

Urban phenomena in São Paulo's nineteenth and twentieth centuries

Appropriating local spatio-temporalities

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In the outline of this special issue the editors asked for empirical studies concerning time(s) and/or space(s) in cities with the intention of enriching conceptual debates about social and cultural characteristics of “urban phenomenon (in Brazil)”. What does that mean – the “urban phenomenon”? The thesis of this article is that we understand it as a specific spatio-temporal relation between an urban space and its inhabitants. The common definitions of cities revolve around spatial dimensions in the sense that a city is a specifically ordered space produced by and for humans. But how do we account for time in this perspective? Does it make sense to include the temporal dimension? This question leads to more epistemological questions within debates in social and cultural studies that have notably come to the fore in recent years by means of the so-called “spatial turn”¹. Recently one of the editors of this special issue, Fraya Frehse, concluded that “the historicity of these social phenomena and its role in the social construction/constitution of space remain conceptually underexplored” (Frehse, 2017, p. 513). Taking this, the following study starts from the assumption that temporal and spatial dimensions are intrinsically connected and will be as such analysed as spatio-temporalities.

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1. In the early 1990s, the reassessment of Lefebvre's *La production de l'espace* (1974) by Edward Soja (1989), along with the English translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith in 1991, triggered a fundamental reconceptualization of space in nearly all the disciplines of cultural studies and social sciences. Following this, *La production de l'espace* became an emblem of the so-called spatial turn; for further references, see Dorsch (2013).

For my spatio-temporal analysis of the urban I will utilize in this text the term “appropriation” developed by the French philosopher-sociologist-urbanist Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) in his epochal work *La production de l'espace* (1974). As will be shown, appropriation can be understood as a spatio-temporal practice *par excellence*. The aim here is to look closely at the interrelations between the inhabitants with “their” city of São Paulo, and how they produced the “urban phenomenon” in which this special issue is interested by appropriating space and time, or spatio-temporalities. By doing this many of the linear-progressive histories told so far in urban historiography will be challenged. And, as we will see, Latin America, and especially São Paulo, is highly interesting for the questions about the history of the “urban phenomenon” in the (Western) world. Thus, on a more abstract-conceptual level we will have a short look at urban histories of the Spanish and Portuguese Americas, and then focus on methodology and, more concretely, São Paulo in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Urban histories of the Spanish and Portuguese Americas

The foundation of new cities in the so-called New World of the Americas by the Iberians from the end of fifteenth century onwards has been ignored in the mainstream of (Western) urban history, not to mention the rich pre-European urban history in these areas. For the Castilian – in contrast to the Portuguese crown, to be treated later on – one has to sketch the foundation of new cities as the central spatial technique for the conquest of the area later called Spanish America². They translated Castilian and Islamic approaches deriving from the *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula and applied them to the spatial situation in the New World: they founded cities via so-called *capitulaciones* as nuclei for dominating their surroundings and as centres of their colonial aims. Many of these cities were built on locally known central points. This means that on the same places where the former “indigenous” rulers had established their urban centres within extensive dominions like the Inca (Cuzco, Quito), the Mexica (with the Triple Alliance, involving the cities of Tenochtitlán, Texcoco and Tlacopán in the area of today's Mexico City) or less known the Purhépecha in Western Mexico (Pátzcuaro, Tzintzuntzan), and so forth. Best known is today how highly impressed Hernán Cortes and his followers were in November 1519 when they saw the cities in the valley of México³. As such the new foundations of cities in the Americas are best

2. For a detailed overview on this topic, see Pietschmann (2017).

3. See the classic description in Díaz de Castillo ([1632] 2003).

described as acts of appropriating established ruling practices from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

