

Use value and exchange value

On page 89 of his book, *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment* (abbreviated here as *TAE*), Henri Lefebvre begins to discuss the contrast between spaces of domination and spaces of appropriation. This is a key contrast that enables him to make key arguments later on about the functional possibility of a "space of enjoyment" and relate this possibility to the inner conflict between use value and exchange value, always central to his Marxist outlook. Can we use the template of the "binary signifier" to critique this approach? In particular, can the role of metonymic occultation shed any light on the effectiveness or limitations of Lefebvre's constructs? The goal of such an analysis is two-fold: (1) a review of a work that clearly bears on the project of an "architecture of joy" and (2) the construction of original theory that grows out of a dialectic with other positions such as Lefebvre's.

Background. As good Lacanians, we always ask this question of enjoyment as a topic: *whose* enjoyment? Enjoyment is the primary site of "reversed predication," an inversion of causality that typifies much of the logic of the Lacanian subject, who finds that, instead of "enjoying things" directly, subject to object, she is "enjoyed by things," object to subject. There is the demand of the Big Other, a super-ego agency that defines desire in terms of an enigmatic reversal. We want what the other wants us to want, but the Other is never clear on what that object of desire actually is. Because desire involves a "reversed predication" from subject-to-object to object-to-subject, we automatically know that we should "interrogate the gap" — i.e. ask about the gap or void that is in between these two positions, which try to pretend that all of the options have been covered by their binary opposition. Interrogating the gap means that we ask about metonymy's role in "occluding a signifier" that works as the Lacanian "truth in the first and fourth place," i.e. the letter that always arrives at its destination (the fourth truth), but only after a process of delay that is sustained by the original occultation (the first truth).

This reversal arises from the drives, specifically from the *gap* of timing and direction in the oral, anal, phallic, and (later) gaze and voice. Because of the temporal-spatial nature of these gaps, architecture *from the beginning* finds a foothold in the gap and, hence, in the desire of the Other that the gap gives rise to. Thus, we do not have to add architectural interest as a supplement or external consideration after a fully psychoanalytical account of the gap. Architecture is in the nature of the gap, and thus architecture is a key to the drives taken separately but also, most importantly, the key to the drive that grounds the other drives, the "death drive," diagrammed as a gapped circle that returns motion to its origin, a compulsive circularity that is "read" in ordinary space time as a straight line but which in fact is bent into a circle by the *difference between goal and aim*. Goals and aims are what subjects perceive as their desires and efforts to achieve desires. This might be put in terms of "the shortest distance between 'x' and 'y', with obstacles to be overcome in between." We aim at a goal, to

calculate this shortest distance; we see, in our aim, what obstacles might exist, what we have to “steer around.”

What does the Other do to our aim-and-goal calculations? The spatial logic of ideology tells us a lot. It is the action by which an external presence, a policeman’s shout or a surveillance camera, is taken into the center of the subject, where it operates as an “inside frame” — a radical externality that has a central position. This is Lacan’s idea of the extimate: an inside-out function. Because the most intimate kernel of subjectivity turns out to be a void that cannot be filled (i.e. we can never answer the question “what does the Big Other want me to want?”; we can never be certain we have “fulfilled the requirements of the Big Other”). Remember that the Big Other is *our construct*. The policeman is not really blowing his whistle at us; the surveillance camera is really out of service. We *think* that authority exists, that is all that is required. The other Lacanian point of this is that, in this transfer of outside to inside to outside that is the essence of the ideological subject, a subject whose enjoyment is never his/her own but always defined in terms of the Other, there is a *remainder*. This remainder is the symptom, and the symptom “belongs to” psychoanalysis — that is to say, to the theoretical framework whose main interest is subjectivity itself, i.e. as the basis of human variety within the “ideological” conditions of the Symbolic. This is to say that the Symbolic is the primary basis of the “symptom” that psychoanalysis takes to be its primary data. That there is another remainder *after* the symptom-as-remainder-of-ideology means that psychoanalysis has a further option, of taking up the issue of the Real, i.e. that which resists the Symbolic. This is the territory of the “act” and the option that the subject is forced to avoid at the Mirror Stage. Just as psychoanalysis has the option of returning to the Real as a theoretic project, the subject herself has the option of returning to the *act*, of going back to the point of the forced choice of the mirror stage, where the focus is on the *sinthome*, a more primitive form of the symptom.

