backdrop, Henri Lefebvre's *Vers une architecture de la jouissance* (Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment) takes on a haunting resonance. Written in 1973 but virtually forgotten for forty years, Lefebvre's text argues for the possibility of a "concrete utopia" that is as far removed from productivist fantasy of modernism as from Tafuri's landscape of sublime uselessness. Concrete utopia, says Lefebvre, "takes as a strategic hypothesis the negation of the everyday, of work, of the exchange economy. It also denies the State and the primacy of the political. It begins with enjoyment and seeks to conceive of a new space, which can only be based on an architectural project."

Surprisingly, this liberatory vision was rooted in what many consider a rather dystopian locale:

Benidorm, Spain, ca. 1960. Photo: Paul Popper/Popperfoto/Getty Images.

Costa Blanca Hotel, Benidorm, Spain, 1974. Photo: Alan Band/Fox Photos/Getty Images.

Benidorm, Spain, 2008.
Photo: Pierre-Philippe Marcou/AFP/Getty Images.

Benidorm, a teeming agglomeration of beachfront high-rises on Spain's Mediterranean coast. *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment* was commissioned in 1972 by Spanish sociologist Mario Gaviria, a friend and former student of Lefebvre's, as part of a wide-ranging study of mass tourism and urbanization in the Costa Blanca's booming resort towns. However, in the book-length manuscript that Lefebvre eventually delivered, Benidorm was less a subject than a point of departure, and so the text was included neither in Gaviria's study nor among the related publications that followed. In fact, it was never published at all. After decades of obscurity, Lefebvre's text now suggests a road not traveled—the starting point for an alternate history of architectural theory in the wake of the failures of 1968.

Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment should be seen as part of Lefebvre's theorization of space as produced by manifold, heterogeneous, and antagonistic social practices. Formulated in order to advance Marxism by accounting for the development of capitalism after World War II, Lefebvre's theory was articulated in multiple books, beginning with the 1968 publication of *The Right to the City* and culminating in 1974 with *The Production of Space*. During this period, a young generation of French architects, activists, and artists challenged postwar architectural production, seeking ways to catalyze intense urban experience and collective appropriation of space, as exemplified by the imaginary "revision and correction" of a Paris housing project depicted in 1971 in the countercultural journal *Actuel*. Lefebvre was both a part of this vibrant enterprise and a precursor of it; his sociological studies and his sustained critical attention to times and places beyond work fed into the broader rethinking of an alternative everyday. In the first volume of *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), Lefebvre had shown how leisure spaces had become indispensable for the reproduction of capitalism. But by the time he published *The Production of Space*, he was convinced that a "pedagogy of space and time" was beginning to take shape "in and through the space of leisure." This "pedagogy," he proposed, is fleetingly comprehended via evanescent glimpses, premonitions of a different way of life. Lefebvre argues that at the beach, say, or during an urban festival, one may find oneself "breaking out of the temporal and spatial shell developed in response to labor"—however commodified, "colonized," fetishistic, or irrelevant such situations might appear.

Following a hunch akin to Walter Benjamin's intuition that the emancipatory potential of commodities is revealed in what has just gone out of fashion—the dernier cri of yesterday—Lefebvre looked for an "architecture of enjoyment" in discredited utopias such as Benidorm. His thinking here was influenced specifically by his studies of suburbanites and the residents of modernist housing estates, which had shown him how people may wrest unexpected meanings and uses from banal or oppressive structures, traducing the "industrial" logic of French society in the twilight years of Fordism. It is this ability to discover condensed energy where others saw broken promises that most starkly distinguishes *Toward*

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an Architecture of Enjoyment from the pessimistic climate of opinion in the emerging postmodern architectural culture of the 1970s.