The colonializing aims of the Castilians are represented in an ostensive way in the planning and construction of the new cities. The Spanish established model cities had a central place (Plaza de Armas) where all important civil and ecclesiastical institutions were spatially merged. From this centre, a centripetal and rectangular grid spread into the surroundings and the urban spaces remained most often without walls – the last unthinkable in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. Many cities were founded in the sixteenth century, not all, but many following this model, as mandated by laws, finally assembled in the *ordenanzas de descubrimiento, nueva población y pacificación de las Indias* (Spanish laws concerning discoveries, pacifications, and settlements among the Indians) published in 1573 under Philipp II (Kagan, 2011). The Renaissance urbanistic discourse of “ordered space” (Whitfield, 2005, p. 17) and perspective is reflected very clearly in the *planos fundacionales*. It entailed well ordered, linearized cities within an un-sketched (because unknown?, uninteresting?) environment. As a further example, you can find this model in the Plano Fundacional de San Juan de la Frontera (today Argentina) from 1562 (Kagan, 2011, p. 46).

Recently, Horst Pietschmann has argued convincingly against a common Eurocentric interpretation that these Castilian city-foundations were, in the best sense, pure European claims for establishing order. He underlined that the great majority of land-use and even of cities remained for a long time in the hand of *indígenas* (Pietschmann, 2017). Nevertheless, or maybe better because of this, from an European perspective the New World can be best described as a laboratory for urban design – as did for example Spanish American cartographer Barbara Mundy (1996) –, and the relation between Spanish urban and other spaces as spaces where coloniality was (re)produced. These cities and their maps, like the *planos fundacionales*, reflect the Spanish desire to represent and implement an idealized if not utopian order onto the New World. Richard Kagan called cities “perhaps the most potent and powerful symbol of Spain’s imperial order” (Kagan, 2011, p. 49). As such they can be interpreted as well-ordered models with the European intent to bring order into the unknown world “out there”. Despite many forms of entanglement between the indigenous and the Spanish in the cities – in the following centuries many studies stated a growing *mestizaje* –, the cities kept their status as European-oriented centres within an unknown American environment. In the wars and conflicts which ended during the 1810s and 1820s in the independence of Spanish American states from Spain, these conflicts and the confrontation between (Spanish) cities and other spaces became crucial. Eric van Young entitled a corresponding article “Islands in

the storm: quiet cities and violent countrysides in the Mexican independence era" (Van Young, 1988)⁴. And still in the 1840s, the Argentine writer-statesman Domingo Faustino Sarmiento described in his extremely influential novel *Civilización i barbarie* ([1845] 1986) the confrontation between the "civilized" urbanized spaces and the "barbarian", not yet "civilized" countryside. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Mexico's *indios* and *campesinos* became synonyms for being backward and in the dominant progressive narratives, the non-urban became the non- or even the anti-modern (Schmidt, 2007). The urban people metaphorically built up the formerly unrealized city walls.

Contrasting the Spanish-Castilian model of city-planning in the Americas, historians have pointed to Brazilian cities and highlighted their "planless growth" (Curtis, 2000, p. 476), which led to chaotic, polycentric settlements with winding and narrow streets⁵. Even if new studies have insisted that this dichotomy has been exaggerated, and that, especially in the late colonial epoch, Portuguese city-planning converged with the Spanish, Brazilian urban street life remained as a sphere of the poor, or – as the anthropologist Fraya Frehse (2011) concretized – a sphere of manual labourer. As not only Gilberto Freyre pointed out in his famous historical essay on the *casa-grande* and the *senzala* (translated into English as *The masters and the slaves*), in Brazil "there was formed a society agrarian in structure" (Freyre, [1933] 1946, p. 3), and Brazilian cities far into the nineteenth century were defined by the absence of elite urban life – the elites stayed in their country houses – and by a relatively strict distinction between the private and the public. As told by an old Brazilian adage, wealthy women had the possibility to go down the street only three times in their lives: for baptism, for their wedding and for their own funeral.

