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The Production Of Space



Synopsis

Henri Lefebvre has considerable claims to be the greatest living philosopher. His work spans some sixty years and includes original work on a diverse range of subjects, from dialectical materialism to architecture, urbanism and the experience of everyday life. *The Production of Space* is his major philosophical work and its translation has been long awaited by scholars in many different fields. The book is a search for a reconciliation between mental space (the space of the philosophers) and real space (the physical and social spheres in which we all live). In the course of his exploration, Henri Lefebvre moves from metaphysical and ideological considerations of the meaning of space to its experience in the everyday life of home and city. He seeks, in other words, to bridge the gap between the realms of theory and practice, between the mental and the social, and between philosophy and reality. In doing so, he ranges through art, literature, architecture and economics, and further provides a powerful antidote to the sterile and obfuscatory methods and theories characteristic of much recent continental philosophy. This is a work of great vision and incisiveness. It is also characterized by its author's wit and by anecdote, as well as by a deftness of style which Donald Nicholson-Smith's sensitive translation precisely captures.

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Customer Reviews

"The Production of Space reveals Lefebvre at the height of his powers: imaginative, incisive and immensely suggestive." Derek Gregory, University of British Columbia

Text: French Original Language: English --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

for those exploring the complexity of context (of human settlements) as a basis for design, Lefebvre's philosophical work is the foundation for later writers such as Edward Soja and many others. It is like reading Fritjof Capra's "Turning Point" prior to investigating creative systems and sustainability (a politically over-used term). This work reintroduces the connections between and among the key forces that influence urban form, meaning and structure: the influences of culture, space and time/history--very powerful reminders that we as designers cannot "design" without understanding the complexity of the urban matrix.

thanks!

Anyone interested in political or academic Marxism or in joining their organizing efforts with solid theory should get this book. As a student of post-Marxism, poststructuralism, and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (from Althusser to Žižek I guess you could say), I can appreciate Lefebvre's solid body of theory. Unlike many other theorists (Baudrillard, for example), Lefebvre connects his theory to direct, concrete practice in the real world and skewers other academics who are prone to oblivious abstraction. Some theories cheaply "apply" their theories to examples, but Lefebvre actually has an object in mind (capitalist space and revolutionary space) when outlining his considerable argument, which he compares to Marx's project in *Capital*. Whereas Marx uncovered the "secret of the commodity" and all of the implications of its denuding, Lefebvre's task is to describe, as precisely as possible, the theoretical and pragmatic aspects of the production of (social) space, not as a mere empty container to be filled with content, but something that is made by society. The result is a compelling toolbox for analyzing the spaces around us. Most summaries of Lefebvre emphasize perceived (visual) space, conceived (abstract) space, and lived (concrete, physical, actual) space. There are other schemata that are important in the whole argument. For example, there are induced/minimal and produced/maximal differences within a system of spatial practice. Similar patterns apply to more "contradictions within space." This all sounds a bit abstract but I am only outlining a few of the broad terms that might give a brief hint at the larger scope for anyone looking to do more research on this.

Although there are some (many, with some qualification) brilliant ideas in this book, I found that the

density is not justified. It goes into the classification of a book that must have sounded more brilliant in French. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is at least four stars in that category. Not recommended for aspiring philosophers, although on the other hand it might be useful to someone very patient. Unlike John Dewey, it is not impossible to find brilliance here. It just won't necessarily pay off for generating your own ideas.

"In the beginning was the Topos. Before - long before - the advent of the Logos, in the chiaroscuro realm of primitive life, lived experience already possessed its internal rationality; this experience was producing long before thought space, and spatial thought, began reproducing the projection, explosion, image and orientation of the body." (p. 174) In Henri Lefebvre's terms, living things "produce" space simply by moving. What he meant was that an animal's or plant's "gestures," that is, the movements of its body relative to other things, create new spatial relationships of left and right, above and below, in front and behind, inside and outside. Of course these spaces are all created within another, larger Topos including things that do not move on their own, and others that do -- what we call the natural environment. The human beings must adapt themselves to it (when they run into immovable objects) as they try to adapt it to themselves. In short, humans had to domesticate their environment, beginning perhaps by domesticating each other - establishing the hierarchies and other rules that made it easier for them to live together -- and then domesticating some plants and animals, long before they had sufficient experience to reflect on what they were doing or its probable consequences. Brilliant.

Lefebvre intended to use the marxist concept of 'production' to space, and to analyze it from this perspective, which would have produced a very interesting book. Unfortunately, in his florid style that mixes between analysis and metaphors, Lefebvre failed to do this, and instead produced a work which is not devoid of some 'illuminating' ideas, but doesn't carry the idea to its end, nor does it address for instance the function of individual property and its transformations through different epochs, as a fundamental component in the analysis of the production of space.

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