

Urban Revolution Now

Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture

Edited by

Łukasz Stanek
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and
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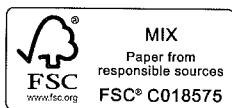
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For Difference 'in and through' São Paulo: The Regressive-Progressive Method

Fraya Frehse

How can one produce conceptual explanations about urban space that are sensitive to empirically given social processes that contribute to making cities differ from one another, amid and despite the vigour of the current global urbanization trend? This theoretical issue, which has been mobilizing sociologists in various academic contexts in the US and Europe (for example, Sassen 1991, 2008, Berking and Löw 2008, Löw 2009), is of special interest to me as a Brazilian sociologist and anthropologist living in and doing research on São Paulo. Although Brazilian urban contexts are experienced in practice as being different from Paris, London, Chicago, Los Angeles or New York, these cities often inspire, empirically speaking, the sociological city notions that present-day Brazilian research relies upon to explain, in theoretical terms, this country's urban space. Notions such as fragmentation, gentrification, global cities and segregation underpin the Brazilian debate (Frehse and Leite 2010). They bring to the interpretive forefront what is mutual among urban contexts amid and despite the elements that make them differ from each other. Empirical differences become (in)voluntarily subject to similarities. In extreme cases, difference entirely disappears from the conceptual agenda (Frehse 2012).

My aim here is to show that Lefebvre's regressive-progressive method plays a *unique* role in changing this state of affairs, which applies not only to the Brazilian academic context. There is a definite 'international division of the academic labour model' in urban studies: research centres outside 'the core countries in Northern Europe and North America' have been 'pushed towards the provision of empirical, but not of theoretical or methodological knowledge' (Fortuna 2012: 138). Instead of addressing the theoretical contributions of Lefebvre's approach to current urban studies in Latin America and abroad (Frehse 2013a, 2013b), I consider this book appropriate for a more radical statement. It does not matter that Lefebvre is usually associated with urban studies of the so-called North: the approach is unparalleled for conceptualizing empirically given differences in definite urban contexts as difference in the production of space *beyond* this region, notably 'in and through' São Paulo – by considering that social relations only exist 'in and through space'

(Lefebvre 2000 [1974]: 465), and that difference is both a (logical) concept and a (factual) content historically produced in the wake of the 'reciprocal, conflictive and appeared relationships' between the 'qualities' of the 'particularities' that 'survived' these encounters (Lefebvre 1970a: 65).¹

The thesis of the method's uniqueness becomes evident when one addresses a specific dimension of Lefebvre's approach. My sub-thesis is that the method's exclusiveness derives from the conceptual object that it helps the urban researcher to evidence in analytical terms: the mediating role of historicity in the space produced by the mediation of the everyday uses of definite empirically given spaces in various urban contexts, regardless of whether these uses range from fleeting bodily movements to urbanistic conceptions of space. One has only to accept Lefebvre's methodological standpoint regarding the (metaphilosophical) dialectical relation between theory and practice, concept and 'practical reality' (1975: 132): his concern with the transductive identification of historical possibilities contained in empirically given realities, even urban ones (Lefebvre 2009 [1968]: 99–100).² From this angle, space, as a 'set of relationships', is a mediation of praxis, thus also a mediation of (bodily) perceptions, of (symbolic) experiences and of (rational and scientific) conceptions: of 'the perceived', 'the lived', and 'the conceived' (Lefebvre 2000: xx–xxi, 48–50). Historicity, in turn, refers to the entanglement of historical times; or, better stated, 'of the temporalities of history concerning the past, the present and "the possible"'.³

This chapter elucidates the argument in three steps. First I bring to the fore the specificity of my sub-thesis by both elucidating what the regressive-progressive method is about, and by locating my interest in it in the recent academic debate about its use. Then the analytical demonstration of the method's uniqueness in the search for difference in and through space beyond the North can start. In the second section, I articulate the approach with Lefebvre's space triad and apply this tool set to data related to my investigations into the everyday past and present uses of São Paulo's cathedral square by pedestrians. Scrutinized respectively in descriptive, in analytical-regressive and in historical-genetic terms, Praça da Sé reveals two specific historical contradictions which, finally, evidence São Paulo as a *different* urban space, and hence three factors that ensure the method's exclusiveness, when the issue is difference.

(NON-)USES OF THE REGRESSIVE-PROGRESSIVE METHOD IN URBAN RESEARCH

Lefebvre presented his approach for the first time in an article in the *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, four years after a paper on the 'problems of rural sociology' published there in 1949 (Lefebvre 2001a). Based on findings of one recent piece of empirical research on a 'peasant community' of the Pyrenean region of Campan, the first article critically focused on 'city-dwellers, intellectuals and even historians or sociologists' that ignore the 'complex organization' of 'our rural villages' (2001a: 21). Inspired by Lenin's law of uneven development, which reveals

the 'different degrees and modes of dissolution or reconstitution of the peasant community'; Lefebvre then stressed the presence of an unnoticed past in current villages and cities; in fact the persistence and action of 'the historical' upon 'the actual' everywhere (2001a: 39, 22).

