

# How Löw's Constitution of Space Methodologically Enhances Lefebvre's Production of Space

---

Fraya Frehse

The French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) is a constant presence in Martina Löw's accounts on her approach to the constitution of space (for example Löw 2001, pp. 109–111; 2005; 2008, pp. 28–30; 2013, p. 18; 2016, pp. vii, 53, 87–88, 111–113). Now and again, Löw highlights the English translation of Lefebvre's approach to the production of space (Lefebvre1991 [1974]) as the pioneering theoretical signpost of her relational concept of space (Löw 2001, p. 110; 2008, p. 27; 2016, p. 53, note 7). Particularly, the English version of the *Raumsoziologie* (Löw 2016, pp. 111–113) includes an unprecedented two-page set in which Löw details Lefebvre's theorization on space.

This focus comes as no surprise once we recall that it was in the wake of Lefebvre's work that the “production of space” has become a catchphrase for the international scholarship interested in the macro- and micro-social processes involved in (re-)generating space. Not only does this apply to urban studies in general (see for summaries Schmid 2005, 2008; Schmid et al. 2014; Stanek 2011; Leary-Owhin and McCarthy 2020, pp. 281–365) but to sociology in particular (Frehse 2021).

Building on Löw's ongoing, and recently increasing theoretical deference towards Lefebvre's approach to the production of space, I here aim to explore the relationship between Löw's constitution-of-space approach and Lefebvre's framework in more detail. This examination leads to the central argument of this paper: Löw's approach offers a *methodological turning point* within the wider history of sociological theories of the production of space.

I understand methodology as a conceptual concern with the logical pathways followed through inferential thinking in search of an abstract, “generalizing explanation” about the types of relations implicit in the empirical occurrence of social phenomena (Fernandes 1959, p. 32)<sup>1</sup>. In other – and more recent – words, methodology

---

1 All translations from languages other than English are my own. I here resort to an old heuristic distinction by Abraham Wolf in the *Textbook of Logic* from (1930) reframed by the Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes (1959, pp. 13–14) to highlight the role of method in particular in sociological research. Due to the empirical basis of sociological “explanations”, soci-

is a set of “more ‘theoretical’ options to construct an object” (Bourdieu 1989 [1987], p. 21, p. 24). In the social sciences, these options concern the “ability” of a “method of thinking” to turn socially insignificant objects into scientific objects” (Bourdieu 1989, p. 20) – which, in the case in focus, are comprised in the theoretical issue named the production of space.

Given this premise, my subsidiary statement comes to the conceptual forefront. To historically contextualize the methodological turning-point of Löw’s approach within the wider theoretical history regarding the production of space within the confines of this paper, her *methodological* contributions to Lefebvre’s *sociological theory* of the production of space are paramount. By sociological theory I mean – following Hubert Knoblauch (2017, pp. 10, 16) – a theoretical explanation based on the development of categories that help “determine the features of empirical societies, which are the subject matters of sociology and ethnology.” I argue that Löw’s approach introduces a unique methodological innovation to Lefebvre’s sociological theory on the phenomenal *how* of the micro-social processes involved in the generation and regeneration of space in everyday life.

To demonstrate this twofold statement, this paper follows three steps. Firstly, I offer a sociological assessment of Löw’s Lefebvrian reading by analytically situating it within the broader reception history of Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space. This analysis reveals that Löw’s interpretation is part of a wider interdisciplinary trend in the urban research community regarding “Lefebvre’s legacy” (Schmid et al. 2014, p. 17). However, Lefebvre’s approach transcends a critical theory of postwar capitalism and global urbanization. Therefore, secondly, I analyze Lefebvre’s peculiar dialectical methodology for empirically addressing the production of space, drawing on Löw’s approach to the constitution of space. Hence, a threefold methodological contribution to Lefebvre’s production of space comes to the interpretive forefront. Against this backdrop, I conclusively round up my major statement by heightening the methodological turning-point that I perceive in Löw’s relational-space approach.

## **The overall reception of *La production de l’espace*: the prevalence of theory**

First and foremost, let me start with a disclaimer. By qualifying my appraisal of Löw’s reading as sociological, I am referring to a specific epistemological standpoint. I conceptually and analytically embed any empirically given social phenomena within the “tissue of social interactions and relations”, which is the “reference point”

---

ological research inevitably comprises inferentially loaded “methods of interpretation” and operational “methods of investigation”. My interest here lies in the latter.

for any expressly sociological description of social life (Fernandes 1970, pp. 20–21) – or within “figurations (networks of dependencies)”, to use a more recent theoretical framework about where “sociology starts its survey from” (Bauman and May 2001, p. 9).

From this epistemological standpoint, Löw is not alone in her emphasis on the theoretical relevance of Lefebvre's theory of the production of space in (urban) sociology. However, her acknowledgement of Lefebvre's framework remains relatively sparse in the history of the discipline. If at first sight the internationally renowned Manuel Castells, particularly in his highly influential *La question urbaine* (1972), seems intrinsically linked to Lefebvre's ideas (see for example Löw 2016, pp. 53, note 7), geographer Christian Schmid has demonstrated that this connection was not truly acknowledged in Castells' work (Schmid 2005, pp. 35–40). Indeed, Lefebvre's *theoretical* contributions regarding the production of space are only prominently featured in a few presentations of his oeuvre (Hess 1988, pp. 281–283; 2000). More recently, I differently emphasized Lefebvre's *methodological* role within the history of sociological theories on the production of space (Frehse 2021). Both trends go hand-in-hand with the internationally influential *empirical* application of the production-of-space approach to conceptualize urbanization trends – firstly in the United States in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century (Gottdiener 1985; see also Gottdiener 1993), and since then worldwide (for summaries see Schmid 2005; Frehse 2018, p. 95).

