

## BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

**Lefebvre, Henri**, *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment*. Edited by Lukasz Stanek, Translated by Robert Bononno. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2014. 252 pp., \$27.95 paper (9780816677207)

**T**he arrival of this book is a publication event. What we have here is a long forgotten manuscript written by the French Marxist (meta) philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) that has been discovered, edited, and now printed for the interested English speaking world to engage.

During his 90-year lifetime, Lefebvre authored over 60 books and hundreds of articles on a variety of topics. In the English speaking world he has become most well-known for his texts on everyday life, modernity, the city, the urban, and space. Essentially, these are the topics that have been translated into English. These topics all roughly equate to the following eight texts: the three volumes of his *Critique of Everyday Life*, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, *Introduction to Modernity*, *Writings on Cities*, *The Urban Revolution*, and *The Production of Space*. These books are all intertwined in some way or another, but despite their hundreds of combined pages, something was missing, not just in English translation, but in all of Lefebvre's work: a book on architecture. Lefebvre's latest book, translated into English, is the missing link, so speak, in Lefebvre's canon. It would, however, be a disservice to claim that this is only a book about architecture. At the very least, this should be viewed as a book that also provides an in-depth exploration of the concept of enjoyment. This book is a text on both architecture and enjoyment and how they both diverge and are interconnected.

Thanks to the determination and thoughtfulness of Lefebvre scholar Łukasz Stanek – a Lecturer at the Manchester Architecture Research Centre, University of Manchester – this hidden gem has seen the light of day. Stanek, the book's editor, is the intrepid scholar that unearthed Lefebvre's text while visiting Mario Gaviria, a former student of Lefebvre's, in Spain. Gaviria commissioned the text, originally titled *Vers une architecture de jouissance*, in the early 1970s for inclusion in a broader study of tourist new towns in Spain. At the time, Lefebvre's text was deemed to be too abstract, so it was not included in Gaviria's project. Gaviria was correct; Lefebvre's text is most certainly abstract and requires

a considerable amount of concentration. Nevertheless, it is surprising to know that a scholar of Lefebvre's caliber would have a text such as this rejected for publication, especially since the rejection came from a student of Lefebvre's, and that Gaviria is also the person to whom the book is dedicated.

Stanek's discovery of Lefebvre's text is not a surprise to those who have read his 2011 book *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory*. Stanek begins the book's afterword by mentioning the discovery of a book written by Lefebvre on the topic of architecture, although a considerable amount of investigating was in order to find out exactly what it was. Three years pass and the investigation has not only lead to the publication of Lefebvre's book, but also helped produce a wonderful and lengthy introduction by Stanek that outlines the content of Lefebvre's text, provides context for the discovery, and, perhaps most valuable of all, places the book within the broader context of Lefebvre's work.

The basic argument Lefebvre puts forth is that something like an architecture of enjoyment is only possible within a total revolution of social conditions. So, in a way, an architecture of enjoyment is both possible and impossible. It is possible if society changes; it is impossible if society does not change. Architecture is, of course, part of society, so it could be part of an overall change in the material conditions of existence, but it is not in and of itself a way to change society in a revolutionary way. Architects, or the bureaucrats that pay them and put constraints on them, are mistaken if they think their works and products will unilaterally improve society for the majority of people. This overarching theme of architecture as an important yet limited part of society is revealed and concealed throughout Lefebvre's text.

Like most of Lefebvre's other work, *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment* takes the reader on a journey. Lefebvre often picks up threads out of nowhere as if the reader were following him throughout his career. Passages from some of his texts seem to follow up on passages from some of his other texts, even if they were written years apart. In addition, Lefebvre drops threads in a way that make the argument, at times, seem underdeveloped. Despite the meandering and playful prose, the content in this book ought to have broad appeal to academics, architects, and activists. On the surface, such as when you look at the chapter headings, the book seems to move in an intuitive manner from introductory chapters outlining the question and scope of the study, then through a series of chapters on disciplinary angles (philosophy, history, anthropology, etc.), ending with a concluding chapter. These chapter headings belie the dialectical twists and turns waiting for the reader on every page. In-

tuitive it is not. Such a journey can be off-putting to some, especially those unfamiliar with dialectical argumentation, which is precisely what Lefebvre employs here, as he does with all of his work.

This book ought to have a long lifespan. While its abstract nature was seen, at least initially, as problematic, it is, nevertheless, a work that is profound, relevant, and important. Scholars specializing in Lefebvre's work will surely rejoice at the publication of this lost text, but it should also be of interest to those interested in thinking about space in general and architecture in particular. This is a book for those that are willing to take enjoyment seriously.

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