In turn, by 1953 the time had come for proposing 'perspectives' for rural sociology (Lefebvre 2001b); hence the regressive-progressive method. This set of empirical research procedures aimed to identify the dialectical interplay between the 'horizontal' (synchronic) and the 'vertical' (diachronic) complexity of peasant reality, so that 'the possible' there might be disclosed (2001b: 65–6). In this sense, whether the approach resulted from Lefebvre's reading of Marx's interpretation method exposed in *Capital* and in *Grundrisse* (Hess 1988: 181), from Lenin's ponderings on the Marxian 'economic-social formation' notion (Martins 1996a: 15–20), or from Lefebvre's contact with Marc Bloch's 'regressive method' (Stanek 2011: 159–60), it operationalized a definite methodological perspective on social reality. On the one hand, 'Agrarian formations and structures' with the same 'historical date' present 'essential differences' and, on the other, the 'rural world' offers 'the coexistence of formations of *different ages and dates*' for 'observation and analysis' (Lefebvre 2001b: 65–6).

Based on these concerns, the regressive-progressive method holds both an operational and an interpretive dimension that become manifest in three main research steps that Lefebvre terms 'moments', which are 'attempt[s] aiming at the total accomplishment of a possibility' (Lefebvre 1961: 348). Based on participant observation and on interviews, surveys and statistics, the researcher 'describes', in the 'descriptive moment', the empirically given 'field' (Lefebvre 2001b: 73); or, more precisely, that which an analyst termed 'social life' or 'social relations', and the 'elements of material and spiritual culture' (Martins 1996a: 21). Thus the horizontal complexity of social reality in the field can be disclosed, putting its vertical complexity at stake. Its 'analytical-regressive' assessment involves the attempt to identify the 'exact' dates of the previously described 'reality' (Lefebvre 2001b: 74). Then, both complexities can be dialectically linked to each other: in the third 'historical-genetic moment', the 'transformations' of the previously dated elements are 'elucidated and understood' against the background of 'the further (internal or external) development', and of these elements' 'subordination to the overall structures', to the 'overall processes'. The effort is 'to return to the previously described actual, in order to meet the present again', but this time an '*explained*' present (ibid.). The coexistence of things, social relations and representations of different ages in the actual – of society, of the individual – brings to the fore contradictions between the research-field elements that historically changed and those that did not – from the methodological viewpoint of other, already accomplished historical possibilities embedded in the contradictory overall process.

Thus the regressive-progressive approach reveals what is historically possible in *any* researched social reality – an aspect Jean-Paul Sartre (1960: 41–2, n. 1) quickly recognized. The coexistence of elements from different historical times turns each one, as opposed to the others, into an indication that a possibility lies 'ahead of the real

and of what has been accomplished' (Martins 1996a: 22). This is due to the (Marxian) 'radical needs' embedded in the '*residua*' of praxis, in conceptions and relations that, uncaptured by power, remain subterranean in social life (Lefebvre 1965: 20, Martins 1996a: 22-3). Radical needs cannot be satisfied without changes in society (*ibid.*).

Given these characteristics, there is, however, more at play in the method – and a departing point for my statement: a set of procedures to evidence in analytical terms how the entanglement of historical times empirically interferes with *space*; or, better stated, with its transformations, as space is a product. Although the approach's first explicit demonstration occurred within a specific spatial context, Lefebvre applied it to various empirical research fields thereafter: from specific cities to the 'field of representations' (Lefebvre 1970b: 69, 2000: *passim*, 1980: 136–7).

Still, present-day empirical urban research rarely takes into consideration both the operational and interpretive roles of the method regarding the link between (historical) time and (urban) space. By doing research in Iberian and Latin American online journals (Frehse 2013b), and in Portuguese, German, French and British university libraries, I found out that the regressive–progressive approach is just about absent from urban research, except for Brazilian urban investigations, and for French institutional analyses. The proliferation of empirical studies on the production of space with the aid of Lefebvre's space triad as of the 1980s (Harvey 1989, Soja 1989, Schmid 2005, Löw 2005, Urban Research 2009) has not changed this situation, even though Lefebvre himself thoroughly dated spatial practice, the space of representations and the representations of space in his analyses, aware that 'all reality in space is exposed and explained by a *genesis* in time' (2000: 51, 53, 56–8, 136).

Brazil's peculiarity in this context is due to the history of sociology there, which is tied to the foundation of the country's first university, in 1934. The first sociologists educated at the University of São Paulo (USP) 'learned to reflect ... on Brazil largely in terms of the past' (Candido 1993: xxxix). This emphasis on history certainly lies at the root of the great receptiveness for the Marxian dialectic method among USP's first generations of sociologists (for example, Fernandes 1959, Cardoso 1962, Martins 1975). A major concern was the 'social obstacles to development' in Brazil, due to the active presence of social practices inherited from its colonial and slavery past (Martins 1998). One can thus understand precisely why Lefebvre's method drove the first attempt to study his works in depth there (Martins 1996b). The regressive–progressive approach became the target of methodological reflections (Martins 1996a, Frehse 2001, 2013b) and of empirical urban research (Martins 1992, 2008, Frehse 2005, 2011, 2013a).

It is to this lineage of studies that this chapter belongs. Its peculiarity derives from its aim: to demonstrate step by step, by applying the method to a definite empirical reality in São Paulo, that the focus of this approach on the relationship between historicity and space makes it unique in present-day urban studies, as regards difference in urban space amid the global urbanization trend.

