

ABSTRACTION BEYOND A 'LAW OF THOUGHT': ON SPACE, APPROPRIATION AND CONCRETE ABSTRACTION

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ABSTRACT. Given that one of the defining elements of capitalist society is the ubiquity of forms of abstraction through which social relations are mediated, it is not surprising that a generalised 'reproach of abstraction' has taken on a critical orthodoxy within social theory and the humanities. Many of these attacks against a pervasive culture of abstraction have an obvious resonance with longstanding critiques of the abstractions inherent in law. This article explores the critique of the power of abstraction that is a central theme in Henri Lefebvre's depiction of the 'abstract space' of contemporary capitalism. In doing so, it will be emphasised that Lefebvre's work is not primarily concerned with the rejection of abstraction per se, but with understanding the relationships between dominant forms of abstraction and concrete social practices. Of particular interest here is Lefebvre's reformulation of the concept of concrete abstraction which extends his work beyond a polemical dismissal of the violence of abstraction into broader theoretical debates about the role of the abstract in the reproduction of social relations. Building on this aspect of Lefebvre's work, I will argue that the concept of concrete abstraction can provide a means of understanding the relationships between the concrete and the abstract in existing juridico-political relations.

KEYWORDS: abstract space; aesthetics; appropriation; concrete abstraction; difference; Henri Lefebvre; right to the city; the body.

But there can be no pure abstraction. The abstract is also concrete, and the concrete ... is also abstract. All that exists for us is the concrete abstract.
(Lefebvre 1968, p. 88)

Introduction

One of the defining elements of capitalist society is its generation of certain dominant forms of abstraction through which social relations are mediated. The classic example of such an abstraction is the role of the commodity form and the multiple ways in which its logic has become concretised within social institutions and the practices of everyday life. Alberto Toscano has recently argued capitalism can be plausibly understood as a 'culture of abstraction *par excellence*, as a society that is really driven ... by actual abstractions' (Toscano 2008a; 2008b). In a social formation so deeply constituted by abstractions, it is not

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surprising that a generalised 'reproach of abstraction' has attained a transdisciplinary critical orthodoxy within social theory and the humanities more broadly. Peter Osborne describes this critical gesture as the assertion of a widely held distrust of the cognitive and political inadequacies that are 'inherent to abstraction per se' (Osborne 2004, p. 21). This sceptical premise underlies a range of philosophical positions, from those drawing on Humean empiricism, to writers within the Western marxist tradition who attribute significant responsibility to the power of these abstractions for reproducing the forms of alienated existence that characterise contemporary capitalism (Lukács 1971; Sohn-Rethel 1978; Postone 1993; Sayer 1987). Critics of abstraction within the humanities and social sciences have targeted its complicity with an intellectual withdrawal from both 'bodily and affective' influences, its reduction of the heterogeneity of existence to isolated categories and its contribution to the alienation of the individual from the products of their labour (McCormack 2012). Within social theory this critique has helped to promote the widespread interest in various forms of what Osborne denotes as 'historicist particularism' in the quest to capture the vibrancy of experiences which are repressed by the dominance of abstraction (Osborne 2004, p. 22).

These attacks against a pervasive culture of abstraction have an obvious resonance with longstanding critiques of the abstractions inherent in law. Whether the target is the fiction of the individual legal subject, the ideological dominance of liberal formulations of human rights, the legal protection of private property or the assertion of sovereign power by the state, forms of abstraction play a pivotal role in both law's self-definition and its reproduction of social relations. In this article I will take the opportunity to explore one highly developed critique of the power of abstraction which has only recently begun to influence critical legal thinking. This account is Henri Lefebvre's depiction of the 'abstract space' of capitalism as the latest tendency in a history of spatial formations that he most comprehensively charts in his majestic 1974 book *The production of space* (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 49-53). For Lefebvre, abstract space and the social relations it engenders are defined by tendencies towards fragmentation, homogeneity and hierarchical organisation (Lefebvre 1991b, 2003a, pp. 206-213; Martins 1982, pp. 177-8). Each of these tendencies can be observed in the workings of state institutions and in the exercise of juridical power. Here I will outline Lefebvre's spatial history of the rise of abstraction and identify a number ways in which his work implicates the emergence of this spatial mode with the rise of the abstract forms of legality that structure contemporary capitalist society.

Lefebvre's account of the production of abstract space is most closely associated with his critique of the violence that is visited on the body through the progressive marginalisation of its full range of gestural capacities, and with his characterisation of the intensity of struggles between difference and abstraction. These elements are certainly crucial to understanding Lefebvre's work, but it is often overlooked that he is not centrally concerned with the rejection of abstraction per se or with reductively identifying it with processes of intellectual withdrawal. He is much more interested in the inextricable associations between abstraction and modernity, and in recognising how forms of abstraction are driven by concrete and embodied social practices. A thorough reading of his work – from his earliest writings on Marx's philosophy to his four-volume work on the state in the late 1970s – reveals that the broader question of the roles played by abstraction within capitalist modernity is a recurring motif (Lefebvre 1968, 1976-1978; Wilson 2013, pp. 365-6). Indeed he explicitly acknowledges the necessity of constructing and deploying conceptual abstractions in all forms of intellectual inquiry (Lefebvre 1995, p. 193).² Of interest here is Lefebvre's largely unacknowledged reformulation of Marx's concept of concrete abstraction which he uses in theorising social space and the nature of state power (Stanek 2008, 2011). It is this aspect of Lefebvre's work which extends it beyond a narrow focus on the 'reproach of abstraction' and demonstrates his relevance for broader theoretical debates about the role of abstraction in the reproduction of social relations. In particular, I will argue that the concept of concrete abstraction can also provide a means of articulating the relationships between the concrete and the abstract in contemporary juridico-political relations.