In the following excerpt from the book's first chapter, Lefebvre observes that there is no point in repeating "that there is nothing to be done, nothing to be thought." Instead, *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment* begins with a call for freeing architectural imagination by "putting into parentheses" the political and economic conditions that had relegated architects to a marginal position within the social division of labor. With the phrase "put into parentheses," Lefebvre designated a conceptual procedure that "suspends by means of thought," temporarily neutralizing the powers that "subordinate" architecture. Only by postulating architecture's "relative autonomy," he writes, is it possible to unleash the imagination and reclaim the "forgotten, obliterated" place of architecture as a practice whose political stakes are nothing less than a fundamental transformation of daily life.

This is why Lefebvre describes his project in *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment* as "negative," that is, as defined in opposition to the basic spatiotemporal distribution of the postwar everyday, in particular the partition of places and times of work and "non-work." Spaces of leisure were both sites of reproduction of capitalism and of capitalism's other: non-work rather than production, excess rather than accumulation, gift rather than exchange. In spaces of leisure, the hegemonic social regime is disrupted, and Lefebvre urges us to think of this disruption not simply as a compensation for the tedium of ordinary routines, but as an instance when this regime is experienced as fundamentally incomplete. Extending this proposition via transhistorical speculations on the phenomenology of architectural experience, Lefebvre writes about the baths of Diocletian, Gupta temples, and Renaissance towns, about the Alhambra and the Generalife gardens, but also about fictive spaces like the Abbey of Thélème, described by Rabelais as a community of people educated in the knowledge of pleasure, both carnal and intellectual. He muses on Charles Fourier's phalanstery, framing Fourier's vision of communal housing as an assemblage of bodies, senses, and ideas that produce new constellations of love and labor, and he researches the space of the body understood as a concatenation of rhythms, as manifested in Ricardo Bofill's experimental movie *Esquizo* (1970). These examples are neither illustrations nor models of Lefebvre's architecture of enjoyment but, rather, "concrete" or "experimental" utopias, where architectural projects are understood as cognitive objects allowing us to fathom the potential of the social production of space.

As Lefebvre discusses these precedents, he builds a theory of an embodied jouissance, a force at odds with the shell of postwar capitalist space-time. Yet he makes clear that the "negativity" of architectural imagination is not about locating an exception to capitalism or "resisting" it via architecture. Lefebvre's parentheses are an attempt to "turn the world upside down using theory, the imaginary, and dream, to contribute to its multiform practical transformation." What may appear to be a withdrawal from political engagement in fact opens up the possibility of a political practice: After the parentheses are removed, the images and ideas they contained reenter social practice as projects and "counter-projects." The latter term was Lefebvre's designation for collective activities or initiatives that, as he put it in *The Production of Space*, create sites where the "primacy of *use*" trumps "primacy of exchange" and room is found for an "encounter." The directive of architecture, Lefebvre suggests, is to create conditions of possibility for such counter-projects via hijacked commissions, co-opted plans—that is, via propositions delivered in spite, or even in contradiction, of what is expected, much like *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment* itself. □

Benidorm, Spain, 2001. Photo: Hans Pama/Flickr.

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THE QUESTION

BY *ARCHITECTURE* I understand neither the prestigious art of erecting monuments nor simply the professional's contribution to the indispensable activity of construction.[1] In the first sense, the architect elevates himself to the status of a demiurge; in the second, he responds to an external and higher command, which authorizes him to stand in for the engineer or the entrepreneur.

What I propose to understand by *architecture* is the production of space at a specific level, ranging from furniture to gardens and parks and extending even to landscapes. I exclude, however, urban planning and what is generally known as land-use planning.

This sense of the term corresponds to the way it has been used since the beginning of the twentieth century, which is to say since architects began to design furniture and to express their views and present their projects on what is commonly called "the environment"—although I shall be carefully avoiding this expression because it has no precise meaning and has been corrupted by abuse.