Against the backdrop of this scarce reception dynamics in sociology, a properly sociological understanding of Löw's emphasis on Lefebvre's forerunning theoretical role regarding the production of space demands leaving disciplinary borders behind. Drawing on Schmid's reconstruction of the reception history of *La production de l'espace*, on Mark Gottdiener's (1993) review of the book's English translation, and on two recent bibliographic assessments of Lefebvre's contributions to 21<sup>st</sup>-century urban theory (Kipfer et al. 2008; Schmid et al. 2014), I will outline four academic milestones in the international reception history of Lefebvre's theory in urban studies in general. These milestones serve as heuristic devices to contextualize Löw's interpretation.

Firstly, the reception of *La production de l'espace* in sociology was strongly tarnished by Castells' Marxist-structuralist critique of Lefebvre's dialectical approach to the city and urbanization (Schmid 2005, pp. 39–40; Gottdiener 1993, p. 130 note 2). In the 1980s, Castells' Althusserian theory of collective consumption not only gave rise to the Anglo-Saxon “new urban sociology” (Schmid 2005, p. 32) but also to the “neo-Marxist urban sociology” in Germany (confer for summary Häußermann and Siebel 2004, pp. 97–99). It was precisely this latter framework that served as a primary sub-disciplinary counterpoint for Löw in her early development of a relational approach to the constitution of space: she conceived it as “urban sociology without space” (Löw 2001, pp. 44–57; 2016, pp. 32–43).

Secondly, the highly positive reception of *La production de l'espace* in British geography, particularly through the work of geographer David Harvey in *The Limits to Capital* (1982) and *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) has had a strong impact on urban research (Schmid 2005, p. 41). However, this reception has been notably constrained by Harvey's own objective on developing a "political economy of space" rooted in Marx's *Kapital* (Schmid 2005, p. 41). Consequently, Lefebvre's production of space was reframed as a "political-economic process of production", wherein space is viewed as both "built environment" and "(spatially) limited social units such as 'urban region' or 'nation'" (Schmid 2005, p. 44). Hence, we understand why Harvey's political-economic framework is also Löw's primary reference for engaging with Lefebvre's approach (Löw 2001, p. 109; 2008, p. 29; 2013, pp. 18–21; 2016, pp. 87–88). Löw envisages Lefebvre first and foremost as a criticist of capitalism whose production-of-space approach would heighten the state-controlled "aspects" of "fragmentation and unity" implicit in the process (Löw 2016, p. 87) and, indirectly, "a reduction of space to the earth's ground"; thus, a concept of space oblivious to "a dimension of action" (Löw 2016, p. 88). Indeed, during the 1990s, when Löw started her constitution-of-space project as part of her habilitation thesis, she was not alone in the international urban-sociological debate. The trend of conceptually prioritizing Lefebvre's critique of capitalism – in particular regarding the city and urbanization – prevailed in the reception history of sociology during this period (Saunders 1986 [1981]; Gottdiener 1985).

A third milestone in Schmid's assessment of Lefebvre's theory of space is the author's "renaissance" in Anglo-American postmodern geographies, and in particular in Edward Soja's "spatial turn" from the late 1980s, coinciding with the English publication of *La production de l'espace* (Schmid 2005, pp. 62–64). Against this backdrop, we understand not only why Löw connects "the Marxist foundation of a spatial theory that seeks to integrate time or historicization as an essential component" with Harvey and Soja (Löw 2009, p. 30). Furthermore, it becomes clear why she locates the onset of "an intensive debate on concepts of space and their range" in the early 1990s (Löw 2016, p. 53, note 7). In fact, and in turn, Schmid himself (2005, pp. 62, 67) envisages Lefebvre's "second recovery" in the critique that urban researchers (including himself) from different disciplines conveyed against the postmodern "appropriation" of Lefebvre's spatial thought during the 1990s.

Fourth, according to Schmid (2005, p. 70), the overall reception of Lefebvre's "theory of the production of space" is underpinned either by an unawareness or misunderstanding of its epistemological basis. The keyword here is "the German dialectic: Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche" (2005, p. 70); or, to paraphrase Fernandes' methodological framework, Lefebvre's method of interpretation, which essentially relies on Marx's "dialectical method" of inferential induction (Fernandes 1959, pp. 103–127; see also, more recently, Martins 1996; Dulceux and Hess 2009, pp. 88–90; Frehse 2014, 2017). Lefebvre's peculiar "dialectical logic," which is grounded in a

specific reading of Marx's dialectics with the aid of Hegel and Nietzsche, may be summarized as follows: "There is neither thinking nor reality without contradictions" (Lefebvre 1992, p. 22; see also Lefebvre 1986, and for a detailed analysis Schmid 2005, pp. 225–245). At this point, it is important to briefly recall that the intercultural misunderstandings regarding Lefebvre's framework comprise not only conceptual issues regarding the dialectical method but also – and often in connection with the first – some formal translation difficulties with Lefebvre's writing style. The English translation of *La production de l'espace* was not always successful in converting Lefebvre's dialectic contents into English (for example, the theoretically crucial triplicity of categories "vie quotidienne," "le quotidien," and "la quotidienneté" was sometimes summarized in one term only: "everyday life" – confer, among others, Lefebvre 1991, p. 89). This is not to mention the translator's option for "sophisticated synonyms" rather than for Lefebvre's "direct" and "clear" style, which is full of "puns" (Gottdiener 1993, p. 134). Instead, true to Lefebvre's (meta-philosophical) approach to the dialectical relation between theory and practice, his production-of-space approach is underpinned by a "playful" and "fragmentary" writing style, which is moreover supported by argumentative entanglements of simultaneous "yes and no" answers to self-posed questions (Schmid 2005, p. 16). Indeed, this narrative strategy also permeates Lefebvre's much broader, decade-long project of "critique of everyday life," within which the "problematics of space" is forged (for a summary confer Frehse 2021, p. 396).

