

The Pyrenees as place: Lefebvre as guide

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Abstract: Geographers have taken a portion of the voluminous writings of the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre and put them at the center of current disciplinary debates about space and place. In doing so they have constructed an intellectual biography of Lefebvre that highlights his connection to the Pyrenees region of southwestern France. The theoretical arguments of Lefebvre are often translated to fit within disciplinary themes, and the biographical elements are interpolated to give an experiential or lived basis to the theory. Lefebvre's geographical interpretation of his ancestral region in a popular text, *Pyrénées*, gives additional and alternative insights into his complicated relationship to this region and the difficulties of representing place and region. This text illustrates both elements of Lefebvre's social theory and classical geographical themes about narrating place and region.

Key words: Henri Lefebvre, identity construction, narrative strategy, Pyrenees, place.

I 'Il n'y a plus de Pyrénées' (‘The Pyrenees are no more’)¹

Such seeming hyperbole has been used to express the figurative fate of a mountain range significant in European history and storied as a source of the independent spirit of its peoples. The Basque, the Bearnais, the Gascons, the Aragonese and other traditional cultures contribute to its lore as a place of cultural isolation and diversity. The once-controversial tunnel at Somport, which adds a new way of penetrating the center of the Pyrenees, is yet another step in the reduction of this visually impressive and historically important barrier. The tunnel's significance pales, however, in comparison to

the geopolitical shifts associated with the expansion and influence of the European Union.

As with other mountain regions of the developed world, the Pyrenees have been tamed by communication and transportation technologies that make isolation more self-imposed than geographically mandated, traditional peasant cultures part of a national and global culture, and local landscapes into landscapes of national and international recreation and tourism. The still impressive fortifications that now stand silent guard over the passes seem more quaint than fierce, reminders of an age of jealousy and zealously guarded European borders and movements

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of masses of foot soldiers. An imposing material symbol of this transformation is the massive and grand train station at Canfranc, where a station fitting a major urban center sprawls almost the entire length of the small town that gave it its name. The imposing symbolism of the frontier and the state appears ludicrous to the small numbers of backpackers, skiers and the simply curious who walk its long hallways.

This transformation is never absolute, and the step-by-step evolution has not been as straightforward as many theories suggest. Indeed local identities and traditions live on in rural and mountain regions, and local identities are part of a complex *mélange* of identities, local, ethnic, linguistic, mixed with regional, national and European (Reed-Danahay, 1996). No doubt the presence of the Basque and their linguistic and political

distinctiveness has prolonged the perception of the isolation of the Pyrenees, but the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the recreational facilities being built along the Atlantic coast and in the mountains, and the regionalist initiatives of the EU are several among many signs of greater integration.

Such a place (Figure 1) would seem a marvelous laboratory for the geographer and the social scientist recording the transformations of modern life. For the geographer it offers all the complications of a modern place that can be combined with a rich and complex cultural history. However, the Pyrenees live in the figurative shadow of the better-known Alps, in the popular geographical imagination as measured by relative tourist appeal as well as in the scientific mind as the center of European mountain research.

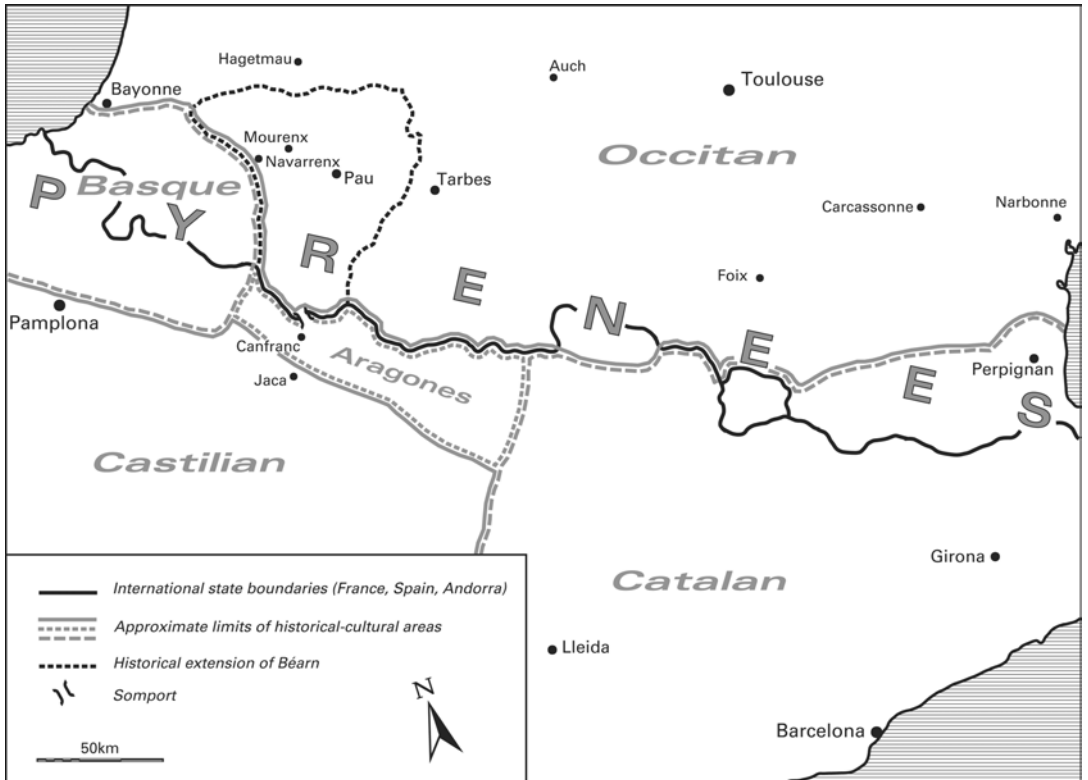


Figure 1 Historical cultural-linguistic areas in the Pyrenees

In the circumscribed world of Anglophone human geography, however, the Pyrenees have reappeared. They have entered the geographical literature through an unusual route, in descriptions of the long life and prolific writings of the Marxist theorist, sociologist, philosopher and peripatetic French intellectual Henri Lefebvre. While not a professional geographer, Lefebvre has gained the close attention of many within the discipline. The adoption of Lefebvre as a geographic authority figure by some geographers has been remarkably rapid and substantial. Their enthusiasm for this enigmatic intellectual may be seen in Michael Dear's (1997: 49) statement: 'There is scarcely a project in theoretical human geography within the past two decades that has remained untouched (consciously or otherwise) by Lefebvre's problematic.' As Dear (1994: 18) notes in another venue, the translation of Lefebvre's *The production of space* has led to a 'veritable industry of Lefebvrian analyses.' Lefebvrian thought has achieved such currency and ease of travel that even those critical of the hegemony of 'Euro-American' political ideas claim special dispensation for Lefebvre whose views have the ability to be 'deployed transnationally given the necessary sensitivity to social and political specificities' (Slater, 2002: 271). Thus, the image created in much of the geographic tribute to Lefebvre is of a man whose ideas capture the spirit of both the center and the periphery and thus avoid the ethnocentric and hegemonic tendencies that postcolonial theorists uncover in the roots of western discourse.

