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Perspectives on Henri Lefebvre

Theory, Practices and (Re)Readings

Edited by
Jenny Bauer and Robert Fischer
In cooperation with Sebastian Dorsch & prefaced by
Susanne Rau

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Susanne Rau

Preface

“Certains naissent de façon posthume.”¹ Some are born posthumously. Thus begins an article written for a French journal by Stuart Elden, a British political scientist and geographer and translator of the *Éléments de rythmanalyse* (1992) into English (2013). There have, in fact, been a series of works, new editions, and translations appearing only after Henri Lefebvre’s death in 1991. Yet as I will show in what follows, it would be somewhat one-sided to reduce Lefebvre’s (literary) afterlife to these publications alone, or to see, in his afterlife alone, his significance for and influence on the social sciences and cultural studies.

These lines are occasioned by this publication: a series of contributions on the “theory and application” of Lefebvre in the cultural studies that originated in the context of Lefebvre workshops in Erfurt (2014), Darmstadt (2015), and Basel (2017). The project was held together, above all, by Jenny Bauer (Kassel) and Robert Fischer (Erfurt) and was initiated in cooperation with Erfurt Spatio-Temporal Studies.² The volume reflects what has been evident for several years now in the German-speaking world, and not only here: an increased interest in Lefebvre’s theory of space – and this despite the fact that his main work on the theory of space, *La Production de l’espace*, has not yet been translated into German. The fascination that Lefebvre’s approach to space holds is certainly to be explained with the general spatial turn in the social sciences and cultural studies. But it must be emphasized that Lefebvre – in contrast, for example, to Michel Foucault, who is also counted among the great thinkers of space from the last century – does in fact develop a comprehensive theory and method, and that he did not just make essayistic attempts to do so. This is why part of the charm of his theory of space, which is also a critical theory of society, lies in its better applicability.

Yet this theory of space is in no way all that Lefebvre’s work has to offer. A critique of everyday life, the right to the city, dialectical materialism, and rhythm

1 Elden, Stuart. “Certains naissent de façon posthume: La survie d’Henri Lefebvre”, Élise Charon and Vincent Charbonnier (trans.). *Actuel Marx* 36:2 (2004): 181–198. The article discusses the French reception of Lefebvre since his death in 1991.

2 Several institutions contributed financially to the project: The Lehrstuhl “Geschichte und Kulturen der Räume der Neuzeit” (Erfurt University); the DFG Research Training Group “Dynamics of Space and Gender” (Universities of Kassel and Göttingen); the DFG Research Training Group “Topology of Technology” (TU Darmstadt); the Graduate School of Social Sciences (G3S) (University of Basel).

Note: Translated by Michael Thomas Taylor.

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Fraya Frehse

On Regressive-Progressive Rhythmanalysis

Introduction

In this paper I summarize how a particular "(re)reading" of the work by the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre may provide methodological contributions to contemporary research as to the role of time in the production/construction/constitution of urban space (depending on the theoretical approach respectively adopted). Rather than exploring the more well-known space triad, which has been used since the 1980s in empirical studies addressing the production of urban space,¹ or its relation to the regressive-progressive method,² or even its connection with rhythmanalysis,³ my (re)reading chiefly approaches rhythmanalysis and its association with the regressive-progressive method. While the former focuses on an analytical differentiation of the sequential repetitions that permeate and envelop the human body in everyday life, the latter is an operational as well as interpretive approach for analytically identifying and conceptually explaining the possibilities of social transformation in varied empirically given research locations.

My statement is that what I call *regressive-progressive rhythmanalysis* carries at least two major contributions for spatial-temporal researches on the generation of urban space – and here I am especially concerned with establishing a dialogue

¹ See, among others, Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989; Soja, Edward. *Postmodern Geographies*. London/New York: Verso, 1989; Schmid, Christian. *Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft*. München: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005; Löw, Martina. "Die Rache des Körpers über den Raum? Über Henri Lefebvres Utopie und Geschlechterverhältnisse am Strand" In: *Soziologie des Körpers*, Markus Schroer (ed.), 241–270. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2005; Stanek, Łukasz, Ákos Moravánsky and Christian Schmid (eds.). *Urban Revolution Now*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2014; Fischer, Robert. "Mobility and Morality at the Border – A Lefebvrian Spatio-Temporal Analysis in Early Twentieth-Century Ciudad Juárez and El Paso" *Historical Social Research* 38:3 (2013); 176–196.

² See Frehse, Fraya. "For Difference 'in and through' São Paulo: The Regressive-Progressive Method" In: *Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture*, Łukasz Stanek, Ákos Moravánsky and Christian Schmid (eds.), 243–262. Surrey: Ashgate, 2014; Bertuzzo, Elisa T. "During the Urban Revolution – Conjunctions on the Streets of Dhaka" In: *Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture*, Łukasz Stanek, Ákos Moravánsky and Christian Schmid (eds.), 49–69. Surrey: Ashgate, 2014.