The critique of abstraction

Many of the generalised theoretical critiques of abstraction which are well-developed within the humanities and social sciences draw their power from identifying the limitations and pernicious consequences produced by scaling back from concrete social relations. In Hegel's classic formulation, the misuse of abstraction introduces a conceptual one-sidedness which inevitably impairs our capacity for judgement (Osborne 2004, p. 25). For Hegel, abstraction is primarily a vice of the uneducated and the ignorant who, by fixating on one isolated aspect

² As Andrew Sayer makes clear: [K]nowledge must grasp the differentiations of the world; we need a way of individuating objects, and of characterizing their attributes and relationships. To be adequate for a specific purpose, it must 'abstract' from particular conditions, excluding those which have no significant effect in order to focus on those which do (Sayer 1992, p. 86). For a more recent elaboration of this point see Wachsmuth, Madden and Brenner 2011, p. 747.

of social phenomena, are unable to grasp the multiple relations that constitute concrete reality. He famously attempts to elucidate this point with an example of the convicted criminal, in whom the 'common populace' see nothing more than 'the abstract fact that he (sic) is a murderer, and ... annul all other human essences in him with this simple quality'. Hegel contrasts this with a more high-minded 'concrete' reflection on the social contexts of crime, which allows us to consider the diversity of factors which have shaped 'the development of the criminal's mind', such as their history, education, family background or experiences of hardship (Hegel 1966, p. 463).

Marx extends Hegel's critique of the conceptual poverty of abstract thinking further in the *Grundrisse*. In this work he explicitly identifies the importance of abstraction in capitalism's historical supersession of earlier social forms based on 'relations of personal dependence', through the introduction of 'personal independence' set within a structural context of 'objective dependence' (Marx 1973, p. 158). Building on his early account of alienation (particularly in the 'Economic and philosophical manuscripts' of 1844), Marx presents abstraction as driving both processes of intellectual fragmentation and the alienation of people from their labour and their lived, bodily experiences (Marx 1975, pp. 322-34). This link between abstraction and alienation is a significant influence on Moishe Postone's attempt to reconstruct Marx's social theory as a critique of the 'abstract domination' of capitalist society. Avoiding the traps of economic determinism in analysing the character of social life under contemporary capitalism, Postone concentrates on the central role played by 'the domination of people by abstract, quasi-independent structures of social relations' (Postone 1993, p. 126). For both Marx and Postone, capitalist social relations establish a mode of social domination which is abstract and impersonal (Postone 1993, p. 125). In Marx's words,

[I]ndividuals come into connection with one another only in determined ways. These *objective* dependency relations also appear, in antithesis to those of *personal* dependence ... in such a way that individuals are now ruled by *abstractions*, whereas earlier they depended on one another. The abstraction, or idea, however, is nothing more than the theoretical expression of those material relations which are their lord and master. (Marx 1973, p. 164)

It is of course well known that this depiction of abstraction lies at the heart of Marx's theorisation of the concept of labour in the *Grundrisse*. In this work, he argues that labour only begins to be considered as a general, 'abstract' category with the emergence of

a society in which 'concrete' skills and practices of individual workers are required to be stripped back to render labour quantifiable and exchangeable. This leads him to conclude that,

for the first time ... the abstraction of the category 'labour', 'labour as such', labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice. The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society. (Marx 1973, p. 105)

As Łukasz Stanek has recently argued, this characterisation of abstract labour as an 'abstraction which became true in practice' was also an important inspiration for Henri Lefebvre's theorisation of the emergence of a new form of space which accompanied the historical development of capitalist social relations (Stanek 2011, pp. 133-64; Stanek 2008, pp. 66-72). The centrepiece of the sweeping argument that Lefebvre pursues in *The production of space* is an account of the rise of abstraction in thought, practice and experience which has accompanied the complex historical transitions between modes of production of space. Importantly, Lefebvre charts how a relatively organic form of social space was transformed over a number of centuries, into the contemporary mode of spatial production in which abstract relations dominate lived experience.

A spatial history of abstraction

The starting point of Lefebvre's history of spatial formations is 'absolute space' – a space in which social relations are most closely entwined with the forces and rhythms of the natural world (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 48). He provides the example of areas of 'agro-pastoral space' inhabited by peasants and 'nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists' in which social activity is inscribed through the construction of housing, the gathering and cultivation of food, the clearing of pathways and the establishment of sites for the enactment of rituals and worship (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 234). While Lefebvre acknowledges a high degree of 'immediacy' in the body's relationship to absolute space, he also recognises the extent to which it was subject to intervention and domination by political and religious powers. Indeed, whenever fragments of the natural world were consecrated for the erection of architectural structures, or the carrying out of ceremonial rites associated with ageing, sex and fertility, they almost immediately became subject to the exercise of authority. These appropriations

of valued spaces symbolically transferred them into the 'political world' (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 48). It was through such acts of conquest and through the establishment of new ruling elites that parts of absolute space became invested with sacred or divine properties, and paved the way for a transition to 'sacred space' (Shields 1999, pp. 173-5). Lefebvre associates this transformation with the establishment of the Greek city-states, in which particular sites assumed a 'transcendent' status within a highly controlled unification of spatial form, function and structure (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 234, 239). It is sacred space which inaugurated the dominance of the town centre over its peripheral surroundings.

The city state thus establishes a fixed centre by coming to constitute a hub, a privileged focal point, surrounded by peripheral areas which bear its stamp. From this moment on, the vastness of pre-existing space appears to come under the thrall of a divine order. (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 235)

Absolute space is not destroyed through such transitions, but lingers in those pockets of the natural world which survive as symbolic resources for magical and religious power (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 48). It is also to be found in hidden pathways and in the 'interior' of the domestic dwelling, as described in Gaston Bachelard's *The poetics of space* (Bachelard 1969). While such sites are relatively shielded from the intrusions of dominant forms of spatial power, Lefebvre remains dissatisfied with what he refers to as the 'obsessive' and 'nostalgic' treatment of these remnants of absolute space in Bachelard's work and in the writings of Martin Heidegger on dwelling (Heidegger 1971; Shields 1999, p. 174). For Lefebvre, both these accounts of habitation remain pitched at the level of description and are therefore unable to articulate the historical shifts between modes of spatial production and the politics which such modes generate (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 121-2).