In this paper we explore the role of place and region in Lefebvre's thought. His geographical biography has been an important part of his myth-like status within geography. Indeed there has been an implication of authenticity given to the idea that this intellectual has lived in the same relation of periphery and center that his theory incorporates and uses. Such a conflation is conducive to the construction of heroic narratives within disciplinary power struggles, but they inevitably do

injustice to the complexities of biography, and in this case to geography. The complex Pyrenean region, the full dimensions of which are only hinted at in this introduction, provided both a source and an obstacle to theory. Those that seek to elevate the theory to a dominant position in geography and to implicate the life of its author in establishing its legitimacy, run the risk of oversimplifying each. They would do well to examine the complexities of the place, Lefebvre's relation to the place, and his attempt to represent its rich cultural tapestries. Place narratives give us some insight into this relation, and the one place narrative of the Pyrenees that Lefebvre (1965) produced has been surprisingly absent from the geographical literature about his life and work (for a recent exception, see Elden, 2004: 127–57). It is our goal to add dimensionality to this geographical biography and to demonstrate the intellectual challenges of writing about one's place, even for an imaginative and capable writer such as Lefebvre.

Related to this question is the more general issue of the intellectual legacy of Lefebvre. His seemingly boundless intellectual curiosity, prolific publication and prolixity are legendary. He was an imaginative writer whose current appeal is in part related to his difficult-to-categorize and attractively nondogmatic Marxism. Indeed his legacy in geography is largely the product of one, possibly two, book(s) out of almost 70 that he authored. The breadth and adventuresome quality of his writings suggest that there are probably a multiplicity of views that characterize portions of his work. He explored different forms of writing for different themes, and this experimental quality provides even more reason for the geographer to consider the variety of his geographical representations. Such an exploration will expose a more complex and less easily packaged, transported and reproduced geographical perspective than is apparent in contemporary geographical debates. We seek to demonstrate that the theoretical reductionism of space and place that has followed

from the Lefebvrian influence in geography diminishes both the conceptual richness of geographical writing and the exploratory quality of Lefebvre's published work. Lefebvre is best viewed as a theoretical guide who offers geographers various alternative routes toward geographical representation, but no clear path. Lefebvre's description of his ancestral region provides a useful illustration of this variety.

II Lefebvre: the construction of a life

The biographical statements that have appeared about the life and thought of this recently discovered intellectual icon of geography has brought the Pyrenees into the story of modern geography. Indeed, Soja's (1991) eulogy for Lefebvre offers a geographic explanation of his thought. It is the movement from core to periphery, from Paris to the Pyrenees, that gives Lefebvre the incredibly flexible geographical 'positionality' of insider/outsider, marxist/maverick, center/periphery that shaped his impressively large corpus of work. In his contribution to the growing Lefebvrian hagiography, Andrew Merrifield (2002: 129) writes about Lefebvre's love of 'festivals of the people' and describes Lefebvre as 'the Catholic boy from the Pyrénées-Atlantiques who integrated rural festal traditions into a modern industrial and urban context, and then affirmed them as a prospective Marxist political practice'. In the great bulk of Lefebvre's writings, Soja, Merrifield and others find an alternative vision, a link between the old and new Left, a resolution of the intellectual separation of the materialism and the idealism of the everyday. For Merrifield (2002: 128), Lefebvre is the source of a 'lingua franca' of opposition much needed by today's Left. This view appears in part shaped by the geographical construction of a Lefebvrian biography in which a man born in the southern periphery of France, refined and tested in the intellectual wars of Paris, brings fresh insight to challenge the dogmas of twentieth-century social thought.

Lefebvre's personal connection to the Pyrenees has become part of the new disciplinary lore about his circumstances as an intellectual. Lefebvre was born in 1901 in the southwestern French town of Hagetmau, which is just a short distance north of the city of Pau where he died in a hospital in 1991. At the time of his death he was living in the Béarnais town of Navarrenx, on the edge of Pays Basques, where he was residing in the family home of his part-Basque mother. Although raised primarily in Brittany and schooled in the Paris region and later because of illness in Aix-en-Provence, he maintained ties with his mother's home region for much of his life. He used the family residence in Navarrenx as a refuge and a *maison secondaire* (vacation home) when seeking respite from the intensely social, political and intellectual world of Paris. It had been a place of summer vacations in his youth, and he maintained the connection for the duration of his life.

Soja creates a poetic harmony or aesthetic in the spatial and temporal rhythms of Lefebvre's life. His was an existence that almost spanned an entire century and that displayed a physical and intellectual synchronicity between center and periphery. For Soja (1996: 7), Lefebvre was 'a refined barbarian, a Parisian peasant from the Occitanian forelands of the Pyrenees'. The Paris/Occitania or Paris/Navarrenx tension 'echoed' Lefebvre's interest in conflict between conceived and lived space, as well as between representation of space and the space of representation, hot spaces and cool spaces (Soja 1996: 30). Lefebvre was for Soja (1996: 33) 'the centered peripheral', a view given substance by Lefebvre's (1975: 60) own interest in displaying his 'outsider' credentials. This attitude is best expressed in Lefebvre's (1975: 60) own words: 'I am Occitan, that is to say, peripheral – and global.'

This meridional view is clearly as self-consciously important to Lefebvre as Soja suggests. Soja (1996: 29) accepts Lefebvre's self-representation as someone who is at

the same time 'peripheral and central', but who 'takes sides with the periphery'. Soja (1996: 29–30) quotes from Lefebvre's autobiographical *Le temps des méprises* (1975: 134): 'I have known life in peasant communities, been among mountain people. . . [but] Parisianism, with all its sophistications, is no stranger to me'. What Lefebvre (1975: 134) refers to as the 'lived contradiction' between these two geographic poles became for Soja the experiential basis for Lefebvre's thought. Soja finds in this dialectic of center-periphery the echo of the tension between conceived and lived and the source of Lefebvre's frequently expressed concern with what he saw as the constant struggle between regions of power and regions of resistance. The connection is theoretically tidy, but probably too tidy.