Against this backdrop of intercultural misunderstandings in translation, it becomes evident not only why the more recent empirical deployment of Lefebvre's work in general (rather than only the production-of-space approach) in international urban research has focused on theory rather than method (Stanek 2011; Kipfer et al. 2008; Schmid et al. 2014; Leary-Owhin and McCarthy 2020; for an exception confer Frehse 2014, 2017, 2018; regarding the mobilization of Lefebvre's method in sociological theory in general see Hess 1988, 2009; Martins 1996). Moreover, Löw's constant emphasis on Lefebvre's theoretical contribution also makes sense. By positioning Lefebvre as a counterpoint of her own theory of the constitution of space, Löw contends that his approach would make evident the need of a "positive" concept of space, which is able to "conceive of spatial production beyond" capitalist alienation (Löw 2008, p. 29; see also Löw 2016, p. 112).

In light of this historical context, my assertion about Löw's methodological contributions to Lefebvre's production of space might seem pointless. However, things change once we recall that sociological theories have methodological implications. To paraphrase Bourdieu once more (1989, p. 27): being a "'theoretical' instrument," a concept (or rather "notion") is also "a conceptual stenography of a way of constructing the object, which will dictate – or guide – all the practical research options." Despite taking a radically different theoretical path, Lefebvre's theory of space also remains loyal to the methodological precept that concepts should not remain enclosed within

the abstract realm of theory. His lifelong, “meta-philosophical” approach to social life was forged precisely in his dissatisfaction with the “fixity” of concepts in philosophical thought, which he argued failed to account for their “freedom” and thus precluded a “critical analysis” based on their (dialectical) “fusion” with (“mental and social”) conscience: that is, with the conceived and lived knowledge (Lefebvre 1970, pp. 139–140). Particularly in *La production de l'espace*, Lefebvre concludes by advocating a “knowledge about the production of space” that “connects to philosophy and extends it” (Lefebvre 2000a [1974], p. 424).

Therefore, to heighten Löw’s methodological contributions to Lefebvre’s approach, let me now examine the methodological implications of the latter with the assistance of the former’s own approach as a counterpoint.

### **The how of the production of space with the aid of the constitution of space**

So far, the methodological dimension of Lefebvre’s spatial theory has remained largely underexplored by the Lefebvorean scholarship (Schmid 2005, 2008; Goonewardena et al. 2008; Stanek 2011; Schmid et al. 2014; Leary-Owhin and McCarthy 2020; for exceptions see Frehse 2014, 2017, 2018; Bertuzzo 2014). Although Schmid’s analysis underscores the openness of Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space to a wide array of conceptual and inspirational applications – in line with Lefebvre’s own meta-philosophical opposition against any system, particularly conceptual ones (Schmid 2005, pp. 332–333; 2008, p. 43; confer also Frehse 2017, p. 515) – it does not address the framework’s methodological dimension. On the contrary, in collaboration and elsewhere (Schmid et al. 2014, p. 17), Schmid emphasizes both Lefebvre’s preference for “the term ‘démarche’ (procedure) to indicate the openness of his research” and his aim at “a confrontation of a variety of methods from within a shared theoretical framework.” Based on this assessment, Schmid et al. (2014) frame Lefebvre’s oeuvre as two-sided: the author’s “writing dynamics” are shaped by “the theoretical guidelines that form a persistent structure throughout his texts,” and “the experience of their operationalization in response to urgent questions” (Schmid et al. 2014, p. 17).

Differently, I argue that Lefebvre’s meta-philosophical asystematization regarding his theory goes hand in hand with a continuous, albeit tacit, methodological coherence of a sociological nature. Significantly, Lefebvre qualifies his “démarche” in *La production de l'espace* as “regressive-progressive” (2000a, p. 79). This descriptor merely scratches the surface of a comprehensive method of investigation and interpretation that Lefebvre systematically employed since the early 1950s (Frehse 2014). This method, more or less tacitly, also informed his works after *La production*

*de l'espace* (for example Lefebvre 1975, 1980), including his late rhythm analysis (Frehse 2018).

Instead of detailing the “regressive-progressive method” (for that, see Frehse 2013, 2014, 2017), I will focus on Lefebvre's argumentative application of it in *La production de l'espace* (2000a)<sup>2</sup>. Thus, not only will it become evident that the regressive-progressive method underpins Lefebvre's theoretical framework for empirically addressing the production of space. More importantly, Löw's unique contribution to Lefebvre's methodology will synthetically emerge to the analytical forefront. Being aware of the argumentative complexity of this endeavour within the constraints of this paper, my heuristic approach is to analytically (and artificially!) address the three major steps implicit in any sociological knowledge process. I mean the logic links between epistemology, theory, and methodology (see Esposito and Evans-Winters 2022, pp. 30–31) regarding in particular Lefebvre's framework and using Löw's approach (and her critiques of Lefebvre) as a counterpoint.

### On epistemology and theory – and Löw's counterpoints

First and foremost, let me recall that Lefebvre did not frame his approach neither as sociological, nor in any disciplinary terms. On the contrary, he aimed for a “theoretical unity between the ‘fields’ that appear separately,” ranging from “the *physical*, the nature, le cosmos – followed by the *mental* (which includes formal logic and abstraction) – to the *social*” (Lefebvre 2000a, p. 19; original emphasis). Yet this theoretical aim does not make Lefebvre's epistemology less sociological. Rather than focusing solely on the concept of space, he emphasizes its (social, relational) *production*: “space taken separately turns into an empty abstraction” (Lefebvre 2000a, p. 20). Well understood, this epistemological focus is embedded within the aforementioned wider, meta-philosophical epistemology, which in Lefebvre's overall work is also underpinned by two other drives. On the one hand, there is “transduction”: a logic of thought concerned with the historical possibilities for future social transformation contained in empirically given realities of the present and the past (for a summary see Lefebvre 1961, p. 121). On the other hand, there is the aforementioned dialectic. This underpins Lefebvre's perspective when addressing the issue of the production of space with the aid of (I) Friedrich Hegel's theoretical concepts of product and production (Lefebvre 2000b [1985], p. xx), (II) Marx's concept of praxis, expanded to encompass the spatial dimension of social practice (that is, “spatial practice”), and (III) Marx's methodological “*démarche*” in the *Grundrisse*, which inspired Lefebvre's “regressive-progressive” framework (2000a, pp. 79–81).