Progressively, the roles assigned to these fragments of space and the power exercised by the internal unity of the Greek civil order gave way to a 'relativized and *historical*' space, which first finds its expression in the political spaces of the Roman empire, but retained its dominance well into the Middle Ages (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 48). The 'historical' mode of spatial production of the Roman city-state was marked by the introduction of secularism and new forms 'difference' and 'relativity', which displaced the metaphysical closure of the Greek civil order (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 239). However, it also carried with it new forms of authority and control which would later crystallise and intensify in the transition to 'abstract space'. One of these was the establishment of a new juridical order which directly challenged the unity of sacred space and submitted the vestiges of

absolute space to the measure of abstract rules. As Maria Drakopoulou recounts, the introduction of the Twelve Tables in 451 BC as the founding jurisdictional moment of the Roman Republic disrupted the

harmonious relationship between Rome's human and divine inhabitants ... [through the] ... inexorable application of its rules ... [that] ... became a measure against which people chose right from wrong in the interests of humanity rather than gods. (Drakopoulou 2007, p. 38)

Lefebvre suggests that without the internal unity of the Greek civil order, early Roman law provided an 'external constraining principle' through which social relations, ideology and spatial ordering could once again attain a measure of coherence (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 239). In Rome, the organisation and the production of space were brought together, but as Lefebvre states, they operated 'not under the sign of the Logos but under the sign of the Law' (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 246). Linked to the emergence of this universalising juridical form was the ascendancy of patriarchal social relations as a mode of authority entrenching the power of abstraction.

Paternity's imposition of its juridical law ... on maternity promoted abstraction to the rank of a law of thought. Abstraction was introduced – and presupposed – by the Father's dominion over the soil, over possessions, over children, over servants and slaves, and over women. Assigned to the feminine sphere were immediate experience, the reproduction of life ... pleasure and pain, the earth, and the abyss below. (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 243. See also Drakopoulou 2007, pp. 53-6)

Patriarchal rule was established through both material exercises of power and abstract principles for governing the lineage and social status of property-holders (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 243). Through the legal codification of private land ownership, Lefebvre argues that the Roman world introduced a model of organising space which was focused on its division and its 'subordination to the unifying but abstract principle of property' (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 252). By the Middle Ages, the introduction of the juridical relations of private property over the entirety of physical space became possible through the law's imposition of the contractual form over customary relationships (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 263; Cunningham 2008, pp. 455-6). These changes inaugurate the beginnings of the shift to an abstract mode of spatial production.

The rise of abstract space

Throughout this spatial history, Lefebvre is careful to acknowledge the persistent traces of previous spatial forms, which bear witness to the fact that the production of space is an inevitably historical process (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 46). However, it is clear that he sees contemporary capitalism as driven by powerful tendencies towards the abstraction of space, which not only crush the comparatively organic relationships characterising absolute space, but also marginalise the remaining spatial remnants of the sacred. Abstract space is characterised by its simultaneous tendencies towards fragmentation, homogeneity and hierarchy which nurture and continually reproduce capitalist social relations (Lefebvre 2003a, p. 210; Lefebvre 1976c; Martins 1982, pp. 177–8; Gottdiener 1994, p. 126; Butler 2012, pp. 48-51; Butler 2009, pp. 323-5; Dimendberg 1998). The first of these tendencies is the fragmentation of space, which can be observed in countless contemporary examples of the slicing of space into discrete parcels, the privatisation of these spatial fragments through legal decree and their entry into circuits of capital accumulation. These material, legal and economic manifestations of spatial fragmentation are reinforced by the ways in which intellectual disciplines carve up space according to their specialised interests. Academic and professional domains such as architecture, economics, planning and law

divide space among them and act upon its truncated parts, setting up mental barriers and practico-social frontiers ... The *ideologically* dominant tendency divides space up into parts and parcels in accordance with the social division of labour. (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 89-90)

This intellectual division of space provides Lefebvre with an opportunity to draw an analogy with Marx's critique of commodity fetishism (Marx 1976, pp. 163-77). Just as the latter necessarily involves treating "things" in isolation, so too the fragmentation of abstract space obscures the social relationships embodied within it, and introduces a fetishism of 'space as space "in itself"' (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 90). Indeed Lefebvre takes this further in arguing that space has been transformed into a commodity and as such, embodies both the abstraction of its exchangeability and the concreteness of its use by inhabitants. It is in this context that Lefebvre adopts another element of Marx's terminology in describing space as a 'concrete abstraction' – which is realised through both intellectual processes and social practices (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 341-2, 86, 100; Stanek 2008, pp. 68-72; Stanek 2011, pp. 143-5, 149-58). In doing so, Lefebvre draws on at least two senses of concrete abstraction. One of these is the methodological or epistemological process through which 'thought

appropriates the concrete, (and) reproduces it as the concrete in the mind' as Marx describes it in the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973, p. 101). For Evald Ilyenkov, in his classic account of *The dialectics of the abstract and the concrete in Marx's Capital*, this methodological approach understands concrete abstraction as the product of a dialectical progression from 'living contemplation to abstract thought and from it to practice' (Ilyenkov 1960).

Another, more ontological understanding of concrete abstraction draws attention to the ways in which abstractions, such as the commodity form, take on a real existence and operate concretely in capitalist society. A classic example of this can be seen in Alfred Sohn-Rethel's account of the 'commodity abstraction ... as a *real abstraction* resulting from spatio-temporal activity' (Sohn-Rethel 1978, p. 20). In *Intellectual and manual labour*, Sohn-Rethel argues that 'exchange empties time and space of their material contents' in a passage that echoes Lefebvre's identification of the pressures imposed by the commodification of space.

Time and space rendered abstract under the impact of commodity exchange are marked by homogeneity, continuity and emptiness of all material content, visible or invisible.... The entire empirical reality of facts, events and description by which one moment and locality of time and space is distinguished from another is wiped out. (Sohn-Rethel 1978, p. 48)³

For Lefebvre, the submission of fragments of space to the universalising logic of exchange value provides a dramatic example of a second tendency which is also inherent within abstract space – the drive towards homogenisation. Together with the growth in technical capacities for measurement and quantification, the commodification of space imposes an intense homogeneity, which flattens out spatial diversity (Martins 1982, p. 177). While abstract space is not homogeneous in absolute terms, Lefebvre regards it as having 'homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its "lens"' (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 287). This repetitive tendency towards the imposition of uniformity is characterised by three currents of harmonic resonance or 'formants' which Lefebvre suggests both 'imply' and 'conceal' one another:

- i) A 'geometric formant', which is generated by a reductionist reliance on Euclidean geometry as a measure for all other forms of space (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 285).