This idea of a creative tension between the poles of Paris and Occitania as an account of the dynamic of Lefebvre's thought is not as frequently noted by other, nongeographer commentators on Lefebvre's work. This absence could be explained in part by acknowledging different interests that guide the work of different specialists and the seeming necessity for authors to concentrate on only certain aspects of Lefebvre's extraordinarily large body of work. However, even his biographer, writing while Lefebvre was still alive, makes little of this geographic tension (Hess, 1988; see also Shields, 1999). Most often, commentators recall the Pyrenean origin of Lefebvre, implying some significance to this fact, but rarely specifying it in concrete terms. Such references act above all to locate Lefebvre in time and space, as illustrated by C. Bernié-Boissard (1994: 14): 'Born in the Pyrenees, Henri Lefebvre has participated in all of the adventures of the century.' One could argue with Soja's insistence on the creative tension between Paris and Occitania by suggesting that its role was primarily that of extending the intellectual reach of Soja's concept of 'thirdspace'. However, it is evident that Lefebvre himself consciously provided the ingredients for such

a geographic interpretation and helped to nurture it.

In his autobiography, Lefebvre (1975) places his experience within the perspective of a dialectic relation between thought and life. It is an introductory theme that is recurrent throughout the text. His style is one that does not shrink from the multiple contradictions that formed the weave of his experience. However, his invocations of his experiences of Pyrenean life are primarily incidental, instances of more general themes. He does not hide from this theme, but rather, as Soja notes, seeks to highlight his capacity to place himself in the position of someone on the periphery of the centers of power. The Pyrenees function as a geographical symbol of a counterpoint to a more dominant, metropolitan world-view. Lefebvre's relatively few words (when set in the context of his entire corpus) about his life in the Pyrenees give the impression that he had a real attachment and affection for the place, especially its natural elements but also its many and varied regional cultures. The Pyrenees region constitutes, as is repeated many times in his work, a privileged terrain of observation that stimulated new perspectives and orientations, for example, his interest in urbanism and his experience of the Béarnais industrial new town of Mourenx (Burgel *et al.* 1987: 56). If the Pyrenees constituted an important reference point in his thought, why do they remain peripheral in his writing? What are the Pyrenees? Why speak of the Pyrenees in explaining his displacement, declaring himself 'occitan' and of Pyrenean origin? Lastly, why are self-identified 'critical human geographers' so notably uncritical in accepting at face value Lefebvre's own version of the origins of his thought? As we shall note, Lefebvre is clearly being strategic in the presentation of his autobiography, using metonymy, synecdoche and positionality to support his political position. Occitania and the Pyrenees are important to Lefebvre, not only in terms of affective, familial ties

but also as elemental components for the construction of a political and intellectual perspective.

III 'Les Pyrénées sont encore là' (‘The Pyrenees are still there’)

Certainly the term ‘Pyrenees’ may be understood as a geographical designation referring to a visually distinctive topographical feature. However, it also applies to an ensemble of regions, a lived space with loosely defined limits surrounding a core population dispersed in the foothills and adjacent valley floors (where one finds Navarrenx). An imposing massif in France, the Pyrenees also include a more topographically expansive Spanish side. The geographical area designated by this place name is understood as having a western component that has a distinctive population, the Basques, who are separated linguistically from the romance-language neighbors. On the French side, Occitania refers to a large territorial ensemble that covers principally the Midi of France, but that is commonly mapped as the maximum historical extension of the dialects of the Occitan language. The Pays Basques are therefore excluded from Occitania as are the Catalan and Castilian linguistic territories.

The relatively recent usage of the term Occitania is linked to the anti-Jacobin political position that valorized a unified Occitan language and the desire to live in the ‘pays’ (homeland). Lefebvre fervently stated his position: ‘It pleases me to say that I am Occitan’, which he understood as allowing him to move easily from a peripheral to a global point of view, literally jumping over ‘Frenchness’ (*francité*) (Lefebvre, 1975: 60). This is a view that one finds expressed in various ways in Lefebvre’s comments about himself, but apparently his escape from ‘Frenchness’ was not as evident to neighbors in Navarrenx with whom this visiting Parisian apparently had relatively little contact (Régulier, 1999).

His Occitanian identity was thus not just a matter of circumstance, but also served

as a provocation. It is a self-consciously constructed and chosen identity, but clearly not an illegitimate one. To use his vocabulary, this identity seems as much conceived as lived. Certainly Lefebvre has some important themes to reclaim from this geographical heritage, his birthplace, his vacation village, his numerous excursions and studies of the Pyrenees, his taste for southwestern forms of sociability, the years of study at Aix-en-Provence, his experiences in Toulouse, and his affinities with other intellectuals from the region, for example Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu. Yet he could have claimed other earlier life experiences as well, such as that his father was Breton, that he received his early education in his father’s home region which Lefebvre described quite appreciatively in his autobiography, that his university life unfolded in Strasbourg and especially in the Parisian region, and that he mastered German but not Occitan. As his widow offered testimony, Lefebvre’s visits to his ancestral village functioned as a vacation site for excursions into the intriguing and sometimes stunning landscapes of the region and as a place to welcome friends who traveled to the area rather than as a reflection of intense solidarity with the local population (Régulier, 1999).

In part the Occitanian identity claimed by Lefebvre may be seen as arising from political movements that developed in France after the second world war, and especially in the 1970s. As a mixture of conceived and lived, but more the former than the latter, Lefebvre’s claimed identity must be used with prudence. It is tempting to exploit his demonstration of the tensions that this identity induces, but it is still necessary to pay attention to its retrospectively constructed aspects and its selective uses. Also, one hears in these claims echoes of postmodernism. However, would it be wrong to invert the claims about being Occitanian and speaking from the periphery? Would it be wrong to describe Lefebvre as a Frenchman, a Parisian who knowingly used the elements of Occitan identities, inherited or acquired, to establish

for his own purposes an important distance in addressing the center (Paris), from where he spoke?

It is important here to draw attention to a frequently neglected aspect of his thought. Lefebvre (1937; 1990) was interested in questions surrounding the concepts of nationalism, nation, patriotism and citizenship. Against an almost sacred, uniform and occasionally Stalinist internationalism that dominated the Left in the postwar period and that undermined the significance of nation and nationalism, Lefebvre sought to hold on to these ideas as concrete forms of life nourished and developed in the womb of *la vie quotidienne* (everyday life).

As noted by C. Bernié-Boissard (1994: 17), Lefebvre makes a distinction between a nation *en soi* (in itself) expressed by nationalism and a nation *pour soi* (for itself) expressed as a community of spirit composed of formal individuals who could become real. Abstract and 'pure' individuals were of little interest to Lefebvre compared with real actors whose lives intersected with real places. This emphasis on the everyday lives of social actors is what creates a potential link between Lefebvre's approach and a place perspective (Berdoulay and Entrikin, 1998; Sack, 1997). Soja (1996: 40, n18) indirectly notes this in stating that the geographer's concept of place is incorporated in Lefebvre's *la vie quotidienne* (everyday life) but he concludes from this that place is largely irrelevant for understanding Lefebvre's potential contribution to geographic thought. However, as political expression passes into the exercise of citizenship, the place perspective confers an active dimension to the individual subject and opens the possibility of a change and transformation in terms of the elements chosen to compose an identity. Lefebvre's position appears to be an illustration of this phenomenon.