2 Due to major translation gaps and imprecisions regarding the methodological issues in focus here, the English translation (Lefebvre 1991) is of little use.

Thus, the epistemological stage is set for a dialectically grounded sociological theory that is both forged and enmeshed in a dialectically grounded “diagnosis of society” (Knoblauch 2017, p. 17). Indeed, the scattering of theoretical elements within Lefebvre’s societal diagnosis, developed concurrently to address the (neo)capitalist production of space, adds another layer to the overall misunderstandings surrounding his approach. Because these elements are often indistinguishable, Lefebvre’s sociological theory might appear solely focused on critiquing capitalism through Marx’s concept of alienation (see for example Löw 2005, p. 241, 2008, p. 27, 2016, p. 112).

In *La production de l’espace*, Lefebvre tackles a specific, empirically given contradiction he observed in the early 1970s, when the book first appeared: the simultaneous coexistence of a vast array of inter- and transdisciplinary “theories of space,” alongside the highly centralized and collapsing “spatial planification” of the first post-war decades (Lefebvre 2000b, p. xviii). This empirical “confusion” became the starting point of a specific sociological theorization. After all, to “escape the confusion,” the intended theory builds on a definite presupposition: “(social) space and (social) time” are “products” (2000b, p. xix; original emphasis). In other words, space and time are assumed as “the major aspects of the *second nature*, the effect of the action of societies on the ‘primary nature’; [that is; FF] on the sensorial [‘sensitive’ in the original French; FF] data, the material and the energies” (2000b, p. xix).

At first sight, the phrasing suggests an absolutist concept of space: a pre-existing first nature would be socially shaped by the second nature. In fact, Löw’s most detailed assessment of Lefebvre’s concept of space (Löw 2005) leans in this interpretive direction. She argues that Lefebvre, in a sense, operates with both absolutist and relational concepts of space simultaneously: “there are spaces on which spaces are generated, and spaces are generated in space” (Löw 2005, p. 249).

However, Lefebvre’s dialectic epistemology implies that there is no time-lapse between the first and the second nature. On the one hand, the materiality of “the sensorial, the material. and the energies” is theoretically assumed as first nature, later referred to as “*primary material*,” or “*nature*” (Lefebvre 2000a). Simultaneously, and on the other hand, the primary nature is “a powerful *myth* on which the productive forces of various societies operated to produce their space”; that is, the second nature (2000a, p. 40; emphasis FF). Now, myths cannot be separated from language, which in turn is inseparable from a specific “spatial (social) practice” (2000a, p. 25) due to the fact that it is through words of the everyday discourse that spaces are “discerned” and a spatial practice is “told and composed” (2000a, pp. 23–24). Hence, the primary nature is dialectically framed as both material and symbolic space (that is, as “a myth”) at once. As a conceptual counterpoint, it emphasizes that the second nature is “another, new” creation: “something other than the nature” (2000a, p. 130).

Against this theoretical backdrop, we can understand why Lefebvre summarizes space in the preface as a “set of relations” (Lefebvre 2000b, p. xx), a notion that he

later expands upon in the book. These relations concern “things (objects and products)” inseparable from praxis, that is, from the activity, the use, the necessity, the “social being” (Lefebvre 2000a, p. 100). Turning to Löw’s terminology, we encounter a relational concept of space – although Lefebvre does not employ this term. Instead, he regards “relational space” as a “sociological” qualification of space (2000a, pp. 52, 419).

Indeed, Lefebvre’s relationality is theoretically very different from the one underlying Löw’s relational space. While both share a socially processual dimension – which Lefebvre terms “production” and Löw “constitution” – Lefebvre’s transductive-dialectical approach implies a special role for the various social orderings between temporal categories that Western common-sense terms “present,” “past,” and “future,” with the latter being transductively termed “the possible” by Lefebvre. To summarize two analytical outcomes that I developed elsewhere (Frehse 2021, p. 395), Lefebvre’s approach to the production of space focuses on *historicity* assumed as the entanglement of historical temporalities implicit in the production of space. In turn, Löw’s action-theoretical, phenomenological approach to space as a relationally social product resulting from the “order(-ing)” of human (living) beings and social goods of both material and symbolic natures in places (Löw 2001, p. 154, 2013, p. 27, 2016, p. 141) is conceptually focused on the temporal *immediacy* of the “repetitive everyday” (Löw 2001, p. 161; see also Löw 2016, p. 136; Frehse 2021, p. 499).

If we consider that Lefebvre’s *dialectical* concept of space is theoretically framed around the *historical*, rather than the *phenomenal* temporality which prevails in Löw’s *dual* concept of space, we can understand why Lefebvre’s relationality leans towards a historic-processual nature. The concept of space “becomes dialectic: product-producer, a support of economic and social relations” (Lefebvre 2000b, pp. xx–xxi).

In brief: the Lefebvorean space is a *mediation* of *historically contradictory* social practice, while the Löwsian space is an *outcome* of *repetitive* social actions. This framing is inseparable from the different “logical principles” that underpin sociological approaches (Martins 1972, p. 3). While Lefebvre’s approach follows the Marxian “principle of contradiction,” Löw adopts an interpretive logic of thought whose historic roots lie in Max Weber’s sociology, which in turn follows the “logical principle of identity” (Martins 1972, pp. 3–4). These are epistemological differences of a structural nature between the theories of the production and of the constitution of space. The theoretical scope of these differences jeopardizes the scope of any criticism regarding this specific, epistemological level of sociological knowledge production.

Consistent with Lefebvre’s epistemological and theoretical stance, space “also become[s] part of the *reproduction*, one of the productive apparatuses, of the enlarged reproduction, of the relations space accomplishes practically, ‘in the field’” (Lefebvre 2000b, p. xxi). Hence, the task of the intended theory is to conceptualize the links between the product and the (re)production: “[t]he theory *reproduces*, with a chain of concepts, but in a very strong sense, the generative process: from within rather than

from the outside (descriptively)” (Lefebvre 2000a, p. 47). Yet all of this is instantaneously applied to the (critical) theorization of “today’s society” (Lefebvre 2000b, p. xxiv). In other words, the socially (re)productive dimension of space lays the theoretical groundwork for empirically addressing the spatially (re)productive dimension of the empirically given social reality.

