

Appropriation (of space)

The expression 'appropriation of space' is at the basis of central notions in geography (as in other disciplines that take space into account), such as territory, heritage, public space, segregation, planning, and so on, though the expression is rarely defined and discussed in depth. It is all the more deserving of being so discussed because it is an expression that is both omnipresent and polysemous, moving from the ideal to the material and from the individual to the collective. It is also very much a connotative term, with the particularity that the normative charges of the two main bundles of meaning it covers are opposed. On the one hand, the registers of acquisition, of taking possession (exclusive allocation, possession or use), often denounced as monopolisation, confiscation and dispossession of others; on the other, the registers of exploration, internalisation, mastery of new spaces (or new uses), or of adapting space (or its uses) to one's needs, registers that are generally praised as self-accomplishment, autonomisation or even emancipation.

The use of the lexicon of appropriation in the humanities and social sciences is to be situated in a Marxist genealogy, as concerns both of these bundles of meaning. With the young Marx, following Hegel, appropriation is opposed to alienation: it is the re-appropriation of oneself (of the human essence) through praxis, through work. With his critique of political economy, this meaning does not disappear, since alienation is here dispossession of the means of production and subsistence, which makes their collective appropriation the main means of emancipation. Yet to speak of collective appropriation (by the workers) is to oppose it to a privative appropriation, that of the means of production, of the commodities, and the benefits of sale in this process, by the capitalists.

The application of this Marxist filiation to the notion of space was mainly the work of Henri Lefebvre, with his books on everyday life, the rural and the urban, and of course *La production de l'espace* (1974): "*Of a natural space modified to serve the needs and possibilities of a group, it can be said that this group appropriates it*" (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 192). While appropriation retains its materialist content, it is opposed to the (destructive) 'domination' of nature. It gives content to 'inhabiting' (vs. 'habitat'), as an adaptation of its space by the family group, and is extended to the city as a 'work' that must be collectively reappropriated. Lefebvre denounces everything that alienates and dispossesses the inhabitants of their space - the eviction of the working classes to the periphery of cities, authoritarian urbanism, the privatisation of space by capitalist forces, etc. - and demands "*The right to the city*". Talking about appropriation allows him to analyse the strategies and struggles for (social) space and its production.

The 1970s saw the spread of this expression in the human and social sciences, with multiplied meanings, as evidenced by (and reinforced by) a colloquium organised by specialists in 'environmental' or 'spatial' psychology, which also welcomed sociologists, ethnologists, architects, etc., but no geographers (Korosek-Serfaty, 1973). Although social structures are not absent, as Henri Reymond states, "it is impossible to talk about this appropriation without referring to the way it is practiced and experienced differently in each society" (p. 78) or as Paul-Henri Chombart de Lauwe wrote, declaring that "the power of a few is opposed to the appropriation of space by all" (p. 26), psychological definitions and aspects (cognitive, affective, identity-related, etc.) are privileged. This psycho- or micro-sociological filiation will give an important place to the notion, but it is then linked or even subordinated to the territorial lexicon coming from ethnologists and taken up by Edward Hall and/or Erwing Goffman.

Conversely, Pierre Bourdieu only uses it by articulating it in a structural perspective. In *Distinction*, he makes use of the opposition between material appropriation (exclusive possession) and symbolic appropriation (perception, distinctive use), which for some classes or fractions of classes is only a substitute for the former. The notion is fundamental to his understanding of physical space as a reified 'social space'. It is the appropriation of scarce and localised goods that constitutes them as (social) property and its exclusivity that allows them to be used as capital. We can therefore understand the importance of the struggles for the appropriation of space, the title of a part of the summary of the well-known text "*Site Effects*" (1993), the mediation through which social competitions and different forms of power are translated and objectified in physical space.

In the fields of action on space - architecture, urbanism, planning - the reference to appropriation is more topical than ever, in a context where Lefebvre's thought is making a strong comeback around the debates and movements for the 'right to the city'. It converges there with the discourse on the participation of the inhabitants and the empowerment, which nobody seems to want to translate by emancipation.

At a time when exclusive forms of appropriation manifest and reinforce the increase in social inequalities, we are on the positive side of 'living together', of an appropriation that would allow everyone, especially in the working classes, to have a place, while being implicated collectively. But the reference to appropriation also accompanies the rise of ideologies of security and it legitimises the distancing and collective control of a space: this is how we speak of appropriation in relation to 'residentialization' in social housing 'neighbourhoods'.

Of course, geography has not remained aloof from these uses. On the contrary, it has been involved since the 1970s, particularly with the work on 'lived space' and then 'social geography'. However, the fact that such a notion is still often absent from the entries in the

discipline's dictionaries, even though it is present in a number of cases, such as in the *le Dictionnaire de la géographie et de l'espace des sociétés* is indicative of an unthought-out situation. This paradox is compounded by the undisputed success of territorial (and heritage) lexicon since the 1990s.

We propose to use a typology (Ripoll, Veschambre, 2005) based on a triadic approach to the modes of existence of social processes:

- 1) forms of appropriation that are predominantly material, with an exclusive or private side (monopoly of access to resources) that is often accompanied by the enclosure of space, and a functional side (autonomous use) that includes diversion, adaptation to one's own ends, and often implies a transformation, a development;
- 2) forms of appropriation that are predominantly ideal and subjective, which can be broken down into cognitive appropriation (theoretical learning or internalisation through familiarisation), affective appropriation (attachment to the place) and 'existential' appropriation leading to feel of being in the right place, like being at home
- 3) forms of appropriation that are predominantly ideal but more or less strongly objectified and institutionalised, and which refer to the processes of 'statutory' attribution of a portion or category of space to an individual, a group or a social category, with legal modalities (not reducible to private property) as well as others that are more symbolic or identity-based, objectified in language but also, very often, in material markings (signage, objects, bodies, architecture, etc.).

In the same way that appropriation and the claim to appropriation should not be confused, these different modalities must be distinguished in order to better articulate them, and to make them work with their antonyms or corollaries such as dispossession, expropriation ('déguepissement'), assignment, but also the public or the common, or other concepts that are strongly associated with it such as use, marking, categorisation and (de)valorisation.

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