This questioning of the uses of Lefebvre's self-described Occitan identity is not intended to undermine the validity of Lefebvre's sentiments or the legitimacy of his work. Rather, it is meant to illuminate how a

geographical biography of Lefebvre would have to take into consideration his complicated relationship to the Pyrenees region, his own varied geographical experience, and his self-conscious construction of this biography. Only some of these elements have been given prominence in geographers' interpretations of his geographical origins. Lefebvre clearly uses identity and his origins in the Pyrenees to his advantage. He was aware of the importance of authorial perspective and the difficulties surrounding it (for a critical perspective on Lefebvre and shifting authorial position see Curry, 1996: 175–206). Lefebvre was skilled as a narrator in the effective uses of metonymy and synecdoche, and the rhetorical power of moving easily among geographical scales (for a discussion of Lefebvre and the construction of geographic scale, see Brenner, 1997).

Lefebvre's use of geographically based identity also helped to foster his frequently assigned role of 'heretic' in relation to modern orthodoxies. The context of Lefebvre's use of this term is found in his description of his own marginalized relationship with the French Communist Party. But this sense of heresy is also 'placed' by Lefebvre in the southwestern region of France and in the history of religious conflict in this region. For example, the struggles surrounding French Catholicism associated with the Cathars and the Protestants helped shape the history of the place and were a part of everyday life for the young Henri. He described himself as the product of the bad domestic mix (*mauvais ménage*) of a pietist, near-Jansenist, Catholic mother and a libertarian, Voltairian father. These religious struggles were an important part of the intellectual development of the young Henri, not only at home but also in school, through the formative teachings of the philosopher Maurice Blondel (Lefebvre, 1975: 19–55). Soja (1996: 31) refers to the part-Basque heritage of Lefebvre's mother and connects this to a maternal home region filled with memories of 'radical regional resistance to centralized state power'. For Lefebvre this

heretical strain appears to have been less a trait of ethnic regionalism than it was a consequence of his youthful encounter and exposure to profound religious conflicts.

Indeed his actual connections to the place fluctuated quite dramatically from an early rejection of the pietism of his mother and his conflation of that spirit with Navarrenx: 'I became disgusted with the village of my mother's birth, Navarrenx' (Lefebvre, 1958: 251; Hess, 1988: 23). However, he gradually came to see another part of the history of this place:

I discovered little by little that this region, in which I endured heavy clerical conformism, had throughout history for about ten centuries nourished and sustained all the heretical currents: From Arianism brought by the Visigoths to the Albigensian and Cathar heresies to Protestantism, to Jansenism. (quoted in Hess, 1988: 24).

The oppressiveness of this religious heritage gradually gave way to the emergence of a 'peripheral view'.

As in most mythologized histories, the conflicts are resolved and in this case one might say dialectically resolved, but such resolutions are more common in print than in real life. For Soja (1996: 31) the 'oscillations between Paris and his home in Navarrenx' were 'regenerative movements' from which 'practically all of Lefebvre's achievements and inspirations can be drawn'. Although it is true that he returned on a regular basis to the home that he had inherited, it was less a response to the pull of the local community than the pull of a rural mountain landscape as a respite from the intense intellectual terrain of Paris. For Lefebvre, Navarrenx was an *espace conçu* (conceived space), a part of his own reconstruction of his place. He apparently had little sentimental attachments to the people or its village way of life (Régulier, 1999). He was, according to his widow, realistic about the spiritual divide between himself and his neighbors in this ancestral town. The fact that he returned there at the time of his death was a pragmatic choice

generated by his wife's concern for his health and their financial situation. Lefebvre was reluctant to leave Paris (Régulier, 1999).

In addition to his oft-repeated geographical biography, Lefebvre's role in contemporary geographic thought is related to both the breadth and the open-ended quality of his copious writings, most notably his discussions of space and of urbanism. His publications are thematically wide-ranging and impressive, but he had a prolix style that makes his theoretical contributions open to wide interpretation (Sayer, 1993: 459). His much-cited theory of the production of space is more accurately described as a metatheory, in which the most useful elements are his categorizations (Lefebvre, 1991). He is also given credit for contributing to the awareness of the socially constructed and politically manipulated nature of human spatial organization. Differences have arisen among interpreters of his tripartite division of space – 'material spatial practices', 'spatial representations', and the 'spaces of representation'; for example, over whether one can understand such spatial practices and constructions in dialectical (or trialectical) terms or as mutually interactive and constitutive aspects of human action and thought (Soja, 1996; Shields, 1999). Others debate the roots of Lefebvre's spatial dialectic in terms of class struggle and gender construction (Blum and Nast, 1996). Researchers have applied these broad categorizations to a wide variety of topics ranging from gentrification (Phillips, 2002) to alterity (Blum and Nast, 1996). The semantic capaciousness of his vocabulary leaves room for both the traditional geographical concern of mediating between the material and the ideal and the current interest in magnifying the role of social relations and power in the creation of the spaces of everyday life. One area of its extension into geographic thought is in discussions of the relation of space and place.

IV Place debates

The discussion of place in the human sciences has grown significantly in recent years,

profiting from a growth of interest among both geographers and other scholars outside the discipline (Casey, 1993; 1996; 2001; Sack, 1997; Berdoulay and Entrikin, 1998; Malpas, 1999; Adams *et al.*, 2001; Entrikin, 2001; Agnew, 2004). Not surprisingly, this growth of interest has been accompanied by a diversity of opinion. In the early twentieth century, place played a role in some of the most significant and long-lasting conceptions of geography. For example, Paul Vidal de la Blache described geography as the science of places rather than of man, and Carl Sauer talked of geography as a science based upon the naïve intuition that people have of the differences among places. The concept of place in these and other early expressions, however, was not the subject of analysis and study, but rather could be viewed almost as a primitive term, one not needing definition, or, in the words of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1996: 259), as something that 'goes without saying'.

In Anglo-American geography the current discussions of place originate in the early statements of humanistic geographers, such as Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) and Edward Relph (1976), who used place as a core concept but who now share the concept with a variety of advocates coming from different schools of geographic thought. Indeed the language of place has become so common in American geography that the disciplinary overview presented by the National Research Council (1997) refers to place as the central geographic concept, but without attribution. Such actions simultaneously reflect and hide a significant sea change in geographic thought in which place has been resurrected in human geography after a century of relative obscurity as the everyday speech term connected intuitively to the much debated concepts of region, space and landscape.