If all of this seems theoretically feasible within Lefebvre’s unique dialectical framework (Schmid 2005, 2008), the scenario shifts when we address the methodological dimension of the theory. Here, Löw’s approach makes a crucial difference.

### On methodology, and Löw’s constibutions

In a nutshell, the following phrasing summarizes Lefebvre’s methodological perspective regarding the empirical inquiry into production of space: “the project sketched here [in the book’s first chapter, meaningfully named ‘Sketch of the Work’; FF] does not aim to produce one (the) discourse about space; the contrary, it aims to show the production of space itself by gathering the diverse spaces and the modes of their genesis within one theory” (Lefebvre 2000a, p. 24). Rather than advocating for a new concept within the already vast array of concepts of space, the book’s argumentative structure aims to convey the production of space in process.

But how exactly? This brings us to Lefebvre’s regressive-progressive method applied to the production of space, which is paraphrased in the preface and mentioned in the first chapter (see respectively Lefebvre 2000a, pp. 79–80, 2000b, pp. xxiv, xxvii–xxviii). Lefebvre proposes a twofold empirical inquiry regarding the production of space both as a (theoretical) “concept” and an empirically lived and perceived “language” (2000a, p. 79) whose theoretical basis is laid out in the first chapter. It comprises, on the one hand, the famous space triad (Frehse 2018, p. 95), which he terms “triplicity,” and, on the other hand, the “history of space”.

On the one hand, by explicitly referencing the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Lefebvre establishes the (living) body as *the* methodological “reference” for understanding space in the three (dialectical) “moments” through which this same space is produced: “the perceived – the conceived – the lived” (Lefebvre 2000a, p. 50). This perspective (dialectically) bears in itself a second implication: the (social) spatial dimension of these moments is immanent to the perceived-conceived-lived body. Thus, by the same token the (social) spatial dimension is immanent to – in Lefebvre’s own terms – the “triplicity – the perceived – the conceived – the lived (in spatial terms: practice of space – representations of space – spaces of representation)” (2000a, p. 50; see also Frehse 2021, p. 397). The referential body for analyzing the three moments of space is simultaneously underpinned by the dialectical links between the spatially (re)produced social practice, and respectively the rational-scientific conceptions about space (by experts, planners, urbanists as

well as by “agencing” and “fragmenting” technocrats alongside “some artists close to scientificity”), and the “images and symbols” of this same space (by the so-called “dwellers,” “users,” and also “some artists,” writers and philosophers). In essence, at least under capitalism, the production of space may be methodologically tackled if we analytically focus on the dialectical entanglements between the bodily immediacy of perceptions, of rational conceptions and of symbolically lived experiences of space in everyday life.

However, this temporal-spatial focus on the immediacy of the everyday (Frehse 2021, p. 397) does not methodologically delve deep enough into the empirical intricacies of the production of space. Therefore, we need a second major methodological procedure.

On the other hand, Lefebvre argues that “[i]f (social) space intervenes with the mode of production [of economic and social life; FF], simultaneously as an effect, a cause and a reason, it changes with that mode of production! [...]. Hence, there is a *history of space*. [...] A history still to be written” (Lefebvre 2000b, p. xxii, original emphasis; confer also Lefebvre 2000a, p. 57). In fact, the analysis of the three moments of space goes hand in hand with a procedure that I summarized as follows:

“the dialectical periodization of the ‘productive process’ of space based on the analytic identification of social contradictions that, being implicit in historically former spaces, intervene in the possibilities for the historical transformation of spaces generated by subsequent modes of production” (Frehse 2021, p. 398).

When specifically considering the history of space within the capitalist mode of production (of social and economic life simultaneously),

“the nature-loaded ‘absolute space’ may be dialectically present in the communal ‘historical space’, and both of these may again appear in the functionalistic and quantified ‘abstract space’. The latter, in turn, though dominant in capitalism, is not devoid of contradictions and itself contains the possibility of ‘differential space’. Its contradictions, for their part, stem from historically both new and old conflictual relations of production” (Frehse 2021, p. 398; confer also Lefebvre 2000a, pp. 57–65, 265–460).

The argumentative consequence of this twofold methodological approach to the production of space is reflected in the chapter structure of *La production de l'espace* (Frehse 2021, pp. 397–398). However, for my purposes here, the decisive aspect lies elsewhere.

I am referring to a specific theoretical gap within the aforementioned methodological strategy of simultaneously (dialectically!) inquiring into (I) the space triplicity in regressive-progressive terms and (II) the regressive-progressive history

of space with the aid of the space triplicity. The phenomenal level of everyday life is theoretically crucial to Lefebvre's meta-philosophical and transductive pursuit of historical possibilities for social transformation in and through space. Given this, the *how* of the (re)production of space in everyday life becomes analytically inescapable. To be more precise in regressive-progressive terms (Lefebvre 2001 [1953], p. 74), the question concerns Lefebvre's methodological tools for descriptively "identifying" and analytically "dating" the historical temporalities implicit in the phenomenological dimension of the spatial practice, the representations of space and the spaces of representation. In other words, the issue relates to the temporalities implicit respectively in bodily perceptions, rational conceptions, and symbolic experiences of space. With the data collected during the "descriptive" and "regressive-analytical" moments of the method, it becomes possible to develop a "historical-genetic" interpretation about the socially (re)productive paths of the history of space, through which social transformations occur (Lefebvre 2001, p. 74). Therefore, the crucial empirical object is the historic-temporal mismatches (hence, contradictions) implicit in the space triplicity vis-à-vis the methodologically assumed "overall process" (Lefebvre 2001, p. 74), namely, the (neo-capitalist) mode of production of economic and social relations in and through space. Lefebvre does not provide a methodological roadmap for addressing this issue, much less concepts to be assumed as "ready-to-hand tools to be instantly implemented" (Schmid et al. 2014, p. 17).

