

# Lefebvre's Spatial Philosophy and Representation in American-Jewish Bildungsroman

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Lefebvre's triadic process consists of the relationship between "spatial practice", "representations of space", and "representational spaces". This spatial triad as a unity describes how space is produced within society. Interestingly, Lefebvre's space is closely related to the process of Jewish youth's growing up when we put Lefebvre's triad into American-Jewish Bildungsroman, in which spatial practice is related to the repetitive routines of everyday places and private life, and it is, in a large sense, an abstract process linking to the complicated relationships of ethnicity, gender, class, etc., while representations of space are the "real" lived space and representational spaces are a metaphorical and symbolic one, which is similar to Foucault's space of power, under the function of which the Jewish protagonist goes gradually and paradoxically into the subject.

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In describing how space is produced within society, Lefebvre suggests that we should consider what he calls a triadic process, which consists of the relationship between "spatial practice", "representations of space", and "representational spaces" (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 33). When Lefebvre's spatial triad is put into analysis of the subject's production within the social space, we have to consider such aspects as: what is the spatial triad embodied in the American-Jewish Bildungsroman, and how the triadic space consists of the spatial logic of the subject's growing up, etc. Before these questions are in detailed discussion, Lefebvre's triadic space is first of all decoded from spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces.

## Lefebvre's Philosophic Thinking of Triadic Spaces

In Lefebvre's eyes, space is not a dead, inert thing or object, but organic, fluid, and alive. It has a pulse, and palpates, flows, and collides with other spaces. Lefebvre works through these dilemmas himself by putting forward a complex heuristic concept—"spatial triad", which builds the central epistemological pillar of his *The Production of Space*. Whether unfortunately or fortunately, he sketches it out in preliminary fashion, and leaves us to add our own flesh and to rewrite it as part of our own understanding and interpretation. Notwithstanding this fact, one thing he is sure of is that there are "three elements" but not two: spatial practices, representations of space, and representational space, which inter-relates in a dialectically linked triad. It is not, he emphasizes, about a simple binary between lived and conceived, but a "triple determination" and each instance internalizes and takes on meaning through other instances.

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For Lefebvre, “the spatial practice of a society secretes that society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interactions; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it” (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 38). It is associated with the production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets of characteristics of each social formation, which can be revealed by “deciphering” space and have close affinities with perceived space, particularly with everyday world and its space. Thus spatial practices embody a close connection of the space of everyday life with the space of the broader social and urban reality, including routes and networks and patterns of interaction that link up the places set aside for growth, study, work, play, and leisure. It ensures continuity and some degree of cohesiveness and implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance. Here, cohesiveness does not imply coherence, and Lefebvre is vague about the precise manner in which spatial practices mediate between representations of space and representational of spaces, about how spatial practices keep the conceived space and the lived space together.

Representations of space refer to conceptualized space, the space constructed by assorted professionals and technocrats including planners, engineers, developers, architects, urbanists, geographers, and a certain type of artist with a scientific bent (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 38). Lefebvre says that it is a space which is conceived, and invariably ideology, power, and knowledge are embedded in this representation of space. It is the dominant space of any society because it is intimately “tied to the relations of production and to the ‘other’ which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, signs, codes, and ‘frontal’ relations” (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 33), which, Lefebvre believes, plays a “substantial role and a specific influence in the production of space” (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 42).

Lefebvre describes Representations of space as embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, and sometimes not linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art. He goes on to suggest that representational spaces are

[S]pace as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of “inhabitants” and “users,” but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 39)

Such spaces, therefore, are not sites as such but temporal situations, events, which occur in particular places that open up the possibilities of resistance within society to certain marginal groups or social classes.

Representational spaces are practices associated its places that have their origins in the realities of that everyday life, and in particular, through the realm of the imagination, not immediate to the natural attitude, in resistance to the mundane and alienating features of everyday existence. In that sense, they contain a utopian element in the form of a desire for some form of improvement of change within society. Representational spaces involve making use of sites that have been left behind or left out as fragments produced by the tensions within the contradictory space of capitalism that lies hidden by its representations of space. The use of sites whose attributed meaning leaves them somewhat ambivalent and uncertain allows for these spaces, according to Lefebvre, to offer a vantage point from which the production of space can be made visible and be critically viewed. Representational space is the experiential realm that conceived and ordered space will try to intervene in, rationalize, and ultimately usurp. On the whole, architects, planners, developers, and others, are, willy-nilly, active in this very pursuit.