³ See Fischer, Mobility, 177 f.

with some recent efforts to conceptualize spatial transformations in cities with the methodological aid of temporal categories.⁴

A major trend in these studies is the exploration of how subjective temporal practices of urban space interfere with its generation, and thus the concept of temporality,⁵ not to mention “life historicity”,⁶ and Lefebvrian rhythms⁷ – all of them often in explicit connection with the human bodies that subjectively experience time in various ways in streets, squares and other urban public places.⁸ Another trend, albeit less frequent,⁹ addresses how the historical dimension of time – the entanglements between temporal categories that Western common sense names ‘present’, ‘past’ and ‘future’ – becomes manifest in the human bodies that physically move around the public places of those cities and ultimately contribute to urbanization as a process of socio-spatial transformations – more or less contradictory, as Lefebvre would say.¹⁰ But how does the historicity of urbanization express itself in the pedestrians’ bodies occupying those streets and squares? This issue remains underdeveloped, although it is crucial when, as has been my case for years, one’s intent is a methodological operationalization of how the temporalities of everyday life, as well as wider historical processes express themselves in the bodies of pedestrians moving in central public spaces in Western megacities such as São Paulo.¹¹ It is precisely at this point where regressive-progressive

4 For an overview regarding accounts publicized as sociological, see Frehse, Fraya. “Relational Space through Historically Relational Time – in the Bodies of São Paulo’s Pedestrians” *Current Sociology*, 65:4 (2017a): 513–514. Among historical accounts see e.g. Rau, Susanne, “The Urbanization of the Periphery: A Spatio-Temporal History of Lyon since the Eighteenth Century” *Historical Social Research* 38:3 (2013): 151–152; as to geography see among others Lindón, Alicia. “La construcción socioespacial de la ciudad: el sujeto cuerpo y el sujeto sentimiento” *Cuerpos, Emociones y Sociedad* 1:1 (2009): 6–20; Lindón, Alicia. “Urbane Geographien des alltäglichen Lebens” In: *Stadtforschung aus Lateinamerika*, Anne Huffschmid and Kathrin Wildner (eds.), 39–79. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013; Kärrholm, Mattias. “The Square of Events. Rhythmanalysing the Time-Spaces of an Urban Public Place” *Lo Squaderno* 32 (2014): 9–13; Kärrholm, Mattias. “The Temporality of Territorial Production – The Case of Stortorget, Malmö” *Social & Cultural Geography* 18:5 (2017): 684–685; Bertuzzo. *During the Urban*, 49–69.

5 See Lindón, *La construcción*, 14–16; Lindón, *Urbane Geographien*, 65; Rau, *The Urbanization*, 166.

6 Weidenhaus, Gunter. *Soziale Raumzeit*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2015, 36.

7 See Fischer, *Mobility*, 188 f.; Kärrholm, *The Square*, 9 f.; Kärrholm, *The Temporality*, 2, 15 f.

8 See Lindón, *La construcción*; Fischer, *Mobility*, 183; Kärrholm, *The Temporality*, 15.

9 See Frehse, Fraya. “Zeiten im Körper: Das Potenzial der Lefebvre’schen Methode für die (lateinamerikanische) Stadtforschung” In: *Stadtforschung aus Lateinamerika*, Anne Huffschmid and Kathrin Wildner (eds.), 145–169. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013a; Bertuzzo, *During the Urban*, 49–69; Frehse, *Relational Space*, 511–532.

10 See Lefebvre, Henri. *La révolution urbaine*. Paris: Gallimard, 1970; see also Schmid, *Stadt*, 132.

11 See Frehse, Fraya. *Ô da Rua!* São Paulo: Edusp, 2011; Frehse, *Zeiten im Körper*; Frehse, *For Difference*; Frehse, *Relational Time*.

rhythmanalysis enters the scene, and provides a double contribution to the set of spatial-temporal approaches to the generation of space: on the one hand, by means of the specific cognitive approach that regressive-progressive rhythmanalysis encourages the researcher to adopt; on the other hand, by means of the research object that the approach invites the scholar to address.

Initially presented on other occasions,¹² thus far the association between rhythmanalysis and the regressive-progressive method remains underexplored not only in Lefebvrian studies themselves, but also in works addressing the relationship between time and the production of (urban) space¹³ – despite the fact that there is no lack of interpretations regarding rhythmanalysis or the regressive-progressive method. Or, better stated, comparatively speaking, studies that address the first tool are more common. In turn, the regressive-progressive method remains, above all, a niche interest of sociology in France and Brazil.¹⁴

In order to develop my argument, this essay consists of three sections. First, I shall clarify what rhythmanalysis means and how it articulates itself within academic research on Lefebvre’s oeuvre. This will underline the peculiarity of my proposal, whose empirical relevance I shall subsequently demonstrate. To this end, in the second section, I shall resort to empirical data on my São Paulo research about the human bodies that nowadays move past or physically remain in the streets and squares of the city’s historically oldest perimeter, in order to disclose what they reveal about the historical dynamics of sociocultural changes in this contemporary Latin American megacity.

The concluding section will summarize that regressive-progressive rhythmanalysis firstly informs the researcher about the cognitive relevance of practicing a historical and anthropological estrangement of the body rhythms of both the researcher and the subjects that surround him or her in the streets and public squares, when the purpose is to analytically apprehend clues of historical transformations in cities implicit in everyday life. Furthermore, the approach encourages the researcher interested in the relations between time and space in the

12 See Frehse, Fraya. “Quando os ritmos corporais dos pedestres nos espaços públicos urbanos revelam ritmos da urbanização” *Civitas* 16:1 (2016): 100–118. This paper, in turn, is a translated and reviewed version of my paper “When Pedestrians’ Body Rhythms Disclose Rhythms of Urbanization”, which was given on 19/03/15 at the Conference “Technospaces. Persistence – Practices – Procedures – Power” at the Technische Universität Darmstadt. I thank Jenny Bauer for the invitation for this event, which was the starting point for the reflections upon which this chapter aims to advance.

13 See note 4.

14 See Frehse, *Zeiten*, 149 f.

production of the urban space to tackle a singular research object: the historicity of the rules of body behaviour in urban public spaces.