Beginning with the capital Rio de Janeiro after the relocation of the Portuguese royal court with many thousand people – many of them wealthy – in 1808, and with the following reconstruction of Rio into a "tropical Versailles" (Schultz, 2001), Brazilian cities started to attract urban (elite) life. Like in Spanish America, the countryside became discursively the backward antithesis of the civilized cities in which the elites and even women from high society "could" now appropriate urban street life (Freyre, [1936] 1963, cap. 1, 2, 5, 6; Lauderdale Graham, [1988] 2006, pp. 50-54; Curtis, 2000, pp. 479-480; Beattie, 1996; Haußer, 2009). Euclides da Cunha ([1902] 2001) described this in 1902 in his widespread account of a military expedition against rebels in the hinterland "*sertões*" (translated as *Rebellion in the backlands*).

4. See Dorsch (2010) for a concrete example regarding the Mexican region Michoacán in the era of Atlantic Revolution.

5. For a classic study concerning the dichotomous interpretation, see Holanda ([1936] 1969).

São Paulo, founded in 1554, had a special position within a Brazil whose cities were harbours on the Atlantic Ocean. Instead, until the end of seventeenth century it was the only urban area away from the coast, oriented to the hinterland, established by the Jesuits for their proselytising missions. From São Paulo, the *boca de Sertão* (the border of the hinterland called *sertão*), many of the *bandeirantes* started their excursions and exploration of gold and other precious metals up to the Amazon valley and in order to conduct expeditions to catch runaway slaves. During the gold and diamond rush in the northern neighbouring region of Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century, the city (since 1711) of São Paulo developed as a trading outpost. After the Brazilian declaration of independence from Portugal in 1822, an own advanced school for jurisprudence (1827) was established in the city, but until the 1860s São Paulo continued to be a small and remote city with about 20,000 to 30,000 inhabitants.

Moreover, and like in other Brazilian cities, in São Paulo the street remained a space for poor manual labourers. Travelers in the first half of nineteenth century confirmed this character when reporting that during their stay in São Paulo, except for religious festivities, they did not see women and only few wealthy men on the street (Frehse, 2011, pp. 82-85). Even males from wealthier parts of society tried to avoid the street. Many law students living here from 1828 described the streets as a “negative and extraordinary experience [*experiência negativa e excepcional*]” (*Idem*, p. 109). Studying contemporaneous photography and diaries, Frehse stated and confirmed the described “geography of honor” (Beattie, 1996, p. 440), well into the 1860s.

European and North American travelogues, journals and memoirs by former inhabitants, and newspaper articles and street photographs from before the official abolition of African slavery (1888) indicate in various ways that during the daytime the city’s downtown streets and squares almost exclusively harboured the regular permanence of pedestrians involved in manual labour (street-vending, loitering, begging, animal husbandry, prostitution) and/or in sociability connections that evolved mainly among poor (freed) slaves or freemen in this context [...] men and women of high social standing only left their homes on exceptional and ceremonial occasions, such as festivals and religious processions or to visit relatives (Frehse, 2017, pp. 524-525).

Following these contemporaneous reports, street life remained not only poor, but also rural. On every corner one meet *caipiras*, meaning villagers, in many backyards one could see chickens, in the streets, carriages led by cattle for supplying the city with milk, and so forth. In the direct neighbourhood of the city centre the *várzea*

do Carmo, the meadows of the Tamanduateí river close to the Carmelite convent, remained a wild area often flooded by the river until it was channelled in the beginning of twentieth century and used for washing.

Henri Lefebvre and appropriation

What happened in this period to the “urban phenomenon”? What role may the analysis of space(s) and/or time(s), proposed by the editors of this special issue, play on a conceptual level? For answering these questions, I will use the conception of appropriation established by Henri Lefebvre. Why? Recently, Frehse has argued that “Lefebvre is a ground-breaking historically-relational time-spatial sociologist” (Frehse, 2017, p. 517), and that he developed intriguing propositions for intertwined relational spaces and times with a focus not only on the “cognitive level” (*Idem*, p. 516), but including lived everyday experience. While Lefebvre’s ideas have had particular impact in critical urban research, social geography, sociology, politics and literary studies, until recently “his reception among historians has [...] been relatively muted, which, however, is gradually beginning to change” (Rau, forthcoming)⁶.