Conversely, Löw's approach offers an answer precisely regarding the *how* of the bodily mediated (re)production of space in everyday life.

Therefore, let me briefly specify how her empirical object differs from Lefebvre's. The latter focuses on social (spatial) practice, or *praxis*, which he previously, and elsewhere (Lefebvre 1974 [1966], p. 41), defined as "act, dialectical relation between nature and human beings". This entails dialectically considering the "repetitive" and/or "mimetic" moments of praxis *amidst* the historic possibilities of social (and historical) transformations ("inventive praxis") implicit in the (always) contradictory process of (re)production of social practice in everyday life (Lefebvre 1974, p. 47). To summarize: everyday life is a "level" of social life whose (re)production is mediated by the historical mismatches involved in the three (dialectical) moments of praxis. Accordingly, "the everyday" is a specific historical product of twenty-century capitalism: it is grounded in the temporally linear "programming" of everyday life by bureaucracy, consumption and the state, and simultaneously shaped by the temporal contradictions that characterize the everyday as such: the cyclic rhythms of "the Feast" (Lefebvre 1968, respectively p. 125, p. 73, p. 140). For Lefebvre, the everyday as a historically specific product was an important mediation of alienation in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century (1968, p. 51) whose temporal paroxysm is precisely "the everydayness" (1968, p. 115). From this theoretical standpoint, Löw primarily focuses on the repetitive and/or mimetic dimension of spatial practice – that is, on Lefebvre's everyday – but (obviously) with-

out taking into consideration the everyday's dialectical nature. After all, by following a non-dialectical, phenomenologically informed action-theoretical framework, Löw's empirical object is the routinized, repetitive dimension of action that "constitutes" space in everyday life (Löw 2001, pp. 161–166, 2016, pp. 136–141). Interestingly enough, in the German original *Raumsoziologie*, Löw explicitly addresses "the repetitive everyday" (der repetitive Alltag) (2001, p. 161). This comes as no surprise once we recall that German phenomenological tradition forged by Schütz also distinguishes the repetitive "everyday" (Alltag) from the temporally much more complex "everyday life" (Alltagsleben) (Schütz and Luckmann 2003 [1979]). Accordingly, and adding an action-theoretical approach of a phenomenological nature to a non-dialectical epistemology, Löw addresses "deviation and change" as "possibilities of constituting space in a manner deviating from [repetitive and habitual; FF] everyday practice – or indeed in a manner that changes it" (Löw 2001, p. 183, 2016, p. 155).

In light of this framing, I may be more precise. Löw empirically focuses on the dual-processual entanglement of two processes of action. On the one hand, there is "spacing", which concerns locating human beings and/or material/symbolic goods (2001, p. 158, 2016, p. 135). On the other hand, there is the "operation of synthesis," which refers to the symbolic connection of these beings with goods via perception, memory, and abstract representations (Löw 2001, p. 199, 2016, p. 135). Both types of action produce space by recursively reproducing social structures (that is, institutional rules and resources) by means of the "practical conscience" of human beings (that is, bodily and emotionally based, non-reflexive knowledge); however, a discursive (reflexive) conscience may also influence the process (Löw 2001, pp. 158–172, 2016, pp. 134–146; for a summary see Frehse 2021, p. 400).

Although forged in epistemological and theoretical frameworks vastly different from those of Lefebvre, Löw's dyad of spacing and synthesis proves methodologically helpful for conceptualizing – whether or not in Lefebvrian terms – the micro-social dynamics involved in respectively the bodily perception, the rational conception and the symbolic experience of space in everyday life. Spacing provides analytical insight into the social dimension of the transient bodily mechanics through which space is not only socially perceived. The dyad allows for methodologically operationalizing an issue that Lefebvre only indirectly addressed: the mediating role of both "representations of the body" and "the bodily lived" in the conceived and lived space (Lefebvre 2000a, p. 50). The concept of synthesis, in turn, provides methodological ground for a more precise understanding of the micro-social mechanics involved in the symbolic synthesis that takes place in the perceptions, abstract representations and memories regarding space (Löw 2001, p. 199, 2016, p. 168). In Lefebvrian terms: at the phenomenal levels of the (bodily) perceived, the conceived and the lived, through which space is dialectically produced via spatial practice, representations of space and the space of representations.

Thus, spacing and synthesis emerge as two methodological contributions of Löw's approach to Lefebvre's production of space. The third and final contribution mentioned here is the "duality of space," which concerns "the mutual co-ordination of action and structure" (Löw 2001, p. 224, 2016, p. 190). This concept helps the author grasp the micro-social mechanics involved, especially in the varying socially (re)productive spatial impact, as it were, of the actions of spacing and synthesis. Social and spatial structures are recursively reproduced via the institutional rules and resources that permeate the bodily actions of spacing and synthesis in everyday life.

This mechanics makes one specific Lefebvrian proposition of a regressive-progressive nature analytically operational: the idea that historical possibilities of social transformations may be interpreted by analytically identifying the mismatches of historical dates implicit in the daily social relations in a given research field (Lefebvre 2001, pp. 73–74). According to Löw, spacing- and synthesis-based routinised practices may either change or deviate from habit – and hence give rise to "creative-design action" (Löw 2001, p. 185). While this phrasing echoes Lefebvre's praxis triplicity (repetition-mimesis-invention), the theoretical logic is fundamentally different. Social change – rather than Lefebvre's "social transformation" or "history" – depends on changes in institutionalized spaces, which in turn occur through the routinization of deviations and creations by means of the "collective recourse to relevant rules and resources" (Löw 2001, p. 185). The duality of space elucidates the bodily mediated, micro-social processes of spatial institutionalization, serving as mediations for the broader historical processes of space (re)production that Lefebvre focuses on, and by means of which social transformations take place.