1 Rhythmanalysis in Lefebvrian Thought

In the last thirty years of his long life, Lefebvre referred to rhythmanalysis with relative consistency. The second volume of the *Critique de la vie quotidienne* contains an allusion to “sociological rhythmology or ‘rhythmanalysis’”, followed by a footnote with the following indication: “[t]erm borrowed from Gaston Bachelard”.¹⁵ The latter, in turn, in *Dialectique de la durée*,¹⁶ wrote that he borrowed the concept from Portuguese philosopher Lúcio Alberto Pinheiro dos Santos,¹⁷ for whom, according to one commentator, the analysis of physiological rhythms could cure mental depression or apathy.¹⁸ After this first citation in Lefebvre’s work, the term reappears at least in *La production de l’espace*,¹⁹ in *La présence et l’absence*,²⁰ and in the third volume of *Critique de la vie quotidienne*.²¹ Such works are prior to two articles published together with his last wife²² and the posthumously published book *Éléments de rythmanalyse*²³ – including a sort of digression in the form of an article with Cathérine Régulier from 1968 – which are solely dedicated to the subject.

In his monographic treatise on rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre defined it as “science, a new domain of knowledge: the analysis of rhythms”.²⁴ These, in turn, would be made up of the dialectical relations between cyclical repetitions (stemming from the “cosmic, nature: days, nights, seasons, oceanic waves and

tides, monthly cycles, etc.”) and linear repetitions (deriving from “social practices, thus from human activity: the monotony of actions and gestures, imposed frameworks”), which in “reality” – as Lefebvre emphasizes – constantly interfere with each other, but which analysis would disassociate.²⁵ Hence a crucial question: how do we investigate rhythms? Two complementary paths would coexist: a comparison between concrete cases concerning body rhythms (of living beings or otherwise); or stemming from notions, from abstract categories.²⁶ All this for an objective that Lefebvre made explicit with Régulier: “We shall demonstrate the relations between everyday life and rhythms, that is, the concrete modalities of social life.”²⁷

In fact, the reference point lies in the notion of everyday life as a “level of social reality”²⁸ explored by Lefebvre during the course of his intellectual trajectory. Being “simultaneously the most visible and indiscernible side of social practice, where banality and depth coexist, for it is about existence and the ‘lived’ not speculatively transcribed”,²⁹ everyday life is a historical product. Hence, “the everyday” (“le quotidien” in the original French formulation) is a way of life historically typical to societies whose day-to-day existence, with the advent of modernity, became engulfed by the contradictions of programming and calculation steered by the market, the system of equivalences, and marketing and advertising. This includes the extreme dialectical moment, no less rife with contradictions, signalled by “the everydayness” (“la quotidienneté”), a notion that underlines the homogeneous, repetitive, fragmentary dimension of everyday life.³⁰ Indeed, the preface to the first revised volume of *Critique de la vie quotidienne* explicitly mentions the existence of a “critical program” founded on the critique of alienation in capitalism in the second post-war period.³¹ In theoretical terms, it was about updating the Marxian postulations on the subject in order to understand the social reality of the second half of the twentieth century. In other words, an attempt to grasp the possibilities for a historical transformation of this reality amid the growing prevalence of reproductive mechanisms in everyday life.

15 Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique de la vie quotidienne. Vol. II*. Paris: L’Arche Éditeur, 1961, 233. All the translations from languages other than English are my own.

16 Bachelard, Gaston. *La dialectique de la durée*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950.

17 Baptista, Pedro. *O Filósofo Fantasma: Lúcio Pinheiro dos Santos*. Sintra: Zêfiro, 2010.

18 See Meyer, Kurt. “Rhythms, Streets, Cities” In: *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*, Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgram and Christian Schmid (eds.), 147–160. New York/London: Routledge, 2008, 147.

19 Lefebvre, Henri. *La production de l’espace*. Paris: Anthropos, 2000 [1974].

20 Lefebvre, Henri. *La présence et l’absence. Contributions à la théorie des représentations*. Paris: Casterman, 1980.

21 Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique de la vie quotidienne. Vol. III*. Paris: L’Arche Éditeur, 1981.

22 Lefebvre, Henri and Cathérine Régulier. “Le projet rythmanalytique” *Communications* 41 (1985): 191–199; Lefebvre, Henri and Cathérine Régulier. “Rythmanalyses des villes méditerranéennes [1986]” In: *Éléments de rythmanalyse*, Henri Lefebvre, 97–109. Paris: Syllepse, 1992.

23 Lefebvre, Henri. *Éléments de rythmanalyse*. Paris: Syllepse, 1992.

24 See Lefebvre, *Éléments*, 11.

25 See Lefebvre, *Éléments*, 16 f.; emphasis in original.

26 See Lefebvre, *Éléments*, 13.

27 See Lefebvre and Régulier, *Le projet*, 191.

28 See Lefebvre, *Critique. Vol. II*, 56.

29 See Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique de la vie quotidienne. Vol. I*. Paris: L’Arche Éditeur, 1958 [1947], 56 and 52.

30 See Lefebvre, Henri. “Henri Lefebvre” In: *Entrevistas ao Le Monde: Idéias Contemporâneas*, Olivier Corpet and Thierry Paquot (eds.), Maria Lúcia Blumer (transl.), 134. São Paulo: Ática, 1989 [1972], 134.

31 See Lefebvre, *Critique. Vol. I*, 68.

How do we empirically access the rhythms that pervade everyday life? In *Éléments de rythmanalyse*, Lefebvre outlines the basic methodological procedures. The analysis rests on “isolating from the organized whole a particular movement and its rhythm”,³² a procedure which, in turn, demands from the “rhythmanalyst” a defined attitude: to make one’s body into a metronome, hence a special kind of parameter for “listening” to the bodies of others in search of the mutual integration of the outside and the inside of these same bodies.³³ Indeed, the experience and knowledge of the body are the foundations of rhythmanalysis, as summarized in the book’s conclusion.³⁴ Driven by these instructions, all of which are presented in the first two chapters of the book, the remaining five and the conclusive digression present different rhythmanalytical exercises regarding defined knowledge objects involving the author in his day-to-day life in late twentieth-century Europe: a Parisian street, the training of bodies, the media, music, Mediterranean cities.