My guess is that “joy” involves this return to the forced choice of the Mirror Stage, with the recovery of the lost option of the act. This is where Lacan became interested in James Joyce, the Irish novelist whose novel *Finnegans Wake* offers a blue-print of how “joy” may be recovered through the breakdowns of the chains of signifiers making up the Symbolic. This background to an analysis of Lefebvre aims to show how metonymy works in this “second project” focusing on the “second kind of remainder.” While the symptom, born out of the Symbolic, has the geometry of the gap inscribed into it as a kind of impasse structured by the death drive, the *sinthome* is purely topological. While we can “map” the symptom, we cannot map the *sinthome*. This has to do with the nature of projection. The symptom has a shadow, which is in effect its “real” form. The projection of the symptom is the same as the symptom; the symptom is fundamentally projection. The *sinthome*, like the vampire, has no shadow or reflection. It cannot be projected because the space-time of projection is curved by the *sinthome*; the space-time of the *sinthome* *is* the *sinthome*. This is a key insight into any question pertaining to the “architecture of the *sinthome*,” which for any project relating to joy

as “that which eludes the symptom” would amount to a critical issue. Seeing joy in terms of symptoms or projections would fail; coming to terms with the “curvature” of space-time in the sinthome may be the key to success. This returns joy to the idea of the act, to the moment prior to the Mirror Stage’s forced choice between speaking and being. The act resists symbolization. It is allied with the Real and a kind of trauma — hence its relation to epiphany and divination. This is a key moment in philosophy, one recognized with full force in Plato’s dialog, *Parmenides*, where the elder philosopher guides the young philosopher (Socrates) past the typical errors of attempts to merge speaking and being (i.e. to talk about the Real). If we do that with joy, we will make the same mistakes and fail to reach our goal. Talking about joy-as-the-Real will present significant problems that we must address through this logic of the sinthome.

Lefebvre’s categories

Lefebvre introduces “domination” and “appropriation” as categories that operate at the root level of his analysis (*TAE*, 89). Both are forms of mastery, a subject that Lacan treats in a very Hegelian way in his theory of discourses. For Hegel, as is famously known, mastery is undermined by an “internal contradiction.” The master seeks to be a master “to other masters,” but there can be no resolution to this at the level of a group of masters. One may succeed but all others must fail for that to happen. It is a self-destructive project, and mastery is, to use hackneyed parlance, unsustainable. The master can be a master only in relation to a servant, who is precisely *not* a master and therefore cannot fulfill the requirements of mastery, that it be in relation to other potential masters. Because the discourse of the master finds stability only in a relationship that furthers the servant, who operates outside the system of honor that perpetuates mastery, sublation (*Aufhebung*) negates but preserves the idea of mastery in the irony of the master-servant relationship. The exception or defect in the mastery system, so to speak, is the servant, who preserves the system by violating/subverting its principles.

I think that Lefebvre’s Hegelianism fails to see this principle of the exception. He takes mastery at face value, at its pretended effective functionality. Mastery dominates nature through technology and force; acts of sheer will at odds with nature as a resource or as a given. In contrast, appropriation takes what it finds without abusing it. Lefebvre sees domination and appropriation as polar options, and he takes sides: he favors appropriation as the “kinder, gentler” option. The middle ground defined as a balance point is ruled out, but an ecological approach that substitutes, for a single point, a back-and-forth process of feedback and re-adjustment, can take its place. In this way, Lefebvre has his cake (the binary signifier) and eats it too (by putting the dialectic of ecological feedback in the middle, in place of a compromise point). That Lefebvre views domination and appropriation as opposed categories along a linear scale is further evident from the fact that he treats each as a simple set whose interior is uncomplicated by any exception. A space of domination is created by power and

violence. There is no idea of irony, no "system of the servant" that qualifies mastery by contradicting it. *All* of domination is there to be contrasted with *all* of appropriation, point by point (TAE, 93). Each part of domination is given its contrasting element by appropriation, and these elements are expanded thematically: "[The space of appropriation] is not, therefore, a space devoted to death. ... Use value has priority over exchange value."