³ See also Sohn-Rethel 1973, p. 33; Toscano A 2008b, pp. 279-82; Cunningham 2005, pp. 18-19; Osborne 2004, p. 27. I will return to Lefebvre's use of the concept of concrete abstraction in the concluding sections of this article.

- ii) An 'optical formant' (or 'logic of visualisation') which takes the transparent readability of space for granted, and inevitably becomes absorbed by the condensation of power relations embedded within it (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 286).
- iii) A 'phallic formant', which confers a particular aura on verticality and the monumental in order that inhabitants can avoid the perception of abstract space as an empty receptacle filled only with 'images or transitional objects' (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 286-7).⁴

Abstract space thus embraces homogenisation, while simultaneously being 'broken up into fragments' (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 342). These tendencies do not work in opposition, but mutually reinforce each other and are supplemented by a third orientation towards the hierarchical ordering of space by dominant economic, technological and administrative powers. This hierarchy is not the product of an evolutionary process, but is strategically pursued by the combined force of juridical and political institutions and processes of capital accumulation. As an exposition of this point, Lefebvre identifies the spatial contradiction between the centre and the periphery, through which the centre organises that which is 'around it, arranging and hierarchising the peripheries' (Lefebvre 1976c, p. 17). As the town historically overtook the countryside and sharpened its domination and exploitation of it, Lefebvre argues that urban space became a giant and 'terrifying' abstraction, or '*abstraction in action*' (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 268-9). Such effects continue today as spaces which lose the support of the centre suffer in their share of the distribution of power, wealth, resources and information (Martins 1982, p. 178). This is perhaps one of the clearest examples of how political, administrative and legal institutions actively intervene in the production of abstract space, using it as a political instrument through which social order can be reinforced (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 308, 312-13).

Abstract space and the body

Given the broad sweep of this spatial history, it is not surprising that a number of scholars have questioned Lefebvre's historical typology of modes of spatial production on the grounds that it reduces entire periods to a single motif which corresponds with the stages

⁴ The metaphor of physical force and masculine aggression associated with the phallic formant extends beyond the realm of the imaginary and is also expressed whenever abstract space 'subsumes and unites scattered fragments ... by force' (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 308).

of orthodox historical materialism (Shields 1999, p. 172).⁵ However it is not necessary to read Lefebvre's account as a strict chronology of epochs or fixed social formations, and he constantly emphasises the ways in which different forms of space may mutually coexist, without the entire erasure of earlier forms by succeeding ones. It is also worthwhile remembering that Lefebvre's depiction of the development of abstract space needs to be understood as part of his longstanding interest in the relationship between processes of abstraction and forms of alienation which dominate everyday life (Lefebvre 1991a, p. 167; Wilson 2013). Indeed, one of the most fruitful elements of Lefebvre's account of abstract space is his portrayal of the impacts of abstraction on the body. As Gregory explains, one of the central consequences of the emergence of this form of space has been the progressive constriction of the capacity of the body to express its full range of gestures and faculties. This 'decorporealization of space' is driven by the dominance of the visual in progressively marginalising and subsuming other elements of bodily experience (Gregory 1997, p. 219; Gregory 1994, pp. 382-95). Such is the power of this 'logic of visualisation' that Lefebvre suggests that we have reached the point where 'the senses of smell, taste, and touch have been almost completely annexed and absorbed by sight' (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 139, 197-200).

[A]ll of social life becomes the mere decipherment of messages by the eyes, the mere reading of texts. Any non-optical impression – a tactile one, for example, or a muscular (rhythmic) one – is no longer anything more than a symbolic form of, or a transitional step towards, the visual. (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 287)

The characterisation of abstraction that emerges from *The production of space* also illuminates the multiple forms of violence that abstract space imposes on the body, and the complicity of law's tendencies towards formalism, universality and reductionism in reproducing new modes of abstraction.⁶ As discussed previously, Lefebvre emphasises the role of the legal order, particularly the juridical form of private property, in entrenching and reproducing each of the tendencies that characterise abstract space. Through its discursive commitment to the generality of legal rules and the equality of legal subjects, law reproduces social hierarchies and is a powerful force driving the homogenisation of socio-

⁵ Rob Shields has also criticised Lefebvre for reproducing the Eurocentrism that has afflicted much marxist social theory (p. 170). For Virginia Blum and Heidi Nast the gendered distinctions that Lefebvre adopts, which equate paternal power with agency and force in history and the maternal sphere with passivity and subjection to historical change, are also problematic. They link this aspect of Lefebvre's account to a number of unacknowledged heterosexist assumptions that are implicit in his critique of patriarchal social relations (Blum and Nast 1996, p. 577).

⁶ William Lucy has recently provided a qualified, liberal defence of these tendencies towards law's abstract forms of judgment, as exemplified by the rule of law (Lucy 2009b, p. 482; Lucy 2009a).

spatial relations. Forms of legal judgement not only manifest these examples of 'conceptual one-sidedness', they also exemplify what Lefebvre describes as a more general 'violence intrinsic to abstraction' (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 289). In this context it is important not to conflate all forms of abstraction in a simplistic and reductionist rejection of violence as such, but it is nevertheless the case that the material and imaginary violence of legal judgement cuts decisively through space – prohibiting or permitting particular use values and enforcing compliance with whatever divisions are generated. While abstract space is obscured by a pretence of 'civic peace' and 'consensus', legal and political institutions inevitably exercise power in a coercive and unreflective manner in order to preserve a 'non-violent' social order (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 358). Accordingly, any social settlement over the acceptability and legality of spatial uses is always haunted by the latent threat of prohibition and violence (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 56-7).