As I see it, this explicit focus on spaces and times of everyday life in the 1980s, by reference to the human body, has contributed significantly to a certain pattern in the reception of rhythmanalysis in urban studies. As far as I can tell, the (few) authors who have delved into such approach ground themselves precisely on this emphasis by Lefebvre, in order to recognize, in rhythmanalysis, a *conceptual* contribution to the question of everyday life in the capitalist world of the late twentieth century.

Inspired by the final two volumes of *Critique de la vie quotidienne*,³⁵ in addition to the previously mentioned three treatises on rhythmanalysis – and which he co-translated into English – the geographer Stuart Elden underlines in his introduction to *Rhythmanalysis*³⁶ the importance of these works for a more precise understanding of the notion of everyday (its “dual sense” of mundane and repetitive, in English and French) as well as a reflection on the union and separation of space and time. Furthermore, he considers Lefebvre’s three specific works on rhythmanalysis as evidence of his concern with the “contrast” between the capitalist system and the everyday life of individuals. By relying on similar sources, the philosopher Kurt Meyer, on the other hand, considers that rhythmanalytical studies lead to the “core” of Lefebvre’s critique of everyday life; that

is, “the analyses on the temporal ordering of rhythms in everyday life”.³⁷ These would investigate the continuity of rhythmic time in the linear temporal flux of modern industrial society, and how both times interfere with each other. In turn, sociologist Carlos Fortuna emphasizes, based upon the *Éléments de rythmanalyse* and *La production de l’espace*, the innovative nature of Lefebvre’s “conviction” that sensory experience in everyday life is inseparable from external stimuli, from the “material world of objects”.³⁸ Lastly, historian Robert Fischer applies Lefebvre’s notion of rhythm to the space triad presented in *La production de l’espace*, by arguing that empirically given contradictions between linear and cyclical rhythms may be best depicted in analytical terms in lived space.³⁹

My statement focuses precisely on the reception pattern of Lefebvre’s perspective. When, rather than conceptually associating rhythmanalysis to the author’s specific works, but instead connecting it with his theoretical and methodological considerations about his transductive mode of thought scattered among several publications across decades, what we find at the forefront is the *methodological* role in an approach for apprehending the historically possible social transformations in everyday life.

In fact, transduction is the epistemological foundation of Lefebvre’s oeuvre. Transduction was first mentioned in *Logique formelle, logique dialectique*,⁴⁰ which was published in the same year as the first volume of *Critique de la vie quotidienne*. However, perhaps the most accomplished synthesis of transduction can be found in the subsequent volume of the trilogy: it “goes from the real (given) to the possible”, that is, “it constructs a virtual object from information, arriving at the solution from the data”.⁴¹ As a dialectical Marxist, Lefebvre always sought out the historical possibilities of the production of social innovations within a reality that he conceived as an open and contradictory totality, and whose limits for innovation lay precisely in contradictions of a past not yet overcome, a past that the present carried at the level of everyday life. Human praxis, after all, is essentially contradictory: innovative, mimetic, and repetitive.

In light of these references, one may understand why the critique of everyday life is a lifelong project, and why, according to his friend Armand Ajzenberg, Lefebvre considered *Éléments de rythmanalyse* the fourth volume of his “critique

32 See Lefebvre, *Éléments*, 27.

33 See Lefebvre, *Éléments*, 32, and Lefebvre and Régulier, *Le projet*, 195.

34 See Lefebvre, *Éléments*, 91.

35 See Lefebvre, *Critique. Vol. II*; Lefebvre, *Critique. Vol. III*.

36 See Elden, Stuart. “Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction” In: *Elements of Rhythmanalysis*, Henri Lefebvre, Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (transl.), ix x. London/New York: Continuum, 2004.

37 Meyer, Rhythms, 147 f.

38 See Fortuna, Carlos. “(Micro)territorialidades: metáfora dissidente do social” *Terr@Plural* 6:2 (2012): 199–214, here 203 f.

39 See Fischer, *Mobility*, 189.

40 Lefebvre, Henri. *Lógica Formal, Lógica Dialética*, Carlos Nelson Coutinho (transl.). Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1983 [1947], 15.

41 See Lefebvre, *Critique. Vol. II*, 121.

of everyday life”.⁴² Decisive for my current essay, however, is the fact that, as a sociologist, Lefebvre was not wholly satisfied with the philosophical nature of transduction.

His oeuvre also conveys a constant commitment to operationalize, methodologically speaking, his transductive way of thinking. The major outcome in this sense is the regressive-progressive method, first presented in an article in 1953⁴³ and whose procedure Lefebvre since adopted for several empirical “fields” of research, ranging from defined cities to the “field of representations”, as well as to the production of space.⁴⁴ Both facets of this method, the investigative and the interpretive, are found in three dialectical procedures. The first moment is descriptive, followed by an analytical historical dating of the material as well as immaterial elements found in any empirical field of research. We then arrive at a third moment, that is, the identification of the existing historical contradictions within this social reality in order to analytically indicate the possibilities for social transformations therein.