Why isolate the city, the urban, urbanism, and spatial planning in this way? Are questions concerning the various levels of spatial reality unimportant? Should we erase them from the map when it comes to architectonics? No! On the contrary, it is at these levels that certain agents and powers intervene that are quite capable of crushing architects and their work completely, if only by putting them in a subordinate position, by confining them to the mere execution of a program. And precisely because this is the way things are, the approach adopted in the present investigation will be designed to isolate those powers, at least conceptually, so as to define the place—the forgotten, obliterated location—of the architectonic work.

I repeat: This isolation is the only way forward toward clear thinking, the only way to avoid the incessant repetition of the idea that there is nothing to be done, nothing to be thought, because everything is "blocked," because "capitalism" rules and co-opts everything, because the "mode of production" exists as system and totality, to be rejected or accepted in accordance with the principle of "all or nothing."

The monumental was rich from every point of view: rich with meaning, the sensible expression of richness. These meanings died over the course of the century.

Any other approach can only incorporate the status quo, in other words the annihilation of thought—and hence of action—no matter the domain.

Try and think for a moment, with whatever degree of seriousness you like, of the nuclear threat or any of the mechanisms of planetary destruction (pollution, dwindling resources, etc.)—in short, anything that threatens the human race, with or without capitalism. How do you stop thinking about something like that? How is it possible ever to put the matter out of one's mind? Yet, inevitably, it is impossible to maintain one's focus on the subject. As soon as you think of something else, as soon as you choose to live, even for a moment or two, despite the danger, you effectively put the issue on hold, thus demonstrating the power of thought over the redoubtable forces of death. Does this mean that you deny the perils that lie in wait? No, not if you possess a modicum of perseverance.

Below, I present other arguments in support of this initial but not definitive reduction. Are they better? No. Different? Yes. And complementary.

Today, architecture implies social practice in two senses. In the first place, it implies the practice of *dwelling*, or *inhabiting* (the practice of an inhabitant or, to use a more problematic term, a *habitat*). Secondly, it implies the practice of the architect himself, a person who exercises a profession that has developed (like so many others) over the course of history, one with its own place (or perhaps without a place: this has yet to be verified) within the social division of labor; a profession that produces, or at least contributes to, the production of social space (if indeed it does have its own place in the production process). Engaged with practice in two ways, architecture operates on what I refer to as "the near order," in contradistinction to "the far order." Although the distinction is unavoidable, it has not always existed (the ancient or medieval city, for example), and is currently imposed by the mode of production or the political structure (the State).

But there is a paradox here. By setting aside the far order, by clearly apprehending the link to practice, a consideration of the architectural work liberates the imaginary. Such thinking can approach utopian space by avoiding abstraction and underwriting in advance the concrete nature of that utopia (one that must and can reveal itself at every moment in its relation to practice and to *lived experience*).

Isn't there some risk in this approach? What illusion, what error! Any number of dangers haunt our progress along this slippery path. To take risks while avoiding accidents is a self-evident behavioral precept. For example, today, there are architects who assign a compensatory character to the space occupied by housing (the habitat). From their point of view, the (bourgeois) apartment becomes a microcosm. It tends to replace the city and the urban. A bar is installed to simulate the expansive sociability and conviviality of public places. The kitchen mimics the grocery store, the dining room replaces the restaurant; the terrace and balcony, with their flowers and plants, serve as an analogon (to put it in philosophical terms) of the countryside and nature. "Personalized" individual or family spaces, effectively subject to private ownership, imitate collective space, appropriated by an active and intense social life—confirmed by the most recent findings of advertising rhetoric. No longer do we sell only happiness, or a lifestyle, or a "turnkey" home; we exhort people, mistakenly appropriating the concept "to live differently." In this way the bourgeois apartment and capitalist appropriation, by substituting the "private" character of space for its social and collective character, are established as criteria of difference. This is as true of a city or a vacation home as it is of a spacious and beautifully furnished apartment. We can extend this private/collective and individual/social opposition to the point of antagonism, even to the dissolution of the relationship between habitat and city, the dislocation of the social. But to what end? To provide the illusion of enjoyment, whereby "private" appropriation, in other words, the private ownership of space, is accompanied by the degradation of the real and social practice.