To this end, nothing is better than strictly 'returning to Lefebvre'; that is, to his methodological concerns with the production of space, and hence with articulating the method with the space triad. This is no easy task, as it implies unfolding methodological aspects Lefebvre himself did not explicitly address when

mobilizing both tool sets in his reflections on the relationship between historicity and space.

DIFFERENCE IN SÃO PAULO THROUGH HISTORICITY

A fruitful starting point is to remember that in searching for difference Lefebvre heightened the methodological relevance of 'the formation "in the field" of a differential time-space; of 'differential space' (Lefebvre 1970a: 129, 2000: 407–60). This concerns the relations of juxtaposition, superposition, connection, interference and competition among 'locations, situations and local qualities; of which 'those that resist turn into *differences* in urban time-space' (Lefebvre 1970a: 129).

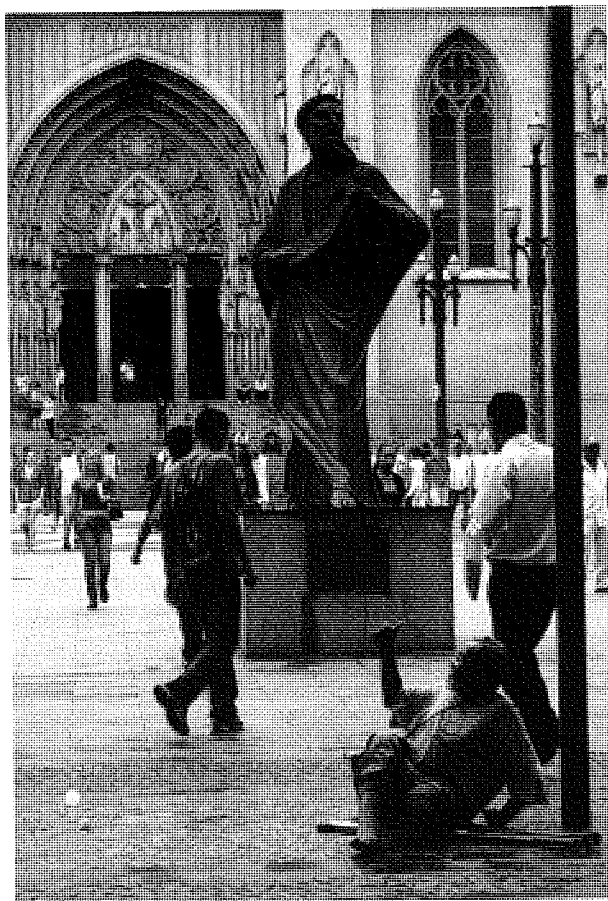
The historical novelty of postwar capitalism is 'the idea of a dialectic centrality or of a dialectics of centrality; characterized by 'movements based on the inclusion-exclusion spatially provoked by a definite cause: the centre gathers only by spurring distance and dispersion' (Lefebvre 2000: 382, 445). This dialectical movement's central role is played by 'abstract space', which is underscored by the forms and quantities that drive the functioning of capitalism (ibid.: 61). Against this background, differential space points to the possible amid the contradictory centrality of abstract space (ibid.: 64–5, 407–60). This is due to the contradictions from which it emerged: the coexistence of the (historically old) 'contradictions *in* space' (embedded in history, especially class conflicts) and the (historically new) 'contradictions *of* space'; for example, the 'dialectic movement of centrality' besides the 'contradiction between the past and possible abundance, and the factual scarcity' (ibid.: 382, 384–5).

Based on these ponderings, the research question becomes what one should focus on, empirically speaking, to synthetically grasp the formation of a possibility of differential space, at least. Given the limitations of this chapter, one alternative lies in the regressive-progressive exploration of what Lefebvre called a monumental space or monument: a 'spatial *oeuvre*' (2000: 253, 255). Rich in symbols, the monument holds 'an inexhaustible sense' (Lefebvre 2001c [1960]: 93). This is what turns it into 'the memory and figuration of the past' of the city, into 'the active nodes of its current everyday life, into the forecast of its future' (Lefebvre 1961: 308). By condensing various historical times, this space goes 'beyond itself, its façade (if it has one), its internal space', while also being underpinned by dialectics analogous to that of centrality: 'everywhere *monumentality* disseminates, irradiates, condenses, concentrates itself' (Lefebvre 1970b: 57). These traits assure the monument's methodological relevance in analyses of space production in postwar capitalism: it is an 'epistemic tool' (Stanek 2011: 196).

Hence my option to focus on Praça da Sé (see Figure 12.1), whose past and present uses by pedestrians I have moreover studied for years (Frehse 1997, 2005, 2011, 2013a, 2013b).

The cathedral's dates and centrality also impregnate in symbolic terms the square in which this monument was erected. Thus Praça da Sé becomes a mediation that may reveal how historicity interferes with São Paulo's urban space.

Fig. 12.1
Southern view of
Praça da Sé with
the cathedral
(February 2012)



And it *synthetically* discloses this link, as illustrated by the data I have collected on this square.

Therefore it is now only necessary to select the empirical elements of the square for assessment in regressive-progressive terms. After all, there is a great deal to observe in this polygonal forecourt (see Figure 12.2) of some 37,500 square metres (Milanesi 2002: 161).