When we consider the methodological dimension of Lefebvre’s oeuvre as a whole, rhythmanalysis appears as knowledge about the rhythms of everyday life that is based on a well-defined type of analysis of such an object. But the author, however, never explicitly stated it as such. Given that cyclical and linear rhythms are so fundamental to the critique of everyday life, Lefebvre often dated them historically for analytical purposes: cyclical repetitions prevail in the pre-capitalist world, whereas the analysis of the abstract, quantitative time of the capitalist clock emphasizes linear repetitions, although both coexist in mutual interference within the contradictory and open totality that is empirical reality.⁴⁵ From this standpoint, I would like to argue here that rhythmanalysis is invariably regressive-progressive; it presumes, in operational terms, the regressive-progressive method.

While Lefebvre never made this connection explicit, he did make operational use of it at various points in his oeuvre. The first reference to rhythmanalysis happens in the context of a reflection on the interaction between times and

spaces in the historically specific way of life that is everyday life: the approach “strives to categorize periodicities and study their relationships and intersections”.⁴⁶ A few years later, in turn, we find an indirect reference to the connection between rhythmanalysis and the regressive-progressive method. The “critique of everyday life” should demonstrate “historically the constitution and formation of the everydayness”, among others, “the separation of ‘man-nature’, the displacement of *rhythms*, the rise of nostalgia [...], the deterioration of drama, or rather, of the tragic and temporality”.⁴⁷ A decisive element in the possibility of a critique of everyday life seems to be, among others, that rhythms hold clues of their underlying historical processes.

Rhythmanalysis is explicitly mentioned once again when the investigative gaze turns to the production of space as the central historical process of modernity; and again in connection with the apprehension of historical transformations – “in and through” the space that is the human body itself in everyday life, considering that for Lefebvre both “every living body *is a space and has its space*”, and “social relations only have real existence in and through space”.⁴⁸ Moreover, since “social time is produced and reproduced through space; but this social time is reintroduced with its traits and determinations; repetitions, rhythms, cycles, activities”,⁴⁹ then “(scientific) knowledge about the use of spaces” is invariably linked to the “analysis of rhythms, the effective critique of representative and normative spaces”.⁵⁰ In effect, rhythmanalysis “completes the exhibition [l’exposé] of the production of space”.⁵¹

In 1980, another research object gained prominence: the “non-philosophical representations”⁵² that emerge in everyday life. Rhythmanalysis can also be useful for grasping the “presence of the absent”: cyclical rhythms lie beneath the qualitative use of the body and, therefore, presence; linear rhythms, in turn, “only imprint a feeling of absence that invades the everyday”.⁵³

And so, in the third volume of *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, the approach is acknowledged for the first time as “new science in the making”.⁵⁴ However, we

⁴² See Ajzenberg, Armand. “À partir d’Henri Lefebvre, vers un mode de production écologiste”. Paper at the Colloquium “Traces de futurs. Henri Lefebvre: le possible et le quotidien”. Paris, 1994 [unpublished manuscript], 5.

⁴³ Lefebvre, Henri. “Perspectives de sociologie rurale” In: *Du rural à l’urbain*, Henri Lefebvre, 63–78. Paris: Anthropos, 2001 [1953].

⁴⁴ See Frehse, For Difference, 246.

⁴⁵ See for example Lefebvre, *Critique. Vol. II*, 55; Lefebvre, Henri. *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne*. Paris: Gallimard, 1968, 78; Lefebvre, *La production*, 138–142; Lefebvre, *La présence*, 31 and 181; Lefebvre, *Critique. Vol. III*, 130; Lefebvre and Régulier, *Le projet*, 193; Lefebvre and Régulier, *Rhythmanalyses*, 100.

⁴⁶ See Lefebvre, *Critique. Vol. II*, 232 f.

⁴⁷ See Lefebvre, *La vie*, 78; emphasis added.

⁴⁸ See Lefebvre, *La production*, 199 and 465; emphasis in original.

⁴⁹ See Lefebvre, *La production*, 392.

⁵⁰ See Lefebvre, *La production*, 412.

⁵¹ See Lefebvre, *La production*, 465.

⁵² See Lefebvre, *La présence*, 147–184.

⁵³ See Lefebvre, *La présence*, 181.

⁵⁴ See Lefebvre, *Critique. Vol. III*, 130.

still find the author's connections with the critique of everyday life as a historical process:

From the organization of work – divided and composed, measured and quantified – quantification won society as a whole, contributing to the implementation of the mode of production [...]. The qualitative has *almost* disappeared. But here, once again, the 'almost' gains chief importance.⁵⁵

Lefebvre recognized the specific dynamics of rhythms as a trait of contemporary society: “the crushing of rhythms and natural times by linearity” is a “situation” that engenders a need for rhythms expressed in the rhythmic innovations found in music and dance.⁵⁶

Lastly, four years later, the first article entirely devoted to the “rhythmanalytical project” appeared, followed by the aforementioned two monographs. If, in such context, the theoretical foundations of the methodological procedures of rhythmanalysis gain importance, the argumentative structure of all such works continues to associate certain historical transformations of capitalist society in the cities with rhythms.

Given this theoretical and methodological trajectory, which I have merely outlined, I hope it will become easier to acknowledge that rhythmanalysis favours the empirical apprehension as to how the possibilities for social transformation appear in the everyday life of contemporary cities. Thus, the regressive-progressive dimension implicit within rhythmanalysis becomes decisive. Nevertheless, a question remains open: *how* is the methodological potential of regressive-progressive rhythmanalysis achieved in practice? In my personal search for answers I found it suitable to analytically approach the bodies of pedestrians in the public streets and squares in downtown São Paulo.