Proletarian housing, for its part, has the opposite characteristics. Reduced to a minimum, barely "vital," it depends on various "facilities," on the "environment," that is, on social space, even if this is not well maintained. There is no connection with enjoyment other than in and through external space, which remains one of social appropriation, even if that appropriation is realized only in terms of the restrictive norms and constraints of the existing mode of production. This is as true of hovels and new housing projects as it is of suburban detached homes occupied by workers forced to the outskirts of urban areas.

We can begin our inquiry with this spatial contradiction, which assumes its meaning only in comparison to some possible enjoyment of that social space, being careful not to elide or evade such contradiction (by setting it aside) because it defines the site, simultaneously practical and utopian, of that inquiry.

[. . .]

Can we, in the so-called modern world, discover an architecture of enjoyment? This incongruous question contains its ironic response. What do we see around us? Monotonously reproduced habitats with miniscule variations presented as if they were profound differences whose appearance is at once dissolved by our gaze and by our other senses. Monotony, boredom, combinations of repetitive elements whose variations obstinately call to mind some fundamental identity. Asceticism is the dominant emotion, a cult of intellectualized sensoriality and abstraction made tangible. Thought and gaze oscillate between two entities: the "unconscious" (inaccessible by definition) and "culture" (banalized by definition), both of which are equally dry and devoid of sensual life, each reflecting the other in a play of mirrors, a revolving door. And this is as true of architecture (reduced to construction) as it is of the other arts, and philosophism and scientism, the ultimate rationalizations.

Accident? Circumstance? Hardly. In this asceticism we find manifested a contradiction of the contemporary world in its developed forms, that of the large industrial countries: on the one hand abundance, waste, an almost extreme productivity, and on the other uneasiness, insecurity, anxiety. The conflict between (an elusive) satisfaction and dissatisfaction (which is all we ever encounter) becomes aggravated in every aspect of life. The intellectualizing asceticism of art echoes this uneasiness and dissatisfaction, while scientism declares its satisfaction and the triumph of productivity. But art like science, literature like philosophy are joined beneath the banner of a carefully determined category: the *interesting*. Not enjoyment.

In all fields of what is generally referred to as art, ever since the nineteenth century, the tendency to the

baroque, to the fantastic, to symbolism has remained marginal, aberrant, dominated by an intellectualizing asceticism or soon co-opted. This includes surrealism. This asceticism, occasionally disguised (Pop art confronted with a fully disembodied Op art), has experienced success and even received the stamp of officialdom. It reflects the dominant ideology (sometimes disguised as protest) and incorporates it in the tangible (reduced to its simplest expression). Would this be the occasion to get to the bottom of things, as we say, by admitting that there is a bottom of things?

In the nineteenth century, the building dethroned the monument. I contrast the two terms, with their content and their meaning, by clearly defining them, for there has been, and still is, some confusion about them. The monument passes for a building because it is built (constructed). In the seventeenth century (1624), the English architect Henry Wotton defined architecture by writing: "Well building hath three conditions: firmness, commodity, and delight,"[2] a definition that has remained celebrated.

It was during the nineteenth century that the "building" became distinct from the "monument," a distinction that slowly entered architectural terminology. Monuments are characterized by their affectation or aesthetic pretension, their official or public character, and the influence exercised on their surroundings, while buildings are defined by their private function, the preoccupation with technique, their placement in a prescribed space. The architect came to be seen as an artist devoted to the construction of monuments, and there was a question of whether buildings were a part of architecture at all.