The close connection of place and humanistic geography is evident, if not explicit, in most of these recent formulations. The most obvious sign of this ancestry is the connection of place and self. This formulation, which has

roots in the humanistic geography of the 1970s and in the environmental perception literature of the same era, is quite explicit in the current fascination in cultural and social geography with issues of identity of various sorts, including ethnic, gender and sexual identity. Such presentations have adopted a language of space and place, in which place is generally seen as related to the specific and the particular, and space to the abstract and the general. This division is found in Tuan's (1977) discussion of space and place where place is defined in terms of the sense of place. What has changed is the more explicitly political turn in the analysis of place and self and the emphasis on difference (Claval and Entrikin, 2004).

A sign of this shift to the discussion of place is found in the attempts of neo-Marxists to move beyond structural Marxism to a more cultural Marxism. David Harvey (1990; 1996), for example, has turned dramatically from condemning place studies as a reactionary romanticism to recognizing the need for paying greater attention to place and local culture. For Harvey (1996: 29–39), a more politically appropriate cultural path to place was blazed in the fictional writings of Raymond Williams.

Lefebvre has also been brought into the discussion of place. Geographers are not of one voice, however, in offering Lefebvrian insight into place debates. As a prolific author, he provided sufficient raw material to satisfy most needs and to support many intellectual causes. He is most known in geography for his work on space, but he has written on many subjects in which place and space play no part. Indeed, some have criticized what might be referred to as the 'overspatialization' of Lefebvre's thought by his supporters in disciplines such as geography and urban studies (Shields, 1999; Elden, 2001). Part of the difference of opinion is related to attempts to extend a Lefebvrian perspective to geographic themes not specifically addressed in his voluminous writings. Soja, Lefebvre's most devoted and consistent disciple in

geography, suggests that the vocabulary of space versus place is a distraction in the interpretation of Lefebvre. For Soja (1996: n40), the separation of space and place in Lefebvre is misleading, an unnecessary distinction that reduces the significance of each. Thus Lefebvre's apparent lack of concern for *lieu* (place) need not be bolstered through reinterpretation. Others, however, see value in extending Lefebvre's arguments to include place. Michael Dear pairs Lefebvre and Frederic Jameson as sources for illuminating processes of place-making:

... Lefebvre allows us to understand the process of place-making; and Jameson shows us new ways of postmodern place-making. Only the foolish would ignore these challenges. (Dear, 1997: 67)

The most explicit attempt to frame space and place in Lefebvrian perspective is found in Merrifield's adaptation of his thought. Merrifield's (2002) concepts of space and place derive primarily from Marxist theory, and thus his Lefebvre is less the predecessor to postmodernism and more the mediational figure able to link the traditional Left with the more anarchic Left of the current day by offering a Marxist 'third way'. Merrifield's materialist ontology is an assumed starting point in his discussion of place. Thus, space and place are 'conceived as the embodiment of real material properties' and not separable in terms of concrete/abstract (Merrifield, 1993a: 103). Not surprisingly, this distinction is put into the vocabulary of dialectical processes and relies on Harvey's idiosyncratic use of the traditional philosophical absolute/relative space distinction and his previously mentioned rediscovery of place through Raymond Williams' references to places as sites of resistance (Merrifield, 1993a: 103). For Merrifield (1993b: 525), place is the 'moment' when the conceived, the perceived, and the lived attain a certain 'structured coherence'.

An interesting element of this renarration of the history of geographic thought through a Lefebvrian lens is the inference about

Lefebvre's conception of place and his own understanding of the role of the philosopher/sociologist in the understanding and conceptualizing of place. However, Lefebvre's (1965) only real contribution to place studies was that of a popular text written about his own ancestral place. This work, *Pyrénées*, bears little relation to the 'structured coherence' referred to above and instead resembles the geographer's place narratives (Entrikin, 1991; Berdoulay and Entrikin, 1998). It is related to his dissertation on the Vallée de Campan but written in a more accessible and less compendious fashion than this earlier work. It is an attractive book, interestingly written and well illustrated, but only marginally identifiable as a Lefebvrian scholarly text. Writing such a book offered Lefebvre the opportunity both to earn money and to come to terms with his native region (Régulier, 1999). Its style is that of a popularized historical geography. In it, Lefebvre struggled in print with the inherent concerns of place narratives, the relations of insider-outsider, subjective-objective, and universal and particular (Entrikin, 1991), and, fitting his immense intellectual curiosity and his high tolerance for ambiguity, the result is far more intriguing and provocative than the more reductive analyses offered by many of his current followers.

Pyrénées was a solicited work, written at the request of a Swiss publisher in anticipation of reaching a relatively large audience. The task for Lefebvre was many-sided. He must adopt a style of writing suitable for the desired audience, a not too difficult task for someone who had already addressed various publics through his writing. However, he also must make coherent, in accord with his own mode of thought, a regional ensemble with at best murky boundaries that he had made part of his own identity. His earlier work on the Pyrenees, which served as his doctoral dissertation, was published in 1963 and is a study of impressive length and comprehensiveness dedicated to a relatively small, rural territory, the Vallée de Campan

(Lefebvre, 1963). Written in a classically academic style, in which the presence of the author is not made explicit, the work concentrated on the mutations and decline of a small rural community under assault from economic and political modernity. In contrast, *Pyrénées* starts with considerably grander themes and spaces. Employing literary license that procures for him a private command of his topic, Lefebvre poses straightaway the question of authorial intentions and authority.

V Henri and Olivier

Pyrénées begins with a surprising chapter, which serves as an introduction and which has the form of a dialogue between Lefebvre, Henri (H.) and Olivier (O.) a Parisian friend and literary businessman who has gone to Navarrenx before the writing has begun. The reader will note in the passage a glimpse into Lefebvre's private life, for Olivier is in fact the name of one of his sons, and this quality possibly engenders the familiar, even teasing, tone in the dialogue between the two characters. Identity and the question of distancing are addressed immediately and directly. Lefebvre, speaking of his book on the Pyrenees, declares:

I want to write it. I need it. With this country, I have scores to settle. As with Pascal or Descartes! I have my roots here. I must deliver myself from it and root myself here more profoundly ... This country I love and detest. (Lefebvre, 1965: 9)

Lefebvre offers insight into his own sense of identity, made here in reference to the Pyrenees (and not to an Occitanian entity), under the cover of the word 'country' (*pays*). The tension between here and elsewhere is forcefully felt and poses a difficulty, but it is effectively resolved through the trump card of the educated, knowing view from a generalized elsewhere, or nowhere. Lefebvre declares: 'This country, I know it better than the people who live here, precisely because I left it. In order to go elsewhere' (1965: 10). He adds that this 'elsewhere' is neither localized nor specific; it is not only Paris but

also 'elsewhere in consciousness and in thought. Elsewhere in the ... world, in Marxism, in philosophy, in the fragmented sciences of man' (1965: 10).