2 What Do Pedestrians' Body Rhythms Reveal about the Rhythms of Urbanization?

By understanding urbanization in Lefebvrian terms, that is, as a set of contradictory processes that encompass the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the geographical expansion of cities,⁵⁷ I would like to address, based on the

55 See Lefebvre, *Critique Vol. III*, 130; emphasis in original.

56 See Lefebvre, *Critique Vol. III*, 134 f.

57 See Lefebvre. *La révolution*; see also Schmid, *Stadt*, 132.

ethnographic data from my current research project,⁵⁸ the following question from a rhythmanalytical inspiration: Which *different* characteristics regarding contemporary urbanization come to the foreground when, as a “regressive-progressive rhythmanalytical” researcher, one's body becomes a metronome in the public places of the historical birthplace of this megacity with over 12 million inhabitants (and the heart of a metropolitan region home to over 20 million inhabitants)? I refer here to the Lefebvre's stance of making the researcher's own body *the* decisive parameter for apprehending the rhythms of other bodies in favour of a reciprocal integration of the outside and the inside – only in this case in pursuit of *differences* that become evident in São Paulo's urbanization process when one relates it with contemporary urbanization as an ongoing historical process all over the globe, and which I understand as an open and contradictory totality.

It was precisely the anthropological estrangement of the São Paulo downtown streets and squares that resulted from this methodological approach that inspired me at a different time.⁵⁹ What I mean by estrangement is the ethnographic dialectics within the epistemological process of making the strange familiar and the familiar strange during all the phases of empirical research.⁶⁰ Indeed the aim was to sociologically and anthropologically explore, based on documentary research, the onset of a modernity historically typical to Western Europe in a city that until the mid-nineteenth century was still grounded on slavery, intensely rural, and home to circa thirty thousand inhabitants (including the rural zone). But the regressive-progressive rhythmanalysis of the body rhythms of pedestrians in the streets and squares of São Paulo's oldest urbanized nucleus – currently known as *Centro Velho* on the so-called historical hill – between 1808 and 1917 led me to a crucial point for the question mentioned in the previous paragraph. It encouraged me to estrange my own body rhythms in the contemporary São Paulo public places in comparison with the ones of this city's nineteenth-century past. Hence the discovery that the passer-by, as the essence of the modern urban type (with its own variations commonplace for Western Europe the *dandy*, the *flâneur*, etc.) – therefore a type of pedestrian which *I personally* identify with in bodily terms in the streets and squares of any city – is a very specific temporal and spatial socio-cultural invention. The passer-by corresponds to a very particular way of using one's body through gestures and postures: one physically passes by streets and squares, whereas a stop just happens in a fleeting way, as a more or less quick

58 Frehse, Fraya. “The Bodily Production of Urban Space in Twenty-First Century São Paulo” National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) Research Project (n. 313285/2017-9), 2017.

59 See Frehse, *Ô da Rua!*.

60 See Frehse, *Ô da Rua!*, 34.

pause before/after the next/last body behaviour of passing-by. But a decisive element for the characterization of the passer-by is that this “body technique”, in accordance with Marcel Mauss,⁶¹ takes place in a defined, *regular* rhythm, linear in nature and corresponding to the rhythms of work and leisure of the passer-by. Thus, in rhythmanalytical terms what particularizes the passer-by is the regular physical passing by urban streets and squares.

From a regressive-progressive standpoint, this body behaviour is inseparable from the nineteenth-century modernity in Western Europe, that is, from a social and cultural reality strongly grounded on the simultaneous belief and critique that everything and everyone is transient, fashionable, and “modern”.⁶² The regular physical passing-by, or circulation, through São Paulo’s central streets and squares started to establish itself as a norm of civility with an increasing empirical scope from the 1880s, with the final crisis in African slavery in the country (it was officially abolished in 1888). Hence circulation’s protagonist, the passer-by, even became a photographic subject within this context – we might just consider the human shapes fleetingly passing by both the left sidewalk and the street’s right-hand, in the lower half of the following photograph (Figure 1).

Until then, the streets and squares of downtown São Paulo had been essentially places for regular physical permanence and, depending on the occasion, the gathering of certain types of pedestrians – especially of people who, involved in the work and sociability of manual labour, were often captured by the heavy photographic cameras of the era while standing (Figure 2), sitting or even lying in front of some door sill,⁶³ perhaps in front of one of the various artisans’ workshops that coexisted in that area of the still slave-based city (Figure 3). I refer here to men, women, and children, who were either captive, manumitted, or poor freemen.

In turn, among the members of the seigniorial stratum – holding great social prestige in the city at the time – there were other implicit rhythms within the set of body techniques in the streets of São Paulo: the exceptional or periodic physical passing-by or gathering of men, women and children of the elite within the context of several Goffmanian “ceremonial” occasions, i.e. of “wider social affair[s]” made of rules that convey the symbolic appreciation one individual



Figure 1: Militão A. de Azevedo, Medium shot from the street-level of what is presently known as Rua 15 de Novembro, 1887 [Source: *Album Comparativo da Cidade de São Paulo 1862–1887*/Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo]

therein makes of other participants of the occasions.⁶⁴ In nineteenth-century São Paulo, such ceremonial occasions were implicit in the frequent weekly “payment” of visits to relatives or acquaintances. Furthermore, there were the sporadic religious and civil festivities that also governed the city’s day-to-day (Figure 4).

Based on such observations about the nineteenth-century past of downtown São Paulo, I began to stroll along the same streets and squares during afternoon business hours (from 2:00 to 7:00 p.m. during workdays) of the 2010s in search of clues as to how historical processes become evident in everyday life and, more so, point to characteristics of contemporary urbanization in São Paulo. What surprised me was *not* – unlike what was the city’s most urbanized area during the nineteenth century – the currently numerous passers-by (Figure 5).