The most commonly discussed concept within Lefebvre’s production of space is the interlinked space triad, consisting of *espace perçu* as experienced, perceived, and used space; of *espace conçu* as thought, planned, and conceived space, or the “representation of space”; and, finally, of *espace vécu* as lived space, or the “spaces of representation” (Lefebvre, [1974] 2012, pp. 48-49)⁷. Appropriation is – as shown elsewhere – an essential part of this threefold model (Dorsch, 2018).

Having this in mind, and while Frehse focused in the previously mentioned article on body-concepts and their non-verbal and verbal interactions, I will use Lefebvre’s conception of appropriation as an “under-conceptualized element of his ideas concerning space” (Dorsch, 2018, p. 77). With the above stated thesis that the “urban phenomenon” can be understood in a more complex manner when looking at spatial *and* temporal perspectives, the concept of appropriation as “spatio-temporal practice *par excellence*” seems to be promising.

Firstly, Lefebvre defined appropriation as a practice of modifying “natural space [...] in order to serve the needs and possibilities of a group” (Lefebvre, [1974] 2012, p. 165). This means appropriation is bound to natural space as “the origin, and the original model, of the social process – perhaps the basis of all ‘originality’” (*Idem*,

6. For an interdisciplinary project on Lefebvre, see Bauer e Fischer (2018).

7. See also Rau (forthcoming, pp. 47-52).

p. 30). In cases in which the group does not modify “the natural”, Lefebvre talks about “reappropriation” (*Idem*, p. 168). But, in a broader sense, he combined both subtypes and contrasted them sharply against domination as a practice of corruption and denaturalization⁸. Dominated space, in contrast to appropriated space, is not lived in harmony with nature but mediated/alienated by technologies (*Idem*, p. 165). As one can see, the term “nature” is used in a romantic way which has to be discussed later on. Appropriation thus is a spatio-temporal dynamic between actors and their space(s) – a dynamic that besides space(s) “implies time (or times)” (*Idem*, p. 356)⁹. In this respect, the argument of “doing” time and space, of doing time-space becomes important.

Lefebvre continues: “The supreme good is time-space; this is what ensures the survival of being, the energy that being contains and has at its disposal” (*Idem*, p. 350) But as a “supreme good” time-space was, and is, seriously under attack in modernity. Lefebvre characterized modernity by the (modern) Western state as the institution which developed in cooperation with capitalist markets’ dominant/dominated spaces. As “impersonal pseudo-subject[s]” (*Idem*, p. 51), states tried to functionalize spaces and to replace subjectively lived, appropriated time-space by abstract, exchangeable, quantifiable, and timeless spaces: “The state crushes time [...] and imposes itself as the stable centre” (*Idem*, p. 23). The so-called *pax estatica* becomes an ideal form of domination, a form which is intrinsically linked with “the mode of production of things in space” (*Idem*, p. 410), a mode of interchangeability where abstract quantity superimposes itself upon concretely lived quality and where nature is/will be destroyed.

It is exactly this moment in which urban life becomes – following Lefebvre – crucial. For him the cities are the places where the revolutionary project of “the mode of production of space” (*Idem*, p. 410), “the desire to ‘do’ something, and hence to ‘create’” (*Idem*, p. 393) could replace the tranquilizing “mode of production of things in space”. Inhabitants of cities could appropriate urban space as a so-called “second nature: the city, urban life, and social energetics” (*Idem*, p. 368).

8. Following this, appropriation *stricto sensu* is bound to the original purpose, to natural space and to creative practices. In a broader sense, Lefebvre called practices appropriative also in cases which he labelled here as diversion, which “is in itself merely appropriation, not creation – a reappropriation” (Lefebvre, [1974] 2012, p. 168). Lefebvre defined natural space as “the origin, and the original model, of the social process – perhaps the basis of all ‘originality’” (*Idem*, p. 30). For more details, see Dorsch (2018, especially pp. 78-91).
9. In this respect Lefebvre introduced the concept of rhythm which “embodies its own law, its own regularity, which derives from space – from its own space – and from a relationship between space and time” (Lefebvre, [1974] 2012, p. 206), it possesses an own time-space.