The destructive character of abstract space is experienced most intensely by the body, which Lefebvre argues has been 'betrayed' by each of the fragmented intellectual disciplines within Western societies. The influence of post-Cartesian philosophy within the natural sciences, the applied professions and the law has generated processes of metaphorisation and metonymisation that have '*abandoned ... and denied the body*' (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 407). Within abstract space, the body is broken down into particular sites with prescribed uses and normative values attached to them, so that there is a great similarity between the ways that 'space is ... carved up' and how the body is discursively 'cut into pieces' (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 355, 138-40). Here Lefebvre rehearses a Nietzschean theme of the 'tragic' nature of signs and language and a similar point can be made about the fragmentation of the body that is imposed by the modernist discourses of legal and human rights (Nietzsche 1982, pp. 46-7; Gregory 1997, pp. 222-3). Through the metonymisation of such discourses, parts of the body are fragmented and detached in order that they may metaphorically reappear as isolated rights claims (MacNeil 1998, pp. 45–6; Douzinas 2000, p. 230). Both positive law and liberal rights claims fragment the body in ways that mimic the subdivision of space into zones for uses such as work and leisure. For Lefebvre, the body's integrity is only ever recognised for the purpose of reinforcing a functionalist identification of social and biological reproduction.

From abstract space to differential space

Despite the ubiquity of the violent tendencies towards fragmentation, homogenisation and hierarchical control that are inherent to abstract space they never achieve total ascendancy. Lefebvre identifies the impossibility of suppressing alternative spatial forms that are harboured by abstract space and he particularly focuses on the potential emergence of a post-capitalist mode of spatial production that he characterises as ‘differential space’ (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 50, 419). This form of space nurtures and accentuates social differences and has the potential to restore a unity to the ‘functions, elements and moments of social practice’ that are fractured by abstract space. Differential space obstructs the

localizations which shatter the integrity of the individual body, the social body, the corpus of human needs, and the corpus of knowledge. By contrast, it ... distinguish[es] what abstract space tends to identify – for example, social reproduction and genitivity, gratification and biological fertility, social relationships and family relationships. (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 52)

An important distinction that Lefebvre makes here is that, whereas abstract space is founded on the domination of nature and of the body, differential space is oriented towards appropriation. This is a distinction that Lefebvre suggests was not sufficiently clarified by Marx’s endorsement of humanity’s Promethean and productivist mastery over material nature. In Lefebvre’s account, the production of abstract space necessarily entails the brutal transformation of nature through strategic uses of technology, to mould space into new formations. He mentions the motorway ‘slicing through space like a great knife’, as an example of the introduction of a ‘rectilinear or rectangular form’ onto a previous space (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 165). Such transformations not only represent the domination of space, but are increasingly becoming the principal way in which the production of space is managed by the political and administrative powers governing the inexorable, global drive towards urbanisation (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 164).⁷ Lefebvre compares these forms of dominated space with ‘appropriated spaces’ which manage to escape being totally subsumed by the functional designs of state power and the logic of exchange. Historically, dominated and appropriated spaces have not always mutually excluded each other but the rise of capital accumulation has progressively accentuated their separation and mutual opposition. While appropriated space is always subject to challenge from the violence, destruction and domination of

⁷ For an introductory survey of the concept of ‘planetary urbanisation’ see Brenner and Schmid 2011.

abstract space, new possibilities are offered by struggles against the incessant pressures to produce space in the manner of a manufactured commodity (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 166-7).

Lefebvre draws on such struggles in proposing his concept of the 'right to the city', perhaps his most important contribution to current transdisciplinary debates within politics, law and urban studies (Lefebvre 1996). The right to the city is now the subject of an emerging literature which is concerned with both the extension of access to urban services and the deepening of participatory forms of urban politics (Attoh 2011; Butler 2009, 2012; Dikeç and Gilbert 2002; Fernandes 2007; Gilbert and Dikeç 2008; Harvey 2008; Mitchell 2003; Purcell 2002, 2008, 2013, 2014; Wall 2011). In Lefebvre's formulation, this right is an assertion of the entitlement of all inhabitants to collaborate in collective, creative struggles to prioritise the appropriation of space and its use values over its domination by exchange and the strategic interventions by a technocratic bureaucracy (Lefebvre 1996). In political terms, the right to the city is premised on a radical opposition to the destructive violence of abstract space and its effective assertion depends on the democratic participation of inhabitants in the re-ordering of urban space. This means that it cannot be reduced to a formalistic juridical right. While attempts to institutionalise material social improvements and procedural protections under its banner should not be dismissed lightly, there are inherent limitations in the positivist juridification of the right to the city, as has been proposed in many state-based initiatives and proposals developed by non-government organisations (Fernandes 2007; UNESCO 2006; Brown and Kristiansen 2009).

Alongside his framing of this spatial demand in terms of the politics of space, Lefebvre also explores the aesthetic dimensions of struggles for the right to the city. He depicts such struggles as producing space through a project of the collective imaginary - a creative work of art rather than a utilitarian construction. The right to the city therefore opens up possibilities for the appropriation of urban space as a creative and fulfilling aesthetic experience, which encompasses the 'full and complete usage' of space by its inhabitants in their daily routines, work practices and forms of play (Lefebvre 1996, p. 179). This means that attempts to transform abstract spatial relations must proceed through a massive intervention of personal and collective uses of space which challenge the universalising pressures of exchange value and sovereign power.

One clear consequence of the portrayal of appropriation outlined here is that differential space necessarily involves a renewal of the relationship between the body – its rhythms, energies and practices – and its own space. For Lefebvre, the potential restoration

of the place of the body rests upon the recovery of 'the sensory-sensual – of speech, of the voice, of smell, of hearing. In short, of the non-visual' (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 363). While this imagery carries great rhetorical power it also forces us to confront an important question about Lefebvre's depiction of the power of abstraction that has not been sufficiently addressed in most interpretations of his work. This concerns the anthropological assumptions that accompany his characterisation of the organic spatiality of absolute space which is crushed by the forces of abstraction. In particular, Lefebvre's depiction of the immediacy of the body's connection to absolute space leads him dangerously close to reproducing a binary opposition between bodily experience and thought. Derek Gregory has characterised this aspect of Lefebvre's project as positing a nostalgic 'conjunction of humanism and romanticism', which issues forth a 'threnody for a lost plenitude' (Gregory 1997, p. 218). There are numerous examples in Lefebvre's writing which give some credence to this interpretation, such as the tone set by the following passage:

Before ... the advent of the Logos, ... lived experience already possessed its internal rationality; this experience was *producing* long before *thought* space, and spatial thought, began *reproducing* the projection, explosion, image and orientation of the body. ... [L]ong before the analysing, separating intellect, long before formal knowledge, there was an intelligence of the body (Lefebvre 1991b, p.174).