What caught my attention the most was the multiplicity of what I have been terming *non-passers-by*.⁶⁵ They were the ones who challenged me conceptually

61 Mauss, Marcel. “Les techniques du corps [1936]” In: *Anthropologie et sociologie*, Marcel Mauss, 363–386, Paris: Quadrige/Puf 1997 [1950].

62 See Lefebvre, Henri. *Introduction à la modernité*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1962, 10.

63 See Frehse, Fraya. “O começo do fim da São Paulo caipira” In: *Militão Augusto de Azevedo, Rubens, Fernandes Jr., Heloisa Barbuy, Fraya Frehse and Henrique Siqueira* (eds.), 50–73. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2012, here 61 and 58.

64 See respectively Goffman, Erving. *Behavior in Public Places*. Toronto: Collier-Macmillan, 1963, 18; Goffman, Erving. *Interaction Ritual*. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967, 54.

65 See Frehse, Fraya. “Os tempos (diferentes) do uso das praças da Sé em Lisboa e em São Paulo” In *Diálogos Urbanos: Territórios, culturas, patrimônios*, Carlos Fortuna and Rogerio Proença Leite (eds.), 127–173. Coimbra: Almedina, 2013b, here 135.



Figure 2: Militão A. de Azevedo, Medium shot from the street-level of a street presently integrating São Paulo's cathedral square, c. 1862 [Source: Collection Jamil Nassif Abib]

as to the *different* traits of the present-day urbanization, given that the sociological literature on contemporary Western metropolises commonly associates streets with spaces of mobility and the hastened flow of pedestrians and vehicles⁶⁶ (Figures 6–8).

Whether artists or artisans, street vendors or street preachers, as well as self-appointed street-dwellers, retired or unemployed people of varying ages and genders, in the midst of the transit either of passers-by – whether fleetingly rushing or pausing natives or foreigners –, of vehicles, and public transportation, these pedestrians of varying socioeconomic, sociocultural, and socio-spatial backgrounds unknowingly share a defined set of body techniques and body rhythms. They remain there physically in linear regularity, whether for the purpose of economic survival or for the sake of social bonds therein reactivated from day to day. At 7:00 p.m., when the stores close their doors and the public hostels have already opened theirs, not just passers-by but also the plethora of non-passers-by disappear from São Paulo's downtown streets and public squares.

⁶⁶ See, among others, Urry, John. *Mobilities*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007.



Figure 3: Militão A. de Azevedo, Medium shot from the street-level of the alleyway in present-day Rua José Bonifácio (left) and of what is presently known as Rua de São Francisco (right), c. 1862 [Source: Collection Jamil Nassif Abib]

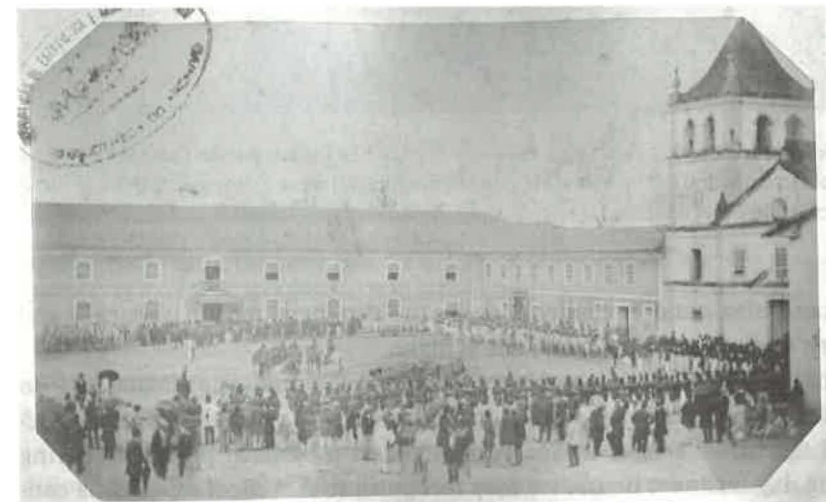


Figure 4: Militão A. de Azevedo, Medium shot from the street-level of what is presently known as the Pátio do Colégio, the oldest São Paulo square, on a day of civic festivity, c. 1862 [Source: *Album Comparativo da Cidade de São Paulo 1862–1887*/Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo]



Figure 5: Fraya Frehse, Open shot from the street-level of São Paulo's Roman Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral on the northeast side of the cathedral square, Monday 21 October 2013 [Source: Private Collection]

Only those who, out of necessity or desire to sleep there, remain physically and regularly on the streets and alleyways at night.

When, in light of this empirical scenario, the analytical focus falls on the rules of social interaction that make historically possible the re-production of this *street society* in São Paulo's oldest urbanized perimeter during working day business hours, we may recognize that *cyclical* repetitions condition the day-to-day *linear* rhythm of regular physical permanence in that space. Fatigue transforms the squares and sidewalks into a bench, a wall or a public sculpture into beds. Moreover, in an attempt to cope with growing hunger, there is nothing like the necessary ingredients gathered via buying



Figure 6: Fraya Frehse, Close shot from the street-level of a musician in Rua 15 de Novembro, Thursday 22 November 2012 [Source: Private Collection]

or begging, and a small campfire on the same wall. The nearby cops do not seem to bother...

In short, what Lefebvre considers a bodily, qualitative use of space, conditioned by cyclical rhythms, is true in such public places urbanistically conceived for the linear body rhythms of the passer-by during business hours. And all of this takes place amid the incisiveness of linear body rhythms of people passing by, and of stopping pedestrians of native or foreign origin right there and then.