Praça da Sé is the biggest square on São Paulo's so-called historical hill, where this city of 11.2 million inhabitants in 2010 (19.7 million in its Metropolitan Region) was founded in 1554 as a hinterland Jesuit settlement of the Portuguese colony named Brazil. The plaza's major building is the Roman Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral of São Paulo, a gothic temple 11 metres long and 46 metres wide, with 92-metre towers and a 30-metre cupola (Milanesi 2002: 85), and capable of holding 8,000 people (Porto 1996: 184).

In favour of selection criteria, I kept in mind that the square is a 'place', a 'local space-time' to which a spatial practice corresponds. As this one concerns the (qualitative) use of space that produces this space, being thus mediated by the



Fig. 12.2
Southern
bird's-eye view
of Praça da Sé
(February 2012)

perceived, the lived and the conceived, *the body* is the analytical reference for 'understanding social space in three moments' (Lefebvre 2000: 21, 23–4, 48–50).

This caused me to focus respectively on elements of *the conceived*, *the perceived* and *the lived* Praça da Sé that touched me the most in visual and audio terms during my fieldwork there on weekdays (2–6 pm) between April 2007 and February 2012. This decision, in turn, led me to concentrate on the western third of the immense polygon, a physically circumscribed area that holds pedestrians only sparsely observable in the plaza's eastern two-thirds. As, moreover, the selected area is currently the plaza's historically oldest spot, I termed it Praça da Sé for analytical purposes.

Last but not least, I choose, from now on, to tackle in descriptive, analytical-regressive and historical-genetic terms three elements of the conceived, the perceived and the lived plaza, respectively: urbanistic representations of it; patterns of pedestrian body behaviour there; and verbal images of the square by some of its users.

Descriptive Moment

Given that I usually started my field observations in the square's southern end, and advanced from there to the north, this is also the geographical direction I adopt in this description. Moreover I make use of the present tense for the sake of fluency.

Last, I address only the physical references and pedestrian types that may help to make the selected empirical elements intelligible in the framework of this chapter. Thus I devised the following sketch that, viewed from the bottom to top (in line with my fieldwork's south-north orientation), represents the most usual locations of some of the urban equipments and pedestrian types I most regularly noticed on Praça da Sé (see Figure 12.3).

The plaza's cathedral is built alongside the south of a pedestrianized rectangular cement forecourt without seats, whose east and west sides are dotted with two lines of imperial palms surrounded by (empty) flowerbeds, while the centre holds an art-nouveau piece of rock in the middle of a compass rose. This is Marco Zero, from which all geographical distances in São Paulo are measured. On the forecourt's east side, low walls physically separate this rectangle from the garden area that I do not consider here, and which is covered with flowerbeds and low trees, park benches, water mirrors, abstract art sculptures and the entrances to São Paulo's main underground junction station, named Sé. The rectangular area's west side, in turn, is bordered by a street dotted with commercial buildings, whereas further north one glimpses a statue about three metres high (pedestal included) of the apostle Paul, as well as flagpoles (see Figure 12.1).

This equipment visually separates the plaza's almost shadeless rectangular area from its pedestrianized continuation further north. With broad shade-giving trees also surrounded by empty flowerbeds, this seatless second rectangle holds a statue some 10 metres high of one of São Paulo's founders, the Jesuit José de Anchieta. This segment's east side, in turn, is bordered by a police station, by commercial establishments, and a court leading to two underground entrances. Its west side ends in the aforementioned street. On the north, this area is physically limited by another street. By crossing it, one arrives at the square's last pedestrianized segment: a seatless triangle with some shade-giving trees surrounded by empty flowerbeds.

Underscored by these and other physical traits related to spatial practice, Praça da Sé evidences the coexistence of at least three urbanistic representations of space – that is, 'dominant' space 'conceptions' developed by 'experts, planners and urbanists, by "fragmenting" and "agencing" technocrats, and by artists close to scientificity: they all identify what is experienced and perceived with what is conceived' (Lefebvre 2000: 48). First, there is the conception that bishops' sees must lie in the geographical centre of a city; moreover, the representation that a cathedral square must hold large human gatherings; and finally, the conception that a cathedral square must be the main junction of a city's underground system.

But Praça da Sé is more than a space conceived in urbanistic terms. By considering that the perceived refers to the use of the body through hands, limbs, sensitivity and gesture (2000: 50), one dimension of it surfaces in particular when one pays attention to the pedestrian types that gather there. I mean the patterns involved in how (in Maussian terms) 'human beings make use of their bodies' in specific (Lefebvrian) 'rhythms'. This is what I termed 'modes of body behaviour' (Frehse 2011: 46): 'body techniques' (Mauss 1997: 365) employed in certain sequences of repetitions that induce 'manners' (Lefebvre 1992: 55). The perceived plaza cathedral

