

Mark Rainey introduction continued... What is significant is that the interrelation between these three notions, under the “concrete universal”, provides a means to escape the “straightjacket” of dualisms that pervade western thought – expressed as the division between the mental and lived, theory and practice, etc. This relates back to space which Lefebvre regards as being traditionally divided between ideal space as mental categories and real space as the lived space of social practice.

The concrete universal allows Lefebvre to “discover or construct a theoretical unity that is apprehended separately”. The concrete universal allows a new account of space, at once unified, but also fragmented into the particular (or descriptions and cross sections of space), the general (logico-mathematical space) and the singular (or sensory, lived space). This, in turn, opens out into distinctly Lefebvrian approaches to space: the triad of spatial practice, representations of space and representational space, the triad of space as perceived, conceived and lived, and abstract and absolute space.

The introduction is essentially Lefebvre’s unfolding of the concrete universal through an analysis of space. The various terms that he uses in this unfolding, including abstract and absolute space, social space, conceived, perceived and lived space, spatial practice, representations of space and representational space, are often isolated and abstracted to better fit our own research, methods and arguments, yet more sincerely, all must be taken together as a series of overlapping and combined concepts. This makes Lefebvre difficult to unpack. We either take him at his word in deploying these multiple, tangled terms, or we confront the idea that he may be a bit loose and inconsistent with his language – something that might very well happen when one wanders and offhandedly, working out a theory by dictating it to staff.