Figure 7: Fraya Frehse, Medium shot from the street-level of the northeast side of São Paulo’s cathedral square, Wednesday 20 April 2011 [Source: Private Collection]

These empirical data reinforce the impression that, at least during the daytime workdays, this rhythmic dialectic is a vital element in São Paulo’s downtown public streets and squares. There and then, the passer-by is definitely *not* hegemonic. In the daytime street society of São Paulo’s historic downtown in the second decade of the twenty-first century, linear and cyclical repetitions seem to coexist in absolute indifference to the periodic disciplinary pressures of the public power and the police, which in the current context of economic globalization, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, fit into a specific political conception typical of so-called gentrification – the urban requalification of specific areas in cities, particularly the historically older urbanization nuclei, for the purposes of tourism, housing, or consumption by higher income groups.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ For a summary on the debate about the issue, see Rubino, Silvana. “Enobrecimento urbano” In: *Plural de Cidade: Novos léxicos urbanos*, Carlos Fortuna and Rogerio Proença Leite (eds.), 25–40. Coimbra: Almedina, 2009.



Figure 8: Fraya Frehse, Medium shot from the balcony-level of a banking building westward from the far north of São Paulo’s cathedral square, Wednesday 20 April 2011 [Source: Private Collection]

In an attempt to explain the “commercial and useful” incisiveness of this conjunction of rhythms, Lefebvre offers an answer: “[...] every rhythm implies the relation of a time to a space, a localized time or, if we prefer, a temporalized place. Rhythm is always connected to this or that place, to your place.”⁶⁸ By mobilizing the historical estrangement implicit in the regressive-progressive method and hence by historically dating the body behaviour pattern that I call *regular physical permanence* in the downtown streets and squares of contemporary São Paulo during daytime workdays, we are able to recognize its intriguing similarity with other modes of body behaviour, which prevailed during daytime in the streets and squares of the same area in slave-based nineteenth-century São Paulo. The same holds true even though contemporary pedestrians are clearly very diverse, not to mention the socioeconomic, technical, and sociocultural mediations that make it historically possible for such pedestrians to coexist socially in São Paulo’s downtown streets and squares during daytime. From the point of view of the

⁶⁸ See Lefebvre, *Éléments*, 99.

body rhythm of the contemporary non-passers-by, these same streets and places remain peculiarly close to that past – remembering, and following Lefebvre, that place is a “level of social space” discernible through the “words of everyday discourse,” which, in turn, correspond to a certain use of the space, a spatial practice that such words say and compose.⁶⁹

Based on these regressive-progressive rhythm analytical findings, the temporal density of the body rhythms of non-passers-by suggests a process of urbanization that, at least at the level of the “business and workday” everyday in the public places of downtown São Paulo, is strongly conditioned by pre-modern rhythms. In this light, at least during daytime the city mainly transforms itself insofar as its historically central public places reproduce themselves day by day. And this in the midst of the periodic accumulation of supposedly innovative political-administrative and urbanistic measures, which precisely go against the rules of body behaviour that mediate the regular physical permanence of non-passers-by in such places.

Final Considerations

Regardless of their differing theoretical and methodological standpoints, recent studies addressing how time interferes with the production of urban space end up pointing out the conceptual importance of empirically given both spatial and temporal practices in everyday life. It is through these practices that “spatiality and temporality”⁷⁰ are produced, and hence also urban space. What is less emphasized is how the historical dimension of time – the entanglement between temporal categories Western common sense names ‘present’, ‘past’ and ‘future’ – manifests itself in these researched practices, and hence in the production of urban space. Regressive-progressive rhythm analysis hopes to be an appropriate methodological tool for tackling this issue. Indeed, it bears at least two methodological contributions for this type of research.

The approach suggests, firstly, the cognitive importance of the anthropological and historical estrangement of the body rhythms of both the researcher and the surrounding pedestrians in the public streets and squares, when what matters is the analytical comprehension of the historical possibilities implicit in urban everyday life. In this particular case, anthropological estrangement allows

the researcher to recognize his sociocultural similarities and differences from the surrounding pedestrians in the analysed public places. Historical estrangement, in turn, allows the researcher to recognize that at least some of his or her own and others’ body rhythms bear an unforeseen historical dimension: they are historical products. Indeed, even in research on historical matters, *body rhythms matter* precisely as factors for a methodological problematization of how human beings, in their everyday lives, contribute to the production of the urban space by the mediation of their bodies.

Secondly, regressive-progressive rhythm analysis invites scholars exploring the influence of time in the production of urban space to tackle a peculiar investigative object: the historicity of body behaviour rules in urban public places. If, in addition to their innumerable definitions, cities as forms of specific human settlements are marked by the presence of spaces of passing by and of the physical gathering of pedestrians, which are signified as endowed with the broadest possible accessibility – whether legal, physical, material, or informational⁷¹ –, then uncovering the temporalities implicit in the rules of the pedestrians’ body behaviour reveals the distinct historical temporalities that therein bodily live and contribute, through the mediation of such bodies, to the urbanization rhythms of that place.

These two dimensions, while embedded within a Lefebvrian perspective, were rarely stressed by the author as such. To discover the reason behind this parsimony, however, would go beyond the limits of this essay.

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⁶⁹ See Lefebvre, *La production*, 108, 23 f.

⁷⁰ Dorsch, Sebastian. “Space/Time Practices and the Production of Space and Time. An Introduction” *Historical Social Research* 38:3 (2013): 7–21, here 14.

⁷¹ See among others Lofland, Lyn. *A World of Strangers*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1985 [1973], 19; Klamt, Martin. “Öffentliche Räume” In: *Handbuch Stadtsoziologie*, Frank Eckart (ed.), 775–804. Wiesbaden: Springer, 2012, here 779; Harding, Alan and Talja Blokland. *Urban Theory*. Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC: Sage, 2014, 187 f.

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