### Interrelations Between Lefebvre's Triadic Spaces

Relations between the conceived-perceived-lived are interconnected and not completely stable, so that "the subject, the individual member of a given social group, may move from one to another without confusion—so much is a logical necessity" (Soja, 1996, pp. 67-68). So it is in this sense that Lefebvre's triad loses its political and analytical resonance if it gets treated merely in the abstract. It needs to be embodied with actual flesh and blood and culture, with real life relationships and events. Lefebvre knows too well that the social space of lived experience gets crushed and vanquished by an abstract conceived space. Representations of space are abstract, while they have an important role in social and political practice. The established relations between objects and subjects in represented space will sooner or later be broken up because of their lack of consistency, while representational spaces, on the other hand, follow no rules of consistency and cohesiveness. In the modern society, what is lived and perceived is of secondary importance when compared with what is conceived. And what is conceived is usually an objective abstraction, an oppressive objective abstraction, which renders less significant both conscious and unconscious levels of lived experience. Conceptions, it seems, rule our lives, sometimes for the good, but more often, give the structure of society, to our detriment.

In a like vein, abstract space has a very real social existence. It gains objective expression in different buildings, places, activities, and modes of social intercourse over and through space. Just as abstract labor denies true concrete labor, abstract space likewise denies true concrete qualitative space: It denies the generation of what Lefebvre calls differential space: a space which does not look superficially different, but is different, different to its very core. It is different because it celebrated particularly—both bodily and experiential. Hence abstract space is not just the repressive economic and political space of the bourgeoisie; it is also, Lefebvre suggests, a repressive male space which finds its representation in the "phallic erectility" of towers and skyscrapers, symbols of force, of male fertility, and of masculine violence. Insofar as abstract space is formal, homogeneous, and quantitative, it erases all differences that originate in the body like sex and ethnicity or else reifies them for its own quantitative ends. True differential space is a burden. It cannot, and must not, be allowed to flourish by the powers that be. It places unacceptable demands on accumulation and growth.

In response, Lefebvre invokes the lived and perceived over the conceived. Or, perhaps more accurately, he seeks to transcend their factitious separation under modern society. Here Lefebvre's earlier invectives on alienation and everyday life, first expounded in *Critique of Everyday Life—Volume One*, enter the discussion. There, Lefebvre stresses the dialectical nature of everyday life. It is the realm, he said, which is colonized by the commodity and so is shrouded in all manners of mystification. At the same time, it remains a primal site of meaningful social resistance. Everyday life thus becomes the "inevitable starting point for the realization of the possible" (Lefebvre, 1971, p. 35). Everyday life, in other words, internalizes all three moments of Lefebvre's spatial triad; it is a space, and the only space which brings "wisdom, knowledge and power to judgment" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 6). He wants everyday life and everyday space—urban representational space—to be reclaimed for itself, reclaimed as a decisive lived moment. Lived moments somehow have to disalienate the everyday. They involve collective and individual rituals of resistance; they would be serious and playful; indeed, they should be luminous festivals of the people. The reassertion of the *spatialized body* in critical thought is a first step towards Lefebvre's reconciliation between personhood and organization, between thinking and living. "Space", he said, "does not consist in the projection of an intellectual representation, does

not arise from the visible-readable realm, but it is first of all heard (listened to) and enacted (through physical gestures and movements)" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 8).

For Lefebvre, it is the task of acts of resistance, in such spaces, to make space as a whole visible, and in so doing reveal the social relations of power that operate within society. In this account, activities associated with the production of representational spaces are displaced, such that marginality is let free; and marginal groups, marginal practices, and marginal ways of thinking help produce the meaning of the sites that are used in the creation of representational space. However, the point that Lefebvre misses is that spaces of resistance are also spaces of alternative modes of ordering; they have their own codes, rules, and symbols and they generate their own relations of power. This interplay between resistance and ordering is crucial to understanding the spatiality of the ghetto. Lefebvre's representational spaces are marginal spaces but they are counter hegemonic spaces of freedom. The main problem with Lefebvre's approach is that he does not allow for a relationship between freedom and order within these representational spaces, but wants to see them solely as spaces of freedom and resistance.