There was a terrible loss of meaning that followed the extensive promotion of the building and the degradation of the monument. The monumental was rich from every point of view: rich with meaning, the sensible expression of richness. These meanings died over the course of the century. We may deplore the loss, but why return to the past? Negative utopia, a form of nostalgia motivated by a rejection of the contemporary, has no more value than its antithesis, technological utopia, which claims to accentuate what is new about the contemporary by focusing on a "positive" factor, technique.

The meaning ascribed to monuments disappeared in the wake of a revolution that had multiple aspects: *political* (the bourgeois democratic revolution, for which the revolution of 1789–93 provided the model), *economic* (industrialization and capitalism), and *social* (the extension of the city, the quantitative and qualitative rise of the working class). The demise of the monument and the rise of the building resulted from this series of cyclical events, from this conjunction of causes and reasons.

The monument possessed meaning. Not only did it *have* meaning, it *was* meaning: strength and power. Those meanings have perished. The building has no meaning; the building has a *signification*. An enormous literature claiming to be of linguistic or semantic origin is now seen as derisively ideological for its failure to observe this elementary distinction between signification and meaning. A word has signification; a work (at the very least a succession of signs and significations, a literature, a succession of sentences) has meaning. As everyone knows, the most elementary sign, letter, syllable, phoneme has no signification until it becomes part of a larger unit, becomes part of a larger structure.

The destruction of meaning, a democratic as well as an industrial revolution, engendered an abstract interest in significations. Paradoxically, and yet quite rationally, the promotion of the building was accompanied by a promotion of signs, words, and speech, which erupted together with the significations to which they corresponded. The power of the thing and the sign, which complement one another, replaced the ancient potencies, endowed with the ability to make themselves perceptible and acceptable through the symbols of kings, princes, and the aristocracy. This does not imply, however, that political power disappeared; it was simply transferred to an abstraction, the State.

The complementary powers of the thing and the sign are incorporated into concrete, which is twofold in its nature, if we can still continue to employ the word: a brutal thing among things, a materialized abstraction and abstract matter. Simultaneously—synchronically, I should say—architectural discourse, highly pertinent, filled with significations, has supplanted architectural production (the production of a space rich with meaning). And the abstract and flawed signs of happiness, of beauty, proliferate among concrete cubes and rectangles.

[. . .]

In truth, by examining the architectural horizon from all sides, only a single case, a single example legitimates this search: Granada, the Alhambra, the palace and gardens of Generalife. Even so, this example does not go unchallenged. The Alhambra does not exist in its original state. In our imagination it is covered with rugs and couches, perfumed, populated with birds and fountains and the beauties of the *Thousand and One Nights*. But what did the arabesque mean to the Arabs—was it the reason for sensuality or reason in sensuality? Its limit or its cause? Or a warning of the end, for the supple line separates and defines as much as it unites and mimes the most graceful movements of life? Does it prescribe pleasure? For us, twentieth-century Westerners, it suggests it, but for others, perhaps, it may have evoked serenity more than passion. Yet the existence alone of the Alhambra would justify our inquiry. Joy, serenity, sensuality, happiness? They are of little importance. I decide to assign it the + sign. And our question then becomes: Why do neutral constructions or those strongly marked by the – sign, the sign of suffering, of anguish, of cruelty, of power, cover the inhabited earth, while its opposite, the + sign, is rare, so rare that until we have further information, a single example is offered for our examination? Does this situation have a meaning? If so, what is it? What can we predict? What can we conclude for the future? Can this situation be reversed, overturned, upended? How and when, and under what conditions? □

Léon Auguste Asselineau, ***The Court of the Alberca in the Alhambra, Granada*, 1853**, lithograph on paper.

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NOTES

1. I would like to thank Donald Nicholson-Smith for his translation of the first two pages of the manuscript, which exist only in Spanish. —Trans.

2. Henry Wotton, *The Elements of Architecture* (1624; Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1970). Wotton rephrased the Vitruvian triad: "All . . . [buildings], must be built with due reference to durability, convenience, and beauty." Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 17. —Ed.