All in all, if we recall Bourdieu's framing of concepts as stenographies of ways of constructing an object, Löw's concepts of spacing, synthesis and the duality of space allow for a unique methodological operationalization of the Lefebvrian object named "the production of space." This achievement is in line with Löw's advocacy that "[v]arious concepts of space offer different operationalizations of problems" (Löw 2001, p. 15, 2016, p. 6). Her relational concept for tackling the problem of space-production manages to operationalize gaps in Lefebvre's dialectic-relational concept of space as mediation, which alternative sociological theorizations of the spatialization of the social, developed in the interim between Lefebvre and Löw, failed to address (Läpple 1991; Bourdieu 2003 [1993], 2013 [1991]; Löw 2001, pp. 141–151, 2016, pp. 116–127). Löw aptly demonstrated that Bourdieu's concept of space remains dichotomous: a metaphoric, social space coexists with an absolutistic, physical space (Löw 2001, p. 183, 2016, p. 154). Läpple, in turn, did not incorporate the bodily, symbolic dimension of space-production implicit in the concept of synthesis (Löw 2001, p. 138, 2016, p. 114).

Thus, Löw's approach paves a solid analytical path also for Lefebvrian spatial researchers to grasp the micro-social dynamics implicit in the daily (re-)production of

perceived, conceived and lived spaces. They learn that this dynamic depends on the varying rhythms of historic change that underlie spatially structured institutions in everyday life, driven by the varying rhythms of the bodily mediated operations of spacing and synthesis, which recursively constitute these spatial structures and, in turn, constitute space itself.

## The methodological turning-point character of the constitution of space

In examining the relationship between the body and the production of space, Löw (2005, p. 266) emphasized the theoretical relevance of Lefebvre's spatial practice ("perception and routinized practices") over his representations of space (which "could be complemented by other ordering principles such as gender, class and ethnicity") and the "space of representations" (which would be problematic due to Lefebvre's association of it as being a realm of "resistance against capitalism from beyond capitalism"). While the preceding analysis serves to potentially relativize this critical evaluation, it also sheds light on Löw's original contribution to Lefebvre's production of space.

In particular, the micro-social action-mechanics implicit in the three sociospatial phenomena, which Lefebvre addressed via his transductive and hence regressive-progressive dialectic – namely, the bodily perceptual, rationally conceived and symbolically experienced dimensions of the production of space –, become not only theoretically intelligible but also methodologically graspable. Something similar applies to Lefebvre's major methodological procedure regarding the space triplicity in *La production de l'espace*: the utilization of this threefold analytical framework to dialectically inquire into the history of space, and vice-versa. Löw demonstrates that at the phenomenal level of everyday life the production of space is rather mediated by actions of spacing and synthesis alongside a bodily mediated, constitution of space whose form and content rely on the institutionally dual, recursive back-and-forth of rules and resources.

On another occasion (Frehse 2021), I highlighted the striking complementarity between Lefebvre's and Löw's approaches to the production of space, especially in their methodological treatment of temporalities to theoretically address the various spatialities implicit in the phenomenon. While Lefebvre's approach focuses on the historicity of the situation, everyday life, and history, Löw privileges the immediacy of the situation, everyday life and history (Frehse 2021, pp. 395–398, 400–402). This complementarity signals that Löw's approach fills methodological gaps in Lefebvre's framework, particularly concerning the temporal realm of the production of space. In turn, the analysis in this paper adds three *spatial* elements to Löw's set of contributions.

Hence, this paper ultimately underscores an overlooked methodological advancement within Löw's approach in the overall academic debate on the production of space. In addition to the well-acknowledged theoretical contribution of Löw's concepts of spacing and synthesis alongside the duality of space (for summaries see Frehse 2021, p. 409, Knoblauch and Steets 2022, pp. 19–24), I hope this paper has made evident why Löw's approach features a *methodological* turning-point in the discussion. Löw also renders the phenomenal, bodily dimension implicit in the production of space in everyday life analytically graspable, as well as its space-institutional interface.

Thus, not even Lefebvre's approach remains the same anymore. When it comes to the historical dimension of the production of space, there is nothing like revisiting Lefebvre's methodological toolkit. However, from now on, we may revisit this with the awareness that it has become phenomenologically much more precise, thanks to Löw's constitution of space.

## Acknowledgement

Funding for this paper was provided by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – Brasil (CAPES).

## References

- Bauman, Zygmunt/May, Tim (2001): *Thinking Sociologically*. Malden/Oxford/Victoria, BC: Blackwell.
- Bertuzzo, Elisa T. (2014): During the Urban Revolution – Conjectures on the Streets of Dhaka. In: Stanek, Lukasz/Moaravánsky, Ákos/Schmid, Christian (eds.): *Urban Revolution Now*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 49–69.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1989 [1987]): Introdução a uma sociologia reflexiva. In: Bourdieu, Pierre: *O Poder Simbólico*. Lisboa: Difel, pp. 17–58.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (2003 [1993]): Efeitos de lugar. In: Bourdieu, Pierre: *A miséria do mundo*. Petrópolis: Vozes, pp. 159–166.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (2013 [1991]): Espaço físico, espaço social e espaço físico apropriado. *Estudos Avançados*. 27(79), pp. 133–144.
- Bastels, Manuel (1972): *La question urbaine*. Paris: François Maspero.
- Dulceux, Sandrine/Hess, Rémi (2009): *Henri Lefebvre: Vie – oeuvre – concepts*. Paris: Ellipses.
- Esposito, Jennifer/Evans-Winters, Venus (2022): *Introduction to Intersectional Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