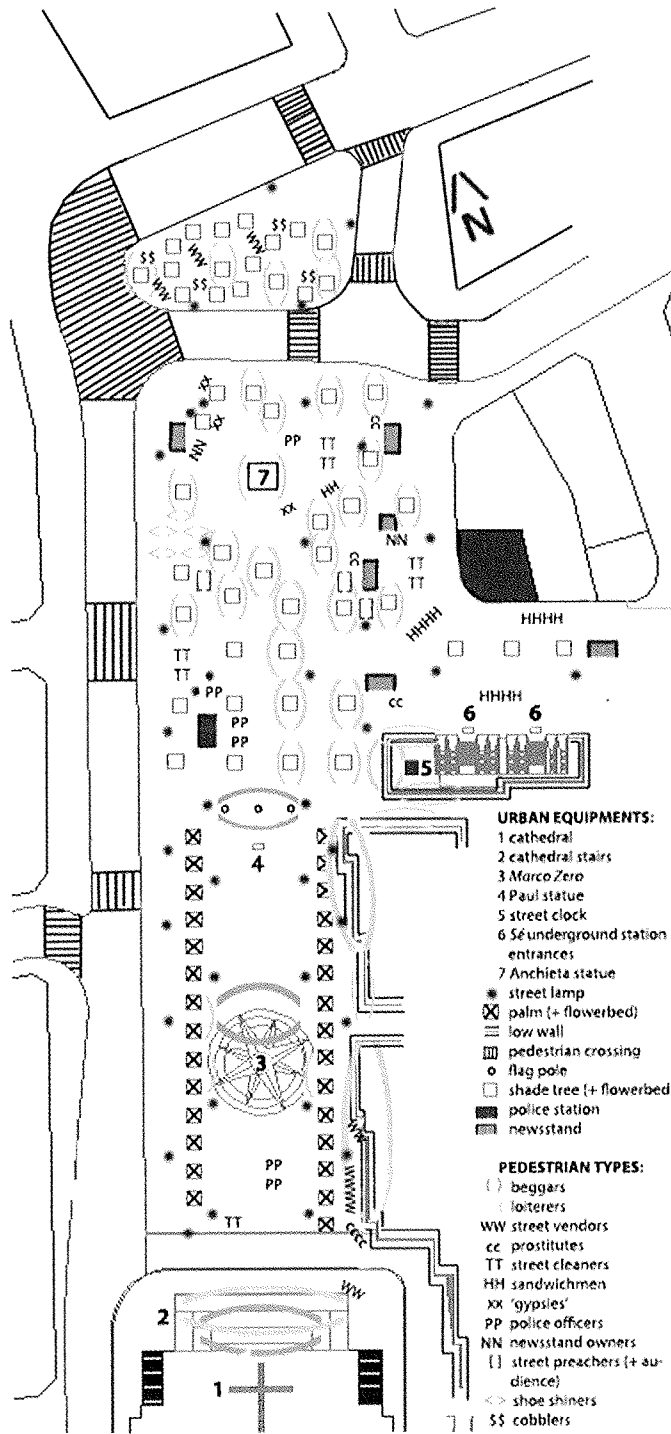


Fig. 12.3 Location of some regular urban equipments and pedestrian types (2007–12)

square is, on the one hand, the setting for the *regular coming and going of passers-by* (see Figure 12.4): of men, women and children that stand out for the physical behaviour of regularly crossing public spaces such as streets and squares (Frehse 2011: 45).

On the other hand, the plaza is enlivened by one mode of body behaviour that I termed the 'regular physical permanence' of pedestrians in São Paulo streets and squares – *whether to perform manual labour, or for sociability purposes* (ibid.: 89). This is why I use to call them *non-passers-by* (Frehse 2013a): indeed, they differ from the passers-by in that they regularly stay in the square (see Figure 12.5).

However, the socioeconomic and gender profiles of these non-passers-by vary, as does their location (see Figure 12.3). On the cathedral stairs and around the low walls, street vendors, prostitutes and loiterers, many of them unemployed and/or homeless, some of them drunk or drugged people, most of them men, few women, illegally sell and exchange food, drugs and alcoholic beverages. The low walls near the stairs, in particular, hold a discrete clandestine fair where (sometimes stolen) apparel, footwear, perfume, mobile phones, among other items, are bartered. The almost shadeless rectangle also holds regular beggars. All these informal non-passers-by lie or sit on the square's ground, on its low walls, on the cathedral stairs or the trees' flowerbeds. There they share the space with a few formal non-passers-by: police officers, street cleaners – that is, state employees engaged in maintaining the square's function as a place of transit and of merely momentary shelter.

Being easily observable in the imperial palm rectangle, all these non-passers-by also appear in the site's other two segments. There they coexist with others that must also be addressed in descriptive terms. In the central part of the shade-giving tree rectangle, street preachers of the most diverse religions loudly argue in front of attentive audiences of (non-)passers-by about gods and devils, while police officers gather inside and around the two police stations nearby. Further northwest is the shoeshiners' workplace. Their activities and those of the newspaper and magazine vendors in the square's many newsstands are the only legally registered street businesses on the plaza. In front of these stands, a few relatively invisible prostitutes gather, whereas next to the Anchieta statue, women in gypsy garb read the fortunes of passers-by. Sandwichmen, in turn, advertise 'I buy gold', mostly near the underground entrances. Last, the non-passers-by of the shade-giving tree triangle are much less variegated in social terms: few loiterers and street vendors share the space with legally registered cobblers who also polish shoes.

What might one say, finally, of the lived Praça da Sé? One must address the 'images and symbols' through which space is bodily lived by its 'inhabitants' and 'users', its artists and writers (Lefebvre 2000: 50). None of these types could be identified as such. Indeed, at least since 1990, there are more people living *on* the streets and squares of São Paulo's historical hill than *in* its surrounding buildings (Sposati 2000). Thus I searched for images of the square verbalized to me by five non-passers-by who had been spending their weekday afternoons there for five or more years, and who agreed to be interviewed during their work or while loitering there.

