



Book review

Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture, Łukasz Stanek, Christian Schmid and Ákos Moravánszky (Eds.). Ashgate, Farnham, England, 2014, xv and 345 pp., index, \$149.95 hardback, ISBN: 978-1-4094-4293-6.

The cover of *Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture* depicts a group of construction workers walking and bicycling down a newly constructed road in a largely unrecognizable landscape [Fig. 1]. The muted colors, seamless gradients, and meticulous framing of the image contribute to its unfamiliarity. The setting is neither urban nor rural, and the space is neither abstract nor concrete. Rather, the landscape captured by photographer Bas Princen is a strange one, caught between paradigmatic representational categories. And in this image, the thesis of *Urban Revolution Now* is reflected. To produce this effect, editors Łukasz Stanek, Christian Schmid, and Ákos Moravánszky curated sixteen chapters from eighteen contributors that apply Henri Lefebvre's theories to spatial problems of contemporary urbanization.

In *La révolution urbaine* (1970), Lefebvre proposed a theory of urban society in which the process of urbanization meets multidimensional conflicts in a continually unfolding struggle.¹ Lefebvre described this process as urban revolution, from which *Urban Revolution Now* draws its title. Years later, in *La production de l'espace* (1974), Lefebvre formulated his renowned theory of urban space based on the interaction of perceived space, lived space, and conceived space.² Bracketing these works, Lefebvre emphasized the role of everyday life in social theory with his trilogy *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947, 1961, 1981).³ Drawing on these core texts, *Urban Revolution Now* applies Lefebvre's theories to specific contexts of broad geographical diversity.

In the introduction, Stanek, Schmid, and Moravánszky situate the book within an historical arc of urban research involving Lefebvre. To this they bring a “wide variety of applications of Lefebvre's theory in urban research, architecture and urban design” (9). In addition to the shared commitment of deploying Lefebvre as “an instrument of analysis and research,” the editors identify four themes that connect the chapters, and in so doing reflect several concerns of *Emotion, Society and Space*: dedication to transdisciplinarity; connection between specific case studies and urban society; production of space through the interaction of perceived, lived, and conceived space; and, application of theory as a general orientation rather than a rigid structure. For Stanek, Schmid, and Moravánszky,

the book demonstrates the “methodological multiplicity” and “shared theoretical framework” of “doing research ‘with’ Lefebvre” (17).

In part one, contributors frame localized analyses using Lefebvre's theory of complete urbanization. Discussing projects in Switzerland and Cuba, Christian Schmid outlines the methodological contours of complete urbanization. Elisa T. Bertuzzo emphasizes the temporal dimensions of urbanization in Bangladesh by zooming in and out, finding the urban revolution already underway. Proposing a limit to the applications of Lefebvre, Wing-Shing Tang argues for the persistence of urban and rural spaces in China by analyzing urban development in Hong Kong. Further expanding the geographical reach of part one, Stefan Kipfer and Kanishka Gooewardena compare public housing in Canada and France to suggest social mixing as a new form of colonization, using Lefebvre's theory of everyday life as a guide.

In part two, Lefebvre's theory of abstract space and differential space prompts contributors to analyze the widespread effects of urban design and planning. Japhy Wilson identifies the direct violence of spatial abstraction in a regional development program in Central America. Tracking planned developments for Paris, Jean-Pierre Garnier notes the prescience of Lefebvre in contemporary processes of urbanization. Greig Charnock and Ramon Ribera-Fumaz use Lefebvre's theory to critique the abstract space of gentrification in Barcelona. And in New Orleans, M. Christine Boyer uses the right to the city to show how groups were excluded in the process of urban redevelopment.

In part three, contributors deploy Lefebvre's theory of spatial trialectics in historically, politically, and geographically diverse urban spaces. Nick Beech uses Lefebvre's triad in analyzing the history of urban development in the South Bank of London. Focusing on four urban squares in Budapest, Ákos Moravánszky uses Lefebvre to help understand the competing visions in the city. Mejrema Zatrić also uses spatial trialectics to show how architecture was complicit in shifting political regimes in Sarajevo, using emotional expressions of residents as evidence. And in São Paulo, Fraya Frehse argues for the value of Lefebvre's writings in understanding difference through participant observation.

In part four, Lefebvre's theory of urban society challenges contributors to examine projects of urban revolution. Łukasz Stanek highlights the contested production of urban space in Poland through the lens of Lefebvre's spatial triad. Emphasizing the role of memory and affect, Ulrich Best analyzes the competing forces surrounding redevelopment plans in Berlin, and offers a portrait of how emotions contribute to the production of urban space. In Belgrade, Ljiljana Blagojević uses the right to the city to critique a range of architecture and urban design projects. Lastly, Jan Lillien-dahl Larsen tracks the appropriation of urban environments in Copenhagen using Lefebvre's idea of diverted spaces.

Like the photograph on the cover of the book, the image

¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003[1970]).

² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003[1974]).

³ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Volume I* (New York: Verso, 1991[1947]); Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Volume II* (London: Verso, 2002[1961]); Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Volume III* (London: Verso, 2002[1981]).



Fig. 1. Bas Princen, "Future Olympic Park," 2007.

portrayed by *Urban Revolution Now* is clear, ordered, and intriguing. In both images, however, a firm grasp of the subject remains elusive. With theory, as in photography, a lens is intended to bring focus to an otherwise blurry subject. Yet when the subject is as broad as contemporary urbanization, any lens—no matter the power and precision—fails to fully clarify the complexity of the phenomenon. For the editors, this is abundantly clear. From the book, they assert, "an overall picture emerges—however uneven, fractured and contradictory—of a planetary urban society" (16). This picture emerges largely through detailed analyses of emotional encounters in and through urban space, particularly in the work of Zatrić, Stanek, and Best. The book is richly illustrated and meticulously organized, and it has a deep index and a diverse bibliography.

Despite its admitted incapability of explaining contemporary urbanization, the book provides helpful operationalizations of Lefebvre's theories, and contributes valuable insights into multidimensional urban processes.

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