Why does Lefebvre introduce Marx's key distinction between use and exchange values at this point? Clearly, this is to align ("bad") exchange with domination and the creation of power landscapes dominated by political-military means to control exchange economies. We cannot expect a "clean transfer" of categories however. Use value and exchange value are inseparable, in theory and in practice. Lefebvre himself knows this, and his attempt to contrast use and exchange as categories, when they are in fact vectors of every economic exchange, at all scales, is inexplicable. It would be like separating the diastole and systole of the heartbeat. Whatever utility an object has that gives it a kind of "objective" value by replacing other goods or services, there is at least a modicum of exchange value that adds a "symbolic" supplement. This is "enjoyment," and Lacanians of course know that enjoyment involves ideological directions from the Big Other. Humans do not have access to any objective assessment of use value. They interpret use through cultural and personal values; they have fetish attachments; they use marketing and advertising to cultivate the ideas of utility where none exist ("I need my cell phone"). The idea of objective utility is unknown not just in Capitalist societies but world-wide and throughout history, because materials and services have values added by meanings assigned by culture, belief, and experience. While Lefebvre would like to see domination as a "pure case" of exchange valuing, but "objective" utility clings to exchange as a kind of remainder, a silent partner.

Similarly, in appropriation there is no pure case of use value, but simply an emphasis, a dominant tonality. Lefebvre cites the monastery is the perfect space of appropriation. Here, there is no need for exchange (symbolic value); every object and act has a usefulness within the order proscribed by religion. As a prelude to his discussion of a space of joy, Lefebvre builds a case for appropriation space as a place where signifiers have no need to attach to particular signifieds. This is an "open situation," left to contemplatives, who are models of artists and poets who "find nature" rather than impose concepts. What could be wrong with this account? Isn't contemplative life perfect in its disavowal of "fetishistic" exchange value, in its simple ideal of utility for the good of the group? The cloister is Lefebvre's idea of a utilitarian utopia, uncomplicated by fetish attachments.

Admittedly, the cloister is just an example intended to illustrate the contrast of domination and appropriation as motives for different kinds of spaces. Without this contrast, it would be impossible for Lefebvre to clear the way for discussions of a space of *en-joy-ment*. But, isn't the cost of this preparation too high? Is it necessary to employ not one but two binary signifiers (domination/appropriation; use/exchange) to align enjoyment with the

"cloister-like" spaces of appropriation? What are we left with when this category is finally whittled down from the dynamic of domination and appropriation, use and exchange? Utility within a walled compound, free (mostly) of power and violence?

We should first ask: have actual, historic monasteries and convents been free of power and violence? In what way does the idea of monastic "discipline" escape being identified as an absolute rule, hierarchically maintained through threats and applications of severe punishment? Is not a monastery both a refuge *and* a prison? Isn't the difference fundamentally subjective? Weren't monasteries also fortresses defended militarily? These are not insignificant details; we are not just quibbling. The Medieval monastery was fundamentally and foremost a defended space, whether or not "militarization" is replaced by the idea of "religious" retreat. Even the form of monasteries shows a commitment to the idea of domination, and in fact monasteries exerted considerable economic, political, and military-like control over their surrounding territories, in addition to their religious influence. We can in no way separate the monastery from the idea of domination; but Lefebvre in effect asks us to accept the cloister as the *paradigm exemplar* of use-value space of appropriation, as if the strict religious order, which assigns meaning to every minute of the day and every object within space, were not at all to be counted as exchange value!

The real question, even though we may suspend disbelief and see what Lefebvre intends to do with his binary signifiers, is, "why does Lefebvre allow himself to be forced into a corner by his own contrast-and-compare logic?" The answer is possibly found on page 97, where the author retreats to a concept which he characterizes as being "a mediating concept," namely the *détournement* of the Situationists.

[This section to be developed in the future; our argument will focus on the role of the gap, and the metonymic nature of this gap. We will compare this "gap analysis" to Lefebvre's account, to see how long he is willing to stick with the binary signifier as a strategy of explanation. One big question is how and why Lefebvre, who must "know his Hegel," gets trapped into making such a bad mistake using binary signifiers without reference to *Aufhebung*, which would involve metonymy and an "occulted signifier." This would solve his problems, but he seems to prefer making categories out of terms that are related as attached vectors.]