In search for semiotic and symbolic forms of representations located in 'the sensitive aspects' that link past individual and group emotions to the present as well



Fig. 12.4 Northern view of the plaza's imperial palm forecourt (April 2011)



Fig. 12.5 Northeastern view of the plaza's shaded rectangle (February 2012)

as to the future (Lefebvre 1961: 288, 1980: 240), I was faced with peculiar images. For the 55-year-old homeless Pedro,⁴ who had been living in the cathedral square for five years (in February 2012), the site was essentially 'a street vending market where you can even find paperclips', a discreet allusion to its clandestine fair. In turn, the 28-year-old homeless Roberto, in the square for 15 years (in November 2008), described Praça da Sé as 'my home, my third mother', after his mother died and his aunt sent him to a remand home. If both these images are idiosyncratic, the third was shared by three of the square's daily workers in February 2012. The plaza is exclusively a workplace for both the 42-year-old Marco and the 70-year-old José, shoeshiners there for ten and 40 years respectively, and for the 58-year-old newspaper seller João, whose stand there is 20 years old. The cathedral is totally absent from these images. It does not matter that the bishop's see, Sé, gave the square its name, and that all the interviewees stated that they had been raised as Roman Catholics – though not all of them currently practise this religion.

Analytical-regressive Moment

In order to date the aforementioned urbanistic representations of space, the best starting point is the cathedral. Although its external appearance paraphrases a definite Gothic past, it was built between 1912 and 1960, its latest ornaments dating from 2004. Its construction by a German immigrant followed the demolition of a previous cathedral that had been constructed as of 1745, in colonial Portuguese style, in the central-north side of the square's currently shaded rectangle (where, since 1954, the Anchieta statue has stood), when the economically poor hinterland town of São Paulo became a diocese of colonial Brazil (see Figure 12.6).

Although the current cathedral's architecture is totally divorced from this long social history, it reveals traits of São Paulo's modernity in the early twentieth century: its 'cultural uprooting' after centuries of strong Iberian references (Martins 1999: 2–3). The only remainder of the colonial Sé is the ground plan of the square's triangular area, which roughly corresponds to the former Largo da Sé. The word *largo* alludes to the triangular widening of the streets that, since the Middle Ages, usually emerged in front of churches in the villages or cities colonized by Portugal (Teixeira 2001a: 11).

Whereas the cathedral's external appearance stems in historical terms from the German medieval period, when Brazil had not yet come into being, Praça da Sé results from a representation of space that dates back to the Portuguese Middle Ages. The positive evaluation of Catholic sees in the geographical centre of settlements dates from the last decades of the fifteenth century (Teixeira 2001a: 14, 2001b: 75, 78). This conception, which spread worldwide thanks to Portugal's colonizing endeavours, also reached São Paulo. The construction of the first Sé dragged on from the last decade of the sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century, in a small Indian–Portuguese settlement that was promoted to 'village' in 1560, becoming a 'city' only in 1711.

The rectangular square, in particular, constructed after the demolition of the colonial cathedral and of three blocks of houses on the south of today's Praça da Sé,



Fig. 12.6
Southeastern
view of the former
cathedral (1862)

results from the urbanistic representation that a cathedral square should be a 'civic square'. This conception became notorious in São Paulo in the 1910s (Sevcenko 1992: 103). It was a novelty in a city with little more than 409,000 inhabitants (1910), a colossal figure relative to the 65,000 people or so of 20 years earlier, and the roughly 32,000 that lived in the still rural and provincial São Paulo by 1872 (Frehse 2011).

Then, during the country's last military dictatorship (1964–85), the 'civic square' representation was merged with the notion that Praça da Sé should become the main junction of the São Paulo underground lines, the construction of which began in 1968 (Milanesi 2002: 118, 142–60). The square was conceived as a place primarily for pedestrian and passenger traffic. In the 1970s, it lost many of its surrounding monumental buildings in favour of the wide pedestrianized area, the compass rose around the 1934 *Marco Zero*, and the eastern garden sector.

In my view, this representation has been reiterated recently, this time under democracy. At least since the latest renovation of Praça da Sé (2006–07), benches have been absent from the area under consideration here. The seating possibilities are now the ground, the cathedral stairs, flower beds, low walls or private chairs (see Figures 12.1, 12.3–12.5).

For all these reasons, the conceived Praça da Sé dates mainly from the twentieth century. The date of the perceived square, in turn, is far harder to establish. Nevertheless, the analytical-regressive perspective enables one to discern that the body behaviour of the square's passers-by dates back to the last third of the nineteenth century and that regular permanence is even older. Regular walking along streets and squares became common in downtown São Paulo in the late

1800s (Frehse 2005, 2011). By the end of the African slavery age (1888), places such as Praça da Sé harboured the regular permanence almost exclusively of pedestrians involved in manual labour (street vending, loitering, begging, animal husbandry, prostitution) and/or with the sociability connections that evolved mainly among poor (ex-)slaves or freemen in these occasions. As a rule, men and women of high social standing left home only on exceptional and ceremonial occasions, such as festivals and religious processions, or to visit relatives. Passers-by were an absolute exception. However, in the wake of the many socioeconomic, demographic and political transformations of the late 1800s, these pedestrians became the new protagonists of regular to-and-fro movements within São Paulo's central streets and squares, thus displaying a body behaviour to which especially the members of the then nascent middle classes were fated. Indeed, they practised the routines of the (few) salaried or self-employed workers in a city marked by slavery.