Nonetheless, Lefebvre, through the voice of Olivier, admits that one could contest his right to speak for his 'native land' (*pays natal*) from the point of view of a 'privileged witness' (1965: 10). His distancing from his subject is presented as lived rather than conceived. The words used by Lefebvre for speaking about 'his land' (*pays*) demonstrate a deep affection and a sense of reconnection. In spite of his reticence to talk about nature without man, he momentarily adopts this unbalanced perspective in order to express his affection: 'These lands, I savor them on my lips and the breath in their smells and perfumes' (1965: 10). His attention to the nuances of light, form, and color emanates from his word choice and writing style. This attentiveness contributes to a recurrently stated concern to understand the lived worlds and experiences of the population.

The first chapter of the book is most interesting for those who wish to gain a glimpse of the person and his place, a subject of much curiosity in contemporary geography. It is constructed as an imagined scene in his home in Navarrenx, a conversation between the author, here self-described as 'a sociologist by trade and a bit of a philosopher' (1965: 6) and his Parisian friend, Olivier. They are passing the time, Henri at his summer retreat and ancestral home and Olivier on vacation. The weather is warm and the spirit is light. They greet one another in the following way:

O. – Greetings, philosopher!

H. – Good day, engineer of souls. (1965: 6)

H. has blank sheets of paper in front of him with doodling and O. inquires about the project. It is a book on the Pyrenees. When asked by O. if it is a sociological, geographical or other scientific text, he answers in the negative with the comment that many such books already exist. H. responds that he wishes to

write something accessible, something easily read. O. encourages him to write a philosophical book, but once again H. demurs from the title of philosopher:

O. Compose a philosophical book. You are a philosopher.

H. Not exactly.

O. Sociologist?

H. No longer. (1965: 6)

O. then chides H. for playing a game, for creating an image of an unclassifiable intellectual. O. offers advice to H.—he is a philosopher and he should write as a philosopher about his land. He notes that the thought of the philosopher rests in the universal. He would thus narrow his thinking in a book on the region and demean the universal in the regional. In spite of his friend's advice not to write the book, H. assures him that he will write it over the objections raised. H. continues that indeed he writes philosophy but finds himself distant from its uncertainties and from the false boldness of philosophical thought in the face of the complexity of human practice. Sociology fares no better.

H. does not like the 'heaviness' of sociologists or the way that they diminish the richness of human experience: 'Give them a flower and they make it wither; a fruit they bruise it.' (1965: 8). They are not of the same quality as philosophers, in that they lack the grandeur, the horizon and the true culture of philosophers. They not only demean their topic, but make it dull as well.

H. sees everyday life as his object of study. He prides himself as one who values the ephemeral, that which slips between the seeming stabilities of life. He exclaims to O. that 'Irony is my element' (1965: 8). No doubt this last statement gives heart to those who wish to view Lefebvre as a postmodernist!

The universal and the particular also provide a tension for Lefebvre. Daily existence and human practice are always particularistic (1965: 9). Lefebvre desires an intellectual program devoted to the transformation of everyday life, and in this sense he sees himself as neither a philosopher

nor a sociologist. He is, through his own self-description, unclassifiable.

In declaring his need to write this book, H. states that the project presents a personal struggle, one steeped in ambivalence about a region that he both loves and hates, a place rooted in familial relations. It is a personal project that hopefully would simultaneously offer deliverance and belonging. He offers to it the advantage of perspective. H. is able to move between the perspectives of both insider and outsider. He is also an expert. He claims both that he knows no place better and that no one else knows this place better (1965: 10)! His knowledge comes in part from the direct experience of someone who has moved through the region by all possible means of travel, both physical and mental. It is a place literally in his body and soul. In addition, he brings the knowledge of the outsider. His perspective is more informed than that of the inhabitants because he left. To these claims O. wisely responds that H. must then choose a point of view. He cannot speak from everywhere.

In discussing the spirit of the place, H. seeks to recognize the role that the Pyrenees played in the development of French romanticism. The notebooks of Ramond de Carbonnières, intermediate between Rousseau and the Romantics, contain observations of the spiritual quality of the place that refreshes the body and the mind. It is a place of fresh air, as is evident in the early health spa and tourism legacy of this region, but it is also the air of 'Liberté' (1965: 11; Chadefaud, 1987). However, H. criticizes many of the romantic writers who write beautifully in the style of their day but who miss the life of the places that they are describing. They present descriptions without real people (1965: 12). H. also sees the beauty of nature and feels drawn to the natural elements of the Pyrenees but for him nature without man, just as man without nature, is of little interest (1965: 15).

According to Lefebvre, the best mode of presenting nature and environment is through

poetics. It is the means by which man gives form to himself and to his environment (1995:16). Poetics is not only about texts but also extends to images. H. uses the example of the controversial Catalan architect, Antonio Gaudi, whose work in Barcelona reflected not only its time period of early twentieth-century modernism, but also its regional cultures, Catalonia and the Pyrenees. Comprehending Gaudi requires a semiological perspective that Lefebvre wishes to use in his own understanding of his place.

As the man of commerce, O. recognizes the popular potential of the book and cautions H. to ask himself what the reader would like him to divulge from his reservoir of intimate knowledge of Pyrenean places, such as Pays Basques, Béarn, Roussillon and Foix. H. responds by chiding his friend about his commercial instincts and expresses a greater interest in what he refers to as the virtual reader. He does not want to use this place for a discourse on human nature but rather as a means of recognizing difference, for example the differences among the Béarnais, the Basques and the Catalonians.

When pressed for a theme by O., H. responds with reference to space. The Pyrenees both link and divide France and Spain and, along another axis, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. For H. this is not primarily a topographical transition, but rather a cultural transition. The provocateur O. takes the fashionable view that the Alps are the mountains of significance and the Pyrenees of minor cultural import. H. once again teases his friend for his fashionable attitudes and his smugness about expressing a cosmopolitan world view. For O., '*Il n'y a plus de Pyrénées*' is conceivable, while '*Il n'y a plus d'Alpes*' is not. For H., the nature of the Pyrenees is not best understood by having scientists deciphering its measurements, but rather should be viewed as part of a complete human experience of nature, aesthetic in quality and presenting a wholeness linking one to another.

This exchange between friends is followed by an entertaining discussion of the Pyrenees

and its people, part natural history, part historical sociology, part anthropology, part folklore and part geography. Its conclusion, however, is political, an expression of concern about the destruction of the uniqueness of this area due to the powerful homogenizing forces of tourism, industrialism and modern agriculture (1965: 157). The region has been left out of regional growth poles and has remained on the periphery, but it has offered a meridional culture that continues to express itself in the human sciences through innovative perspectives and critical voices. Intellectuals from the region, include Pierre Bourdieu, Roland Barthes, Jacques Berque, Georges Lapassade and Serge Mallet, all 'refined in the civilization of discourse, of rhetoric, of the art of speaking and living' (1965: 161) and who critically examined the taken-for-granted elements of urban industrial society. They have helped to revive a meridional point of view that had been lost in the 'emptiness of the period from the Third Republic to the present' (1965: 157).