- Fernandes, Florestan (1959): *Fundamentos Empíricos da Explicação Sociológica*. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional.
- Fernandes, Florestan (1970): *Elementos de Sociologia Teórica*. São Paulo: Edusp/Companhia Editora Nacional.
- Frehse, Fraya (2013): Zeiten im Körper: Das Potenzial der Lefebvre'schen Methode für die (lateinamerikanische) Stadtforschung. In: Huffschmid, Anne/Wildner, Kathrin (eds.): *Stadtforschung aus Lateinamerika*. Bielefeld: transcript, pp. 145–169.
- Frehse, Fraya (2014): For Difference “in and through” São Paulo: The Regressive-Progressive Method. In: Stanek, Lukasz/Schmid, Christian/Moravánsky, Ákos (eds.): *Urban Revolution Now*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 243–262.
- Frehse, Fraya (2017): Relational Space through Historically Relational Time – in the Bodies of São Paulo's Pedestrians. *Current Sociology*. 65(2), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392117697462> (last called: May 26, 2024).
- Frehse, Fraya (2018): On Regressive-Progressive Rhythmanalysis. In: Bauer, Jenny/Fischer, Robert (Hg.): *Perspectives on Henri Lefebvre*. Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, pp. 95–117.
- Frehse, Fraya (2021): Time and the Production of Space in Sociology. *Sociologia & Antropologia*. 11(2), pp. 389–414, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1590/2238-38752021v11i2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1590/2238-38752021v11i2_2) (last called: May 26, 2024).
- Goonewardena, Kanishka/Kipfer, Stefan/Milgrom, Richard/Schmid, Christian (eds.) (2008): *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gottdiener, Mark (1985): *The Social Production of Urban Space*. Austin, TX: Texas University Press.
- Gottdiener, Mark (1993): A Marx for our Time: Henri Lefebvre and the Production of Space. *Sociological Theory*. 11(1), pp. 129–134.
- Häußermann, Hartmut/Siebel, Walter (2004): *Stadtsoziologie*. Frankfurt a. M.: Campus.
- Harvey, David (1982): *The Limits to Capital*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harvey, David (1989): *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hess, Rémi (1988): *Henri Lefebvre et l'aventure du siècle*. Paris: A.M. Métaillié.
- Hess, Rémi (2000): Avant-propos à la quatrième édition française: Henri Lefebvre et la pensée de l'espace. In: Lefebvre, Henri: *La production de l'espace*. Paris: Anthropos, pp. v–xvi.
- Hess, Rémi (2009): *Henri Lefebvre et la pensée du possible*. Paris: Economica.
- Kipfer, Stefan/Goonewardena, Kanishka/Schmid, Christian/Milgrom, Richard (2008): On the Production of Henri Lefebvre. In: Goonewardena, Kanishka/Kipfer, Stefan/Milgrom, Richard/Schmid, Christian (eds.): *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 1–23.
- Knoblauch, Hubert (2017): *Die kommunikative Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

- Knoblauch, Hubert/Steets, Silke (2022): From the constitution to the communicative construction of space. In: Christmann, Gabriela/Knoblauch, Hubert/Löw, Martina (eds.): *Communicative Constructions and the Refiguration of Spaces*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 19–35.
- Läpple, Dieter (1991): Essay über den Raum. Für ein gesellschaftswissenschaftliches Raumkonzept. In: Häußermann, Hartmut/Ipsen, Detlev/Krämer-Badoni, Thomas/Läpple, Dieter/Rodenstein, Marianne/Siebel, Walter (eds.): *Stadt und Raum*. Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, pp. 157–207.
- Leary-Owhin, Michael E./McCarthy, John P. (2020): *The Routledge Handbook of Henri Lefebvre, The City and Urban Society*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1961): *Critique de la vie quotidienne*. Paris: L'Arche Éditeur.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1968): *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1970): *Le manifeste différentialiste*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1974 [1966]): *Sociologie de Marx*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1975): *Le temps des méprises*. Paris: Stock.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1980): *La présence et l'absence*. Paris: Casterman.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1986): *Le retour de la dialectique*. Paris: Messidor.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1991 [1974]): *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1992): *Éléments de rythmanalyse*. Paris: Syllepse.
- Lefebvre, Henri (2000a [1974]): *La production de l'espace*. Paris: Anthropos.
- Lefebvre, Henri (2000b [1985]): Préface. In: Lefebvre, Henri: *La production de l'espace*. Paris: Anthropos, pp. xvii–xxviii.
- Lefebvre, Henri (2001 [1953]): Perspectives de la sociologie rurale. In: Lefebvre, Henri: *Du rural à l'urbain*. Paris: Anthropos, pp. 63–78.
- Löw, Martina (2001): *Raumsoziologie*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.
- Löw, Martina (2005): Die Rache des Körpers über den Raum? Über Henri Lefebvres Utopie und Geschlechterverhältnisse am Strand. In: Schroer, Markus (ed.): *Soziologie des Körpers*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, pp. 241–270.
- Löw, Martina (2008): The Constitution of Space. The Structuration of Spaces Through the Simultaneity of Effect and Perception. *European Journal of Social Theory*. 11(1), pp. 25–49.
- Löw, Martina (2013): O spatial turn: Para uma sociologia do espaço. *Tempo Social*. 25(2), pp. 17–34, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0103-20702013000200002> (last called: May 26, 2024).
- Löw, Martina (2016): *The Sociology of Space*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Martins, José de S. (1972): Introdução. In: Martins, José de S./Foracchi, Marialice M. (eds.): *Sociologia e Sociedade*. Rio de Janeiro: LTC, pp. 1–8.
- Martins, José de S. (1996): *Henri Lefebvre e o Retorno à Dialética*. São Paulo: Hucitec.
- Saunders, Peter (1986 [1981]): *Social Theory and the Urban Question*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Schmid, Christian (2005): *Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft*. München: Franz Steiner.
- Schmid, Christian (2008): Henri Lefebvre's Theory of the Production of Space: Towards a Three-dimensional Dialectic. In: Goonewardena, Kanishka/Kipfer, Stefan/Milgrom, Richard/Schmid, Christian (eds.): *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 25–45.
- Schmid, Christian/Stanek, Lukasz/Moravánsky, Ákos (2014): Introduction: Theory, Not Method – Thinking with Lefebvre. In: Stanek, Lukasz/Schmid, Christian/Moravánsky, Ákos (eds.): *Urban Revolution Now*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 1–24.
- Schütz, Alfred/Luckmann, Thomas (2003 [1979]): *Strukturen der Alltagswelt*. Konstanz: UVK.
- Stanek, Lukasz (2011): *Henri Lefebvre on Space*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wolf, Abraham (1930): *Textbook of Logic*. London: G. Allen and Unwin.