From this standpoint, the perceived Praça da Sé is much older than the conceived one. The nineteenth century in particular becomes evident every time the square's hard ground, its low walls or the cathedral stairs cease to be passageways and the site of a brief stay, tacitly to become the physical supports of the body to relax or to socialize. An analysis of photographs of downtown São Paulo in the nineteenth century (Frehse 2011: 204, 490–97) reveals body techniques surprisingly similar to today's ones, although the square's current pedestrians are obviously very different from those of the former Largo da Sé.

In turn, the lived Praça da Sé gives one the impression of no historicity at all. The cathedral-square images show virtually no ties with the past, the present or the future – let alone with the possible. Their prevailing time is the present, as indicated by the prompt association of Praça da Sé with a workplace for some, with a place of consumption for others, or with a timeless place of affection and of yearning for affection, those irreducible 'residues' of praxis (Lefebvre 1967: 68–9).

To grasp what this peculiar coexistence of times reveals about difference in and through São Paulo, one must, finally, link the previously dated structures with the 'overall' ones, evaluating their modifications.

Historical-genetic Moment

As in this case the structures are the moments of Praça da Sé that, in a way, mediate the production of space both in present-day urban Brazil and abroad, why not evaluate their modifications in relation to the overall process comprised by the current trend toward global urbanization?

The physical appearance of Praça da Sé indicates that after 40 years this space is still architecturally and urbanistically conceived as a place for pedestrian and passenger traffic. This representation turns the square into an exemplary manifestation of Lefebvorean abstract space. The functionalist and quantitatively oriented character of the architectural 'party' of the 1970s (Milanesi 2002: 161) strongly contributed to the square's beginning, just like abstract space, to 'function negatively' concerning 'historical, religious and political aspects' and differential space-time, while 'functioning positively' regarding its implications: techniques,

applied sciences, and knowledge tied to power' (Lefebvre 2000: 62). Thus it comes as no surprise that the conceived Praça da Sé disregards the urbanistic representation that the monumentality of the square derives from the presence of a cathedral there.

This suggests to what extent the São Paulo urban space is 'modern', the characteristics of the 'space of "modernity"' being its 'homogeneity-fragmentation-hierarchisation' (ibid.: xxiii). Thus what Praça da Sé pedestrians share with passers-by of postwar abstract space comes to the analytic fore: 'a tacit agreement, a non-aggression pact, a non-violence agreement in everyday life, almost' (ibid.: 70).

Yet, at the same time, everything is different at the heart of the dialectics of centrality. One has only to focus on two revealing contradictions of space embedded in the lived Praça da Sé.

The images provided by the five non-passers-by suggest, on the one hand, that the lived square seems totally dominated by the rationale of abstract space, with its own temporal contradiction: the time that cannot be reduced appears, at best, through the homeless Roberto, as 'intimacy, interiority, subjectivity' (Lefebvre 2000: 452). On the other hand, the images show that, if for the interviewees the square is a 'space of consumption', of exchange made feasible by everyday work, which applies to the 'historical places of the accumulation of capital', this relation with space does not imply its contradiction, the 'unproductive consumption of space' by means of leisure. When asked if they would go to the square outside their working hours, the interviewees responded with a scathing 'no'. Not even the cathedral would be worthy of a visit. Only João said he had gone in there 'sometimes – incredibly seldom, given that I work here'.

What is fundamental here is that neither contradiction is due to the disappearance of time (of history), which applies to the space of modernity, but to the active presence of historicity, particularly of the past! In the wake of an urbanization process that allocated to the historical city centre the urbanistic role of a main public transport junction, while the districts further away became the favourite residential areas of the socially and economically most privileged segments of society, Praça da Sé turned into an epicentre of the process that the specialized bibliography refers to as the 'popularization of the São Paulo city centre' (for example, José 2010). It became the favoured place of residence and of work of the poor, who also tend to concentrate in the city's outskirts, its so-called periphery (Kowarick 1979, Martins 2008), given the very high prices of urban property, largely controlled by the real estate market since the 1930s and especially since the 1970s.

These densely historical processes appear as mediations in the production of a plaza that is lived as if it were atemporal, of a cathedral square devoid of the cathedral's monumentality, of a space of consumption unworthy of the consumption of space. Thus one notices a first contradiction of space due to contradictions *in* space, to the way in which the past transpires in and through the perceived and lived square. Less than a centre that attracts while expelling, Praça da Sé is a centre that expels the very centre while – and because – it attracts the periphery.

Still, this very same periphery also differs from the one that haunts the centrality that dialectizes abstract space. It is defined less by the geographical origin and social condition of the non-passers-by than by the historicity of their body behaviour.

Viewed from this angle, this square's monumentality lies less in the materiality of the cathedral than in the bodies of the square's non-passers-by. This is a second contradiction of space due to contradictions in space: the city's memory – a monument – is constituted by the body's unworried gestures, as it insists upon staying in the square despite the pressures of traffic, of the 'silence of the "users"' (Lefebvre 2000: 69). It does not matter that this memory and this past are not lived as such daily.

In sum, if viewed through the operational and the interpretive lenses of the regressive-progressive approach, Praça da Sé is a *peripheral centre whose monumentality is embedded in its pedestrians' bodies*. And it becomes revealing of a conceptually different São Paulo.