VI Writing the Pyrenees

Lefebvre believed that a certain distance was an essential element in addressing the Pyrenees, but that it was not sufficient for reaching his objective. The challenge of comprehending this diverse region was immense. Where does one begin and end the Pyrenees? Neither the topography nor the declarations of its people circumscribe the Pyrenees. Indeed these perspectives are often contradictory in their delimitations. The fragmented space of the Pyrenees seems best described as a juxtaposition of little communities, delineated by mountains, piedmonts and adjacent plains. The valleys most often run perpendicular to the east–west axis of the chain, with the water divide frequently delimiting strong rivalries from earlier times. This compartmentalization linked to relief is just one of many divisions. In addition, there are the languages (e.g., Basque, Occitan or Gascon, Catalan, Aragonese, and additionally French and Castilian) and the various dialects and patois

that are part of each. These landscapes are their own region, but these linguistic indicators correspond poorly to the political divisions of the Pyrenees (France, Spain and Andorra). Thus the Pyrenees region is composed of smaller regions with very different histories, different modes of life, different and unequal population densities, and highly variable cultural traditions. Lefebvre was quite conscious of this variety and treated the Pyrenees accordingly, overriding his hesitations with an unconventional narrative strategy.

The strategy is neither a history as a series of events presented chronologically, nor merely a description. Rather it presents an ensemble of juxtaposed descriptions. The reader could easily draw from the book an impression of fragmentation and disconnect-edness. The author clearly mobilizes very different forms of writing. The reader finds dialogues, narratives drawn from informants and other authors, strongly argumentative passages, speculative and digressive ruminations, and classical rhetorical devices scattered throughout the text in a way that still allows for systematic coverage of the details of the territory. These different ways of writing are complemented by commentaries and citations placed beside certain, but not all, illustrations. Also, one finds between the conclusion and the bibliography about 20 pages of separate indices, information on the history of scientific knowledge about the Pyrenees and data on economy and population (with statistical tables and a map), some extracts of oral culture (e.g., songs) and a partial glossary of terms. The reasons for the choice of these extracts are not evident. Furthermore, the great bulk of this miscellany of facts is limited to the French side of the Pyrenees. Similarly, one finds in the text numerous illustrations, principally photographs, which are often presented with neither titles nor commentaries. They are professionally taken photographs (for example, works of the well-known photographer Marc Riboud) with a generally high aesthetic quality and constitute a

visual framework that is primarily an accompaniment rather than an articulation of the text.

This work of popular historical geography would not be considered as a research monograph. Such an end result was clearly not Lefebvre's intention. In many of his texts, Lefebvre does not always seem concerned with form, and critics have noted that they can give the appearance of being first drafts rather than painstakingly revised texts (e.g., Sayer, 1985). *Pyrénées*, however, suggests some recognition by the author of the need for an attractive text, as witnessed in the photographs used. Also, Lefebvre seemed fully aware of the unusual composition of the book. He sought to communicate profound truths about this place and at the same time present a text that would be attractive to a general audience. He experimented with different narrative forms, and in the end created an original perspective on this place, one that did not rely solely on classical categories of regional or territorial coherence (Laplace, 1995; Berdoulay, 2001).

As Lefebvre mentions in his introductory dialogue, what interests him is speaking about people who otherwise cannot be heard or understood except through their everyday lives. It is this concern that helps shape a narrative strategy. The narrative provides a degree of perspectival unity to his work. Its hero or principal character is the Pyrenean population, considered at the same time as representative of humanity and as a diverse group whose particularity derives from concrete forms of life. The narrative allows him to contrast concrete cultures but always with reference to the larger whole of humanity and its universal qualities. One finds here Lefebvre's well-known interests in everyday life: 'The critique of the quotidian, for me cutting across the infinite complexity of the facts of humans, is a main theme' (1965: 9). If this approach opens for him the door to the universal, it passes through the critical study of the particular: 'Everyday being, the man of praxis, is always particular' (1965: 9).

The central theme of the narrative therefore rests on the characteristics and the evolution of Pyrenean peoples in relation to their environment and under the influence of external political and economic powers. These powers or forces link to the statist and capitalist modernity that according to Lefebvre is completed only through the erosion and eventual destruction of local societies, societies that he valued for their communitarian and democratic spirit. The narrative thus takes on pessimistic tones, but not totally pessimistic for the culture (or 'civilization' in Lefebvre's terms) that formed in the Pyrenees and possessed within itself qualities that carried hopes for the future. For Lefebvre, culture is born in historical circumstance and takes shape through the incessant interaction of people and their Pyrenean environment. He is interested in the 'manner in which man is formed by and gives form to that which surrounds him' (1965: 16).

His perspective contains elements of Vidalian possibilism. Lefebvre affirms this clearly when he states that 'man without nature is no more interesting than nature without man. Isn't what counts a certain relation between them? An active relation?' (1965: 15). Culture is the means by which man 'leaves' nature in order to dominate it. But this separation is not total in that there is always an intimate albeit changing relation of humans to nature: 'Drawn from her, we come back towards her. It is uprooting and reconnecting' (1965: 15). Lefebvre adds here a commentary that a Vidalian geographer could have made: 'It may happen that a culture, in drawing itself away from nature, ends up unpredictably encountering it again in its historical path' (1965: 15). The perspective of the everyday appears compatible with possibilist discourse. Lefebvre justifies in this way the attention that he gives to the human and environmental diversity of the Pyrenees. 'Man' (*L'homme*) is not an abstraction: 'The man of whom I speak, he is the shepherd or hunter, a nomad or a sedentarist, a farmer or a woodcutter, an artisan or a merchant.

Sometimes [he is] a worker or a bourgeois. He lives in a family, in a village or a town. He has a land, a house, or he moves through forests and over roads' (1965: 16).

The narrative strategy imposes itself spontaneously as a means of translating this diversity of relations to nature, in spite of Lefebvre's likely reticence for such a project. In *La somme et le reste* (1958: 439), he refers to his youthful attempt to write fiction but the result did not meet his own expectations. However, in that same work his interests in exploring ways of combining autobiographic impressions, fictional historical encounters, poetry, philosophy and history are clearly on display. The challenge was not only his. The classical novelistic forms were to him ill suited to the contemporary world. The image that he draws on in a later text (and that one finds also in the text of his disciple, Soja, 1996: 8–9) to express this complex narrative strategy is that of the fugue:

The complexity of life is such that the sense of an event only appears very slowly and very tardily. Only today, I discover the meanings of certain small facts of my childhood, or of certain events of the Stalinist period. How to narrate them? How to link the conceived and the lived? The narrative would have to unfold on more simultaneous planes than a grand fugue of Bach. (Lefebvre, 1975: 16)

Even if this observation rests on his personal life, it has a general value in the way in which Lefebvre wished to approach the complexity and diversity of life. The narrative seemed to him a solution, for it permitted the linking of the conceived and the lived, but it remained difficult for him to operationalize in that it must also translate simultaneity. The metaphor of the fugue is revealing. Is it not the analogue for what Lefebvre tried to do in order to narrate the Pyrenees? The apparently disjointed presentation corresponds to this concern to account for lived diversity.