Between abstraction and difference

It is this orientation towards the inescapably embodied character of space which has inspired a number of attempts to assimilate Lefebvre within a broader phenomenological tradition, such as that exemplified by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty 2002; Simonsen 2005; Poster 1975). There are certainly a number of phenomenological themes that recur in Lefebvre's writings on space and bodily rhythms, but it is at best a partial interpretation to use this connection to reinforce a supposed dichotomy between the corporeal and the intellectual in his work. As Derek McCormack argues, Lefebvre's focus on the body and lived experience in *The production of space* relies to a large extent on his own 'technique of abstraction ... in ways that complicate any appeal to the preconceptual as the grounds of phenomenological experience' (McCormack 2012, p. 719). Nevertheless there is a tendency to associate Lefebvre's work with a polemical attitude to all forms of abstraction, quantification or representation; treating them as inherently

repressive, while regarding qualitative phenomena and manifestations of difference as potentially emancipatory. There are numerous passages in *The production of space* which suggest a necessary incompatibility between the differential and the forces of abstraction. This tends to simplify many of the issues at stake and risks lapsing into a nihilistic rejection of rationality in general (Dimendberg 1998, p. 37). David Cunningham argues that in broader practico-political terms, such an attachment to an ‘idea of difference that would somehow lie beyond abstraction *per se*’ presents an obstacle to the possibility that differential space could ever emerge in a concrete form (Cunningham 2005, p. 23). He identifies the limitations of resorting to a sweeping critique of the violence of abstraction in general, and instead asserts the importance of identifying ‘the historically specific forms of violence as domination that it generates under certain conditions’ (Cunningham 2008, p. 467). Indeed, without some sense of the necessity of forms of abstraction it becomes difficult to imagine the prospect of generating alternative modes of social organisation or pursuing potentially emancipatory political strategies.

In this sense, politically, one might wonder whether it is, today, less a simple question of ‘difference’ versus ‘abstraction’ ... than one of whether it is possible to conceive of an alternate relationship *between* difference and abstraction. (Cunningham 2005, p. 23)⁸

Here Cunningham identifies a significant inadequacy in those interpretations of Lefebvre which seek to invoke his critique of abstract space in the service of a moralistic rejection of abstraction as a philosophical category in itself. A much more fruitful way of reading Lefebvre’s critique of abstract space is to recognise how it is equally concerned with the necessity of abstract concepts for comprehending ‘the processual materiality of lived space’, as it is directed towards the negativity of specific forms of abstraction (McCormack 2012, p. 719). As Lefebvre makes clear in a collection of lectures published in the early 1960s, one of the defining markers of modernity is the inescapable need to navigate a path through the continual production of abstractions.

Modernity is doomed to explore and to live through abstraction. Abstraction is a bitter chalice, but modernity must drain it to the dregs and, reeling in simulated inebriation, proclaim it the ambrosia of the gods. Abstraction perceived as something concrete, antinature and a growing nostalgia for nature

⁸ Osborne formulates this question in terms of the search for a ‘new conception of appropriation within abstraction’ (Osborne 2004, p. 27).

which has somehow been mislaid – such is the conflict lived out by ‘modern’ man (sic). (Lefebvre 1995, p. 193)

This more sophisticated appreciation of the ubiquity of abstraction in both its intellectual and practical manifestations demonstrates the broader theoretical significance of Lefebvre’s contribution to our understanding of abstraction’s role in the reproduction of social relations than is apparent from the more polemical aspects of his account of abstract space. It is this promise that has recently encouraged McCormack to bring Lefebvre’s work into a dialogue with the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, who was deeply interested in the various ways abstractions are employed in scientific and philosophical inquiry (McCormack 2012, pp. 727-8). Perhaps reflecting the importance of mathematics in the development of Whitehead’s philosophical outlook, he was far from hostile to the legitimate use of abstractions for exploring new intellectual terrains. But it was the ‘illegitimate generalization’ and ‘misuse’ of abstractions such as the ‘Galilean model’ of scientific materialism which Whitehead regarded as playing such an instrumental role in the development of our contemporary ‘culture of abstraction’ (Toscano 2008a, p. 62). As Whitehead states in *Science and the modern world*, philosophical inquiry has a crucial part to play in regulating such generalisations:

You cannot think without abstractions; accordingly, it is of the utmost importance to be vigilant in *critically* revising your *modes* of abstraction. It is here that philosophy finds its niche as essential to the healthy progress of society. It is the critic of abstractions. (Whitehead 1967, p. 73. See also Stengers 2008, p. 97; Gambazzi 1971)

Here Whitehead is concerned with the possibilities that are opened up by revising how forms of abstraction are developed and correcting their inappropriate application across disciplinary boundaries. This forms the backdrop for McCormack’s call for an ‘affirmative critique of abstraction’ – a critique which extends beyond attempts to escape the abstract through a misdirected reification of concrete experience (McCormack 2012, p. 720). McCormack correctly identifies that abstractions are not only a means of withdrawing from the world, but also act as ‘lures’ which draw ‘out elements of the world in ways that make them thinkable and sense-able’ (McCormack 2012, p. 727; Stengers 2008, pp. 95-6). However it is also important to recognise the dangers of relying too heavily on what Alberto Toscano describes as Whitehead’s predominantly ‘pedagogical’ approach and his faith in the prospects for a ‘new mentality’ of abstraction (Toscano 2008a, p. 59, 71). The

central problem here is that Whitehead firmly avoids confronting the extent to which abstractions are constitutive of existing social relations and this leads to his failure to acknowledge that

no amount of cultivation of new, more tolerant, more inclusive abstractions will ever be capable of ... the ... disactivation or subversion of the abstractions that actually frame and govern our social existence. (Toscano 2008a, p. 72)