THE METHOD'S UNIQUENESS IN URBAN STUDIES

Given that cathedral squares, as a rule, stand out in a great variety of cities, at least in the Western world, due to the long-standing symbolic relevance of cathedrals (Pastro 2010: 262), Praça da Sé offers the urban researcher two sociospatial traits that provide, in conceptual terms, uniquely revealing comparisons with other (at least Western) present-day urban contexts. I know that a comparative exercise of this kind is impossible here. Nevertheless, the results of a recent analysis of mine, particularly of the pedestrian use of space in the Lisbon and São Paulo Praças da Sé (Frehse 2013a), make it possible to propose as a hypothesis for further research that cathedral squares underscored by both aforementioned characteristics are definitely *not* usual in present-day Western metropolises, but mainly in the Northern ones that strongly inspire Brazilian urban studies.

Less than the empirical relevance of this hypothesis, what matters here is that a conceptual possibility as such derives from the application of Lefebvre's method to Praça da Sé. The regressive-progressive angle brings to the analytical forefront historical contradictions of the production of (urban) space that inevitably turn the empirically researched field into a mediation that reveals the *possibility* of socially and culturally *specific* processes of space production.

Hence there is difference at play. A possibility *is* difference (Lefebvre 1970a: 79). Indeed, although the Praça da Sé contradictions are perhaps incapable of turning present-day urban space in São Paulo into a differential space, they are mediations that, at least in conceptual terms, reveal it as a *different* space amid the current historical process. They suggest that, notably in part of urban Brazil, the past continues to provide decisive mediation of the production of space. If the dialectics of centrality is crucial in current urbanization, contradictions in space can be so active amid the vigour of the contradictions of space that the centre becomes a periphery, and the pedestrian's body a monument.

By fostering this kind of conceptualization, the method enables one, finally, to address the three aspects that, for me, ensure its uniqueness in urban studies today.

In fact, it is not the only approach to investigating, at present, the role of historicity in the search for differences between present-day cities. For example,

in the contemporary sociological debate, methodologies that underpin concepts such as habitus, identity, path dependence and doxa are often employed to explain how past social practices interfere with sociospatial processes that make it possible to conceptually distinguish cities from each other.⁵ However, based on different conceptions of historicity and space, the regressive-progressive method is, first, unique in its way of articulating both notions. Conceived in dialectical terms, both time and space become revealing mediations of each other's specificities in definite modes of production. Thus historical times, especially, become free, on the one hand, of any causal determination, and therefore from the subtle linearity implicit in the use that is made of history in the contemporary path-dependence perspective. The historical, after all, is simultaneously the past, the present and the possible. On the other hand, historicity does not exclusively concern routinized, reproductive events believed to structure social practices, as in approaches to the habitus, the identity and the 'intrinsic logic' of cities. Indeed, historicity *mediates* the (re)production of space, which in turn is a mediation of the (re)production of society, thus of the latter's – and of mankind's – historicity.

This methodological aspect of theoretical nature leads one to a second uniqueness factor of the Lefebvrian method in present-day urban studies. It helps the urban researcher to evidence in analytical terms *how* historicity in and through space mediates between everyday life and the so-called grand historical processes of an economic and social nature. Sometimes, as the Praça da Sé example shows, the past remains actively present in human, rather than in architectural, bodies – an aspect I have developed conceptually elsewhere (Frehse 2013b). However, this is a dimension of Lefebvre's ponderings on space that is entirely absent from current Lefebvre-oriented empirical analyses of the production of space. In analytical terms, these tend to focus *either* on the micro or on the macro levels of social practice, thus overlooking Lefebvre's own concern with what mediates between both: time and space; and, in postwar capitalism, particularly historicity in and through urban space. In my view, the regressive-progressive method was developed to cope simultaneously, in operational and interpretive terms, with the relationship between time and space as crucial mediations of a second relationship: that between everyday life and history in and through space.

And thus I arrive at the last uniqueness factor to be stressed. By comprising description, analysis and explanation, the approach mediates between both types of methods that have historically underpinned sociological research: those based on investigation and those based on interpretation (Fernandes 1959: 13–14). This is the peculiarity of Lefebvre's approach: it *mediates* between empirical and theoretical research. Hence it operationalizes a concern that can already be found in Marx's methodological writings, despite remaining a rare undertaking in sociology, not to speak of urban research in general.

Underscored by all these characteristics, it is not difficult to recognize, finally, why the scope of the regressive-progressive method inevitably transcends Northern cities and academic contexts. For as long as there is space for one to scrutinize in analytical and conceptual terms, there will be time and, in the capitalist mode

of production, historicity to understand – and this despite the vigour of space, or, better stated, precisely because of it.

NOTES

- 1 All translations from languages other than English are my own.
- 2 The transduction 'builds a virtual object with information as the starting point', by reaching from 'the (given) real [*le réel (donné)*] to the possible [*le possible*]' (Lefebvre 1961: 121).
- 3 'The past becomes (again) present as a function of the realization of the possibilities objectively implied in this past. It unfolds and updates itself with them' (Lefebvre 1965: 36).
- 4 The names of the interviewees are changed for privacy purposes.
- 5 For a recent review of the literature see Löw (2009: 92–5).

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