The 1965 book presents basically a single narrative, even if deployed in multiple ways, and deriving from more partial and localized components. The body of the book

is structured in two parts. The first makes an explicit call to classical narrative strategy. He commences by presenting the Pyrenees from the point of view of a travel narrative. He narrates what one sees when approaching the Pyrenees. He then continues by successively presenting the different parts of the Pyrenees, in proceeding as a traveler from west to east, in alternating the north and south flanks of the mountains: 'Les pays basques', 'Le Béarn', 'Les vallées aragonaises', 'La Bigorre', 'Comminges', 'Couserans', 'Comté de Foix', 'Catalogne-Rousillon'. This movement permits him to show as many types of social geographical organization as the transitions that one observes in going from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean. He puts emphasis, somewhat unequally, on the importance of agropastoralism as well as on the increasingly evident effects of modernity and the resistances opposed to state and capitalist forces. It is in the second part especially that Lefebvre dwells on the more cultural aspects of his study.

Abandoning completely the reference to a voyage from west to east, Lefebvre proceeds principally by the presentation of a series of vignettes, constituted in general by relatively brief narratives. These seek to show the symbols and values that compose a culture in its 'perpetually renewed relation with the everyday' (1965: 101). This is why the commentaries offered by Lefebvre are always related to particular places. The text is therefore a succession or suite of narratives linking symbols and values to examples of places chosen to best demonstrate these linkages. Lefebvre visibly plays on metonymy, but he also plays on the variability of points of view and scales. As Soja (1996: 8, 54–60) has noted, Lefebvre's approach is reminiscent of Luis Borges' 'The Aleph'.

It is in this series of vignettes, which follows a relatively distanced narrative, that the presence of the author is most felt. Lefebvre has the merit of being a knowledgeable insider, in declaring that he presents what he 'knows' or 'feels' about the culture,

'without hiding the subjective element that could appear in his remarks' (1965: 101–102). In fact, however, it seems more of a methodological expedient. In order to translate the intimacy of the relation to nature, one must look beyond the limits of positivistic, analytic science:

The flavors do not lend themselves to measurement; the odors and perfumes even less. No meaningful unities or messages. Only pleasure. In delicious turmoil, in a subtle transition, the other and me, the object itself and my senses meet. It is the place of things. The irreducible. (1965: 26)

The place perspective leads him away from the structuralist point of view. The narrator becomes the experiencing subject, and narrative becomes the means of capturing the multiple dimensions of milieu (Berdoulay, 2000). For example, he recalls the experience of place in relation to changes in the quality of the environment (light, humidity, odors, colors):

These subtle transitions gratify us with subtle pleasures. I prefer them to the crude contentments that are given by clean and clear structures when one knows them or one recognizes them. (1965: 25).

When writing about place, Lefebvre appears to prefer connotation to denotation, the poetics of place over the science of place.

This place perspective permits Lefebvre to circumnavigate the totality of the Pyrenean space and to benefit from narratives that translate and express its grand themes and cultural dimensions. In privileging the meanings and the places that convey these meanings, Lefebvre also avoids the trap of being enclosed by recording this or that observation within precise limits. One of the advantages of the concept of place is its 'variable geometry' (Berdoulay and Entrikin, 1998). This quality allows Lefebvre to write 'Barcelona, Catalonia, it is still the Pyrenees' (1965: 18) and to speak at length about a meridional civilization that embraces the entire south of France (1965: 142–55). Moreover, this place perspective permits Lefebvre to conserve

the critical point of view to which he is so ardently attached. The oppressive ways in which religion and tradition were interpreted and the inequalities that they produced are denounced by Lefebvre in his narratives of everyday life in the Pyrenees. In this way he demonstrated that his critical attitude was not limited to external forces, such as the state and capitalism, but also extended to destructive indigenous practices that influenced the region.

VII Le géographe malgré lui (The geographer in spite of himself)

The reader of *Pyrénées* will quickly note Lefebvre's difficulties in giving shape to his narrative. For example, the accumulation of tables at the end of the book does less to encourage a sense of comprehensiveness than it does to highlight all that the author failed to accomplish in his narrative. Lefebvrian specialists will note also that the three types of space for which Lefebvre is celebrated are not explicit in his narrative on the Pyrenees. Furthermore, in the second part of the volume he does not seem able to avoid cultural stereotypes in order to narrate the life of the people. Culture is given explanatory value, but it is a cultural super-organic, expressive of determinant traits uniformly shared among its members. His account of culture seems far removed from and at least partially contradictory with his more theoretical discourse on everyday life.

Our point, however, is not that a popular book written by a prolific author should be used as a source to undermine metatheoretical arguments. Rather we wish to suggest that contemporary interpreters of Lefebvre often add greater consistency and clarity to his ideas of space and place than is warranted and they apply his theory more broadly than may be either useful or appropriate. *Pyrénées* illustrates the difficulties of place narratives for even the most brilliant of theoreticians. Lefebvre clearly was aware of the pitfalls and the multidimensional demands associated with this task. He offers in his text a form

of experimental geographical narrative, but one that shares common attributes with both traditional and current examples of geographical writing. It seems incongruous that this experimentalism has been transformed into a theoretical reductionism in contemporary debate.

In the effort to give coherence to this diverse region, Lefebvre mobilizes a narrative strategy that weaves disjointed parts, digresses through anecdotes, and shifts authorial positions. He moves from a view from somewhere to a view from nowhere, from insider to outsider. His place narration uses the geometric variability offered by the place perspective to give wholeness to the diverse parts that constitute this region. The Pyrenees function in the text in a dual role, as both geographical object and as part of the formation of the geographical subject. The multiple stories by Lefebvre on his ancestral place enhance this duality. As Lefebvre moves cleverly between relatively centered and decentered positions, and between a particularism and universalism, he retraces and occasionally redraws the basic lines of geographical place narratives. The formulaic reconstructions and applications of a narrowly conceived social production perspective, so common in recent geographical literature, fail to capture the imaginative, flexible and trial-and-error spirit that is evident in Lefebvre's most geographical of books.

Note

1. A phrase attributed to the French monarch Louis XIV as a hopeful expression of the geopolitical consequences of his marriage to the Infanta of Spain. All translations are by the authors.

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