On concrete abstraction, appropriation and aesthetics

If Whitehead's project of reforming the culture of abstraction is constrained by its primarily ethical character and its lack of engagement with the political context which shapes that culture, his questioning of the unthinking concretisation of powerful abstractions outside their appropriate domain remains a fertile source of inspiration for the pursuit of any affirmative critique of abstraction (Whitehead 1925, p. 52; Stengers 2008, p. 98; Gambazzi 1971). It is this aspect of Whitehead's thought that resonates most strongly with the way Lefebvre directly confronts the 'conflicted' relation between the abstract and the concrete in his elaboration of Marx's concept of 'concrete abstraction' (Cunningham 2009, p. 315; Cunningham 2010, p. 18). As noted above, this concept was a profound and persistent influence on Lefebvre's work, beginning with his exposition of Marx's method in *Dialectical materialism* in 1939, where he makes the emphatic claim that 'all that exists for us is the concrete abstract' (Lefebvre 1968, p. 88). Just as abstraction must be conceptualised as a simultaneously concrete phenomenon, so too the concrete must be considered as partially abstract. The philosopher Enzo Paci expresses a similar point in the following terms:

In capitalist society the abstract *functions concretely*. And this concrete function, notwithstanding the fact that it is really abstract, is bound to precise consequences: the *social relation* appears as if it were a thing and in fact functions as a thing, while it is not a thing. ... The fundamental character of capitalism ... reveals itself in the tendency to make abstract categories live as if they were concrete. (Paci 1969, p. 11, 18)

Lefebvre most explicitly engages with this ontological dimension of concrete abstraction in his theorisation of abstract space which, despite its subjection to the forces of fragmentation and homogenisation, remains concretely and materially embodied in social practice (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 100, 340–2; Roberts 2001, p. 556). Like the commodity, space is a sensual thing which also attains a 'suprasensible or social' status – an abstraction that has

become 'true in practice' (Marx 1976, p. 165; Marx 1973, p. 105; Stanek 2008, pp. 67, 71-2, 75-6; Stanek 2011, pp. 143-5, 149-58). This aspect of Lefebvre's theoretical contribution has now become widely acknowledged within disciplines such as geography and sociology, but much less attention has been paid to how his transposition of the concept of concrete abstraction can be extended to a consideration of the nature of state power and juridical relations.

Following the publication of *The production of space*, Lefebvre embarked on an extended period of reflection on the nature of state power, which culminated in his publication of the four-volumes of *De l'État* (Lefebvre 1976-1978). In this work he explores the history, theory and politics of the contemporary state and draws attention to its central role in the production of abstract space. Importantly, he identifies a correlation between the strategic forms taken by state intervention and the tendencies towards fragmentation, homogenisation and hierarchical ordering that characterise abstract space. As a complex institutional ensemble, the state both facilitates the breaking up of social space in the service of commodification, but is simultaneously responsible for the homogenising imposition of equivalence on social phenomena and the '(forced) equalization of the unequal, the identification of the non-identical' (Lefebvre 2009, p. 108). Addressing the institutional framework that underlies the concretisation of abstract relations within everyday life, Lefebvre characterises the state as a form of

social architecture, [a] political monumentality ... a pyramid that carries at its apex the political leader – a concrete abstraction, full of symbols, the source of an intense circulation of information and messages, ... knowledge bound up with power. (Lefebvre 2003b, p. 84)

This analysis can be extended further to a theorisation of law, not as a purely abstract phenomenon, but also as a *concrete* abstraction. Despite its obvious role in reinforcing the violence of abstract tendencies such as the logic of visualisation and the instrumental fragmentation of social space, law is also materialised within social relations and reproduced through the practice of living bodies. In common with other concrete abstractions, law is simultaneously marked by its withdrawal from social relations and its 'constitutive force in the world' (McCormack 2012, p. 719). Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos provides the most sophisticated presentation of this idea in a number of recent writings which explore the radical and potentially 'disturbing' implications that flow from a full appreciation of law's spatiality (2011, p. 190; 2015, pp. 28-37). Like Lefebvre's

account in *The production of space*, this argument is a decisive intervention in theoretical debates over the nature of spatial relations, but it also has broader relevance for our understanding of the abstract and concrete dimensions of law. In pursuing a critique of the conceptual limitations of many of the contributions to the early waves of law and geography research, Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos argues that law's status as a concrete abstraction is demonstrated by 'its paradox of materiality and immateriality' (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2011, p. 195). Accordingly, it is essential for critical scholars to negotiate a path between the positivist abstractions of law's universality and the temptations offered by the 'fetishisation of legal materiality' (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2011, p. 190, 194).

Acknowledging this point is not to accede to a simplistic assertion of identity between law and other forms of concrete abstraction, such as the commodity form. As Cunningham makes clear, law is inevitably 'a form of misrecognition' and in this respect it is distinguishable from the way in which the concrete abstraction represented by capital operates as a '*universal global form of social mediation today*' (Cunningham 2008, p. 466). One consequence of this is that, in the absence of more fundamental changes at the level of the social, a 'reformed' model of juridical relations can never operate as an effective 'counterbalance' to the violence of capital. Nevertheless law is more than an intellectual abstraction or a mere operationalisation of a methodological approach. Lefebvre's account of the tendencies towards fragmentation, homogenisation and hierarchy that characterise abstract space provides one way to explain how law also functions concretely through its spatial ordering and control of bodies. This means that the importance of struggles for alternatives to the specifically juridical forms of concrete abstraction that buttress various modes of oppression remains undiminished. Identifying, confronting and resisting the abstract character and concrete manifestations of law require a reframing of both its modes of expression and the practices it produces (Cunningham 2008, pp. 466-7). A crucial aspect of such an interrogation is the political challenge that Cunningham identifies in the generation of counter-relationships between difference and abstraction (Cunningham 2005, 2008).

It is here that Lefebvre's introduction of the right to the city is instructive as one demand for a form of politics and organisational relations which reconceptualise the connections between the concrete and abstract, by rejecting both the violent abstraction of positivist formulations of juridical rights and the moralistic repudiation of all forms of institutional order. However, Lefebvre augments this emphasis on the spatial politics that

surround the right to the city by highlighting how its reframing of the everyday expression of abstract concepts is also necessarily mediated by the aesthetic realm. This is directly related to the importance Lefebvre attaches to the aesthetic dimensions of the appropriation of space. As I have already outlined, in Lefebvre's writing, practices of appropriation link the production of space to a reassertion of the primacy of use value and creativity over exchange and domination (Lefebvre 1979, p. 291; Lefebvre 2009, p. 191). The right to the city is therefore an essential means of aesthetically reconfiguring everyday life and defending the urban as a creative construction that is 'more or less the *oeuvre* of its citizens' (Lefebvre 1996, p. 117). This exploration of the relationship between the politics of space and the aesthetic character of struggles for the right to the city suggests alternative ways of conceptualising the ordering and production of urban space.