### **Space in American-Jewish Literature Concerning with Bildung**

What about the space in literature? Clearly, places and sites in literary texts will be found in every guise: enclosed, described, projected, dream of, and speculated about, which can be, to a large extent, seen as representations of space of reality. Celine uses everyday language to great effect to evoke the space of Paris, of the Parisian *banlieue*, or of Africa. Plato, in the *Critias* and elsewhere, offers marvelous descriptions of cosmic space, and of the space of the city as a reflection of the Cosmos. The inspired De Quincey pursuing the shadow of the woman of his dreams through the streets of London, and Baudelaire in his *Tableaux parisiens*, offer us accounts of urban space rivaling those of Victor Hugo and Lautreamont. Inasmuch as they deal with socially "real" space, one might suppose on first consideration that architecture and texts relating to architecture would be a better choice than literary texts proper.

According to Lefebvre's spatial theory, subject is also the production of the space. However, before the production or formation of the subject in the space, the space for subject's growth should be first produced. The process of interaction between the subject and space is similar to Lefebvre's spatial triadic process. As far as man's growth is concerned, the triadic process embodies a complicated social relation. The Jewish people involves in more complicated social relations between ethnicity, gender, and class, which unfold through the subject's body behavior of escape and intrusion in the space of realistic life, which is, in fact, Lefebvre's representation of space when it is conceptualized in the literary works. Under the functions of power, any space has its symbolic meaning. In this sense, representational space is symbolized representation of space. With the transformation of representation of space into representational space, the spatial practice of body behavior of escape and intrusion will emerge. Taking home as instance, home is, in its original sense of representation, a comfortable space for shelter, safety, living, etc., but it will become the "prison" which limits the subject's freedom. "Prison" is symbolic space of home, so the representational "prison" is representation of home. The process of spatial escape and intrusion is in fact the process of the production of space for growing up. The process of interaction between the space and the subject is the spatial logic of subject formation. Lefebvre points out that

young children can perhaps live in a space of this kind, with its indifference to age and sex and even to time itself, but adolescence perforce suffers from it, for it cannot discern its own reality therein: it furnishes no male or female images nor any images or possible pleasure. Inasmuch as adolescents are unable to challenge either the dominant system's imperious

architecture or its deployment of signs, it is only by way of revolt that they have any prospect of recovering the world of differences—the natural, the sensory/sensual, sexuality and pleasure. (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 50)

In the road from the individual to the subject in the American-Jewish Bildungsroman, the spatial logic is mainly embodied by Jewish protagonist's frequent behaviors of escaping from and intruding into the typical representations of space of ghetto, family or school and urban street, which are symbolized as the representational spaces of struggle, revolt, and liberation. This logic, to a large extent, forms the Jewish protagonist's growing spatial circle from birth to childhood and adolescence, and then to adulthood.

Lefebvre uses the *body* to seek to understand the three moments of social space. He puts that “all the more so inasmuch as the relationship to space of a ‘subject’ who is a member of a group or society implies his relationship to his own body and vice versa” (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 40). In American-Jewish bildungsroman, the Jewish protagonist's bodily lived experience may be both highly complex and peculiar for the intervention of Jewish culture, with its illusory immediacy, via symbolisms and via the long Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is in this sense that Lefebvre elevates the body to a central position in the social space:

The whole of (social) space proceeds from the body, even though it so metamorphizes the body that it may forget it altogether—even though it may separate itself so radically from the body as to kill it. The genesis of a far-away order [the state? the global?] can be accounted for only on the basis of the order that is nearest to us—namely, the order of the body. Within the body itself, spatially considered, the successive levels constituted by the sense (...) prefigure the layers of social space and their interconnections. The passive body (the sense) and the active body (labour) converge in space. (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 405)

Lefebvre asserts that “today the body establishing itself firmly” beyond the philosophy, discourse, and the theory of discourse. A new critical theory and metaphilosophy is “carrying reflexion on the subject and the object beyond the old concepts”, and “has re-embraced the body along with space, in space, and as the generator (or producer) of space”. “The living body”, he goes further, “being at once ‘subject’ and ‘object,’ cannot tolerate such conceptual division (of the mental and the social space)” (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 407).

### Conclusion

What the spatialized subject should first do is to identify a certain space as “mine”, which is a necessity for self-identification and social-identification. Once an individual with the subjective consciousness obtains a feeling of position or space in which he can take free activities, he has established his subject identity. American-Jewish *Bildung* is the special and common process of an individual going toward the subject under the functions of space on the axis of time. Then we should therefore have to discuss such questions as how an Jewish individual completes this significant process, how he captures or inhabits his vital social space, and how he gets his subject's identity in the complicated or even hostile spatial environments. When these questions are put into the discussion of Jewry as a space-exiled people, they become more complicated for the interlocking social elements of ethnicity, gender, class, etc.

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