Lefebvre considers this problematic in most detail in *The production of space*, where he identifies the revolutionary role of early twentieth century visual artists such as Picasso, Klee and Kandinsky in heralding the 'social and political transformation of space' (Lefebvre 1991b, p. 304). While much attention has focused on his ambivalence towards the violence and cruelty of Picasso's representations of the female body, it is also clear that Lefebvre has high praise for his art as a harbinger of a new 'space of modernity'.

[Picasso] inevitably glimpsed the coming dialectical transformation of space and prepared the ground for it; by discovering the contradictions of a fragmented space – contradictions which reside in him, and in all his works [he] thus bore witness to the emergence of another space, a space not fragmented but differential in character. (Lefebvre 1991b, pp. 302-3)

These reflections on the inevitable relationship between politics and aesthetics have an unacknowledged connection with Antonio Negri's meditations on the capacities of abstract art and creative experimentation to directly critique the dominant cultural and social practices of market society, a social formation he describes as 'the postmodern world of pure abstraction' (Negri 2011, pp. 15-16).⁹ In the midst of the nihilism that accompanies this 'gigantic spectacle of absolute indifference', Negri optimistically identifies the possibilities suggested by artistic abstraction, in revealing the novel qualities of being which are otherwise subsumed by the universalising pressures of exchange (Negri 2011, p. 20).

⁹ They also resonate with Jacques Rancière's account of the intrinsically aesthetic dependence of politics on a certain 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancière 2013, p. 9).

Art ... became abstract by traversing a real development, by creating a new world through abstraction. ... To understand the nature of art today is to understand how the pain of a world which has been lost can venture into a naked and unknown continent in order to create being – new being. (Negri 2011, p. 4, 12)

Negri argues that, faced with the melancholy that followed the eclipse of earlier revolutionary hopes, visual artists in the post-1968 era have had to confront questions about what forms of life are generated by the abstractions of capitalist society. In his words artistic development transforms the abstraction of the social relations in which we are immersed into corporeal figures, releasing the vitality of the flesh into images that move and inflect themselves, in a process of continuous transformation. From Bacon through Warhol to Nam June Paik, the artist imagines a thick space, a molten turmoil, and looks fearlessly to a world freed from its internal architecture. (Negri 2008, p. 22)

Although there are undeniable differences between the philosophical orientations of these two thinkers, both Lefebvre and Negri are drawn to the capacities of artistic abstraction to reveal the contradictions embedded in the social relations of contemporary capitalism. Their reflections on the aesthetics of abstraction raise the question of whether it is possible to develop forms of creative practice which can critique the relentless imperatives of capital and the politico-legal structures which support the neoliberal state, 'without devolving into nostalgia' or reproducing the 'selfsame indifference' of these forms of abstraction (Toscano 2009, p. 377, 381; McCormack 2012, pp. 725-6). Such a pursuit of alternative modes of abstraction is not intended as an avant-gardist substitution of art for juridical relations or the conjuring of an a-legal fantasy of pure creativity and the sensual assertion of difference. These desires would indeed be just as naïve as the formalist embrace of pure abstraction. But we cannot avoid confronting the crucial role of aesthetic criteria and creative practices in imagining new institutional structures, styles of normative ordering and articulations of subjectivity which may challenge the social arrangements which are reproduced by currently dominant forms of abstraction.

Conclusions

Lefebvre's history of abstract space offers a distinctive and powerful account of how certain types of abstraction have become so pervasive in mediating thought, experience and

practice within contemporary capitalist societies. Through an explanation of the historical emergence of this spatial mode of production, Lefebvre's account suggests that the abstract forms that accompany the commodification of social life, the exercise of state power and the construction of juridical relations can be at least partly understood in terms of the fragmentation, homogenisation and hierarchical distributions that characterise abstract space. By focusing on the spatial dimensions of the abstract, Lefebvre both engages with and extends the philosophical critique of abstraction that has been widely influential within the Western marxist tradition (Osborne 2004; Postone 1993). In particular, there is much of interest in his depiction of the potential transition from abstract space to the production of a differential space – oriented towards appropriation rather than domination. Here Lefebvre reveals his own enthusiasm for those utopian possibilities that are always latent within abstract space, and which suggest the contours of forms of resistance to the many sources of domination and violence that structure everyday life. This emphasis is most apparent in his discussion of the potential held out by differential space for the rejuvenation of the body's relationship to its own spatiality, and in the juridico-political relevance of his concept of the right to the city for the critique of law's role in the entrenchment of abstract space.

However it is also important to recognise the deeper significance of Lefebvre's contribution to an affirmative critique of the role of abstraction in the reproduction of social relations. As Cunningham explains, resisting the imperatives of abstract space does not solely depend on an expression of the pure immediacy of experience, but requires the assertion of alternative forms of abstraction, without which no 'such space of a differential connectivity or social 'unity' [would] be conceivable at all' (Cunningham 2005, p. 23). Here Lefebvre's reconceptualisation of the concept of concrete abstraction is of crucial significance in explaining how the generation of new forms of abstraction is a battle waged within both thought and practice. The right to the city again provides an instructive example of how the concrete and the abstract are simultaneously reworked through political concepts and practices, alongside aesthetic criteria and experiences. Lefebvre's articulation of this right charts a course between a positivist, juridical model and the nihilist rejection of institutional order. However it also poses an obvious challenge for critical legal attempts to imagine legal rules, institutional structures and forms of subjectivity which avoid the homogeneous, fragmented and hierarchical tendencies that characterise abstract space. While the importance of such questions remains undeniable, the concept of concrete

abstraction suggests one way of addressing them which goes beyond the intellectual limitations of a narrowly-drawn 'reproach of abstraction' (Osborne 2004).

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