Concluding this methodological section, there remains a question: how did the inhabitants of São Paulo in the turn from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries appropriate the above outlined spatio-temporal situation?

Appropriating spatio-temporalities in São Paulo at the turn of the twentieth century

Therefore, in the next section of this article, firstly I will use the described Lefebvrian ideas for quickly analysing aspects of São Paulo's spatial history in the decades around 1900. For further and deeper readings and for a more complex critique on linear explanations which dominated a long time São Paulo's historiography, I would like to refer the reader to the cited works, not at least to those by Frehse (2005; 2011). Finally, I will take a critical look at the potential of Lefebvre's appropriation-conception for the conceptual debates about spatio-temporal characteristics of the "urban phenomenon in Brazil".

In the last third of nineteenth century, the often-described coffee boom, resulting in a massive immigration from Europe and Northern parts of Brazil, as well as the widening of the scope to other Atlantic regions, in many areas of life the former Jesuit settlement had turned into a prospering metropolis within a very short period of time¹⁰. Through 1900, the number of inhabitants increased tenfold, up to a quarter of a million, and within only thirty years from then São Paulo, already an industrial centre, reached the status of megacity with a million inhabitants. After the end of the centralized Brazilian Empire in 1889, which had been orientated towards the capital, the rival port city Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo claimed political and economic supremacy. It was said: *São Paulo não pode parar* ("São Paulo never can stop"). Self-confidently, Paulistanos (the city's inhabitants), put the Latin slogan *Non ducor, duco* ("I am not led, I lead") on their coat of arms in 1917 (Love, 1980, p. 3). Many of the leading politicians and economic leaders of the First Republic (1889-1930) were settled in São Paulo – in the countryside but increasingly also in the capital. The political system of *Primeira República* was popularly known as *café com leite* (coffee with milk), indicating the leading position of coffee production in São Paulo along with its neighbour, the milk-producing state of Minas Gerais¹¹.

Especially from the 1870s onwards immigrants arriving from nearly all parts of Europe, but especially from its south (Italy, Spain, Portugal), as well as former and runaway slaves leaving the sugar plantations in the northern parts of Brazil, migrated

10. For further information and literature, see Dorsch (2014).

11. See also Dorsch e Wagner (2007), Odalia e Caldeira (2010a; 2010b) and Frehse (2011).

not only to the coffee producing rural areas in the north and west of the state of São Paulo. In burgeoning numbers, they turned now to the city of São Paulo.

Even if there were no linear ways, many of these new Paulistanos from different social contexts, appropriated the streets in different manners compared to the dominant traditional forms of avoiding the urban public sphere. Many historical studies have described and analysed this complex change practised by the new Paulistanos, but also by those living there since longer time. For various reasons, an increasing number of people now spent a lot of time in the streets. Fraya Frehse described the “destiny” of historically “old”, (Goffmanian) ceremonial rules of civility in the *novas ruas*, new streets (Frehse, 2011, pp. 531, 567). More people had their workplaces in the streets, they drove through the streets as small merchants selling and buying commodities, washing in the rivers, cooking on the streets (Pinto, 1994). Many did not have a fixed workplace or a long-term residence, while others lived in dwellings closely connected to the streets. The urban historian Maria Inez Pinto has analysed “habits of nomadism” (Pinto, 1994, p. 151). And, besides the emergence of a new quality of the street as a workplace, Paulistanos also introduced new forms of enlivening the public sphere, as sports in the parks or going for a walk through the streets. Especially in the date of 1888, in which slavery was legally abolished was emphasised: “the streets and squares becoming public places, i.e. socially signified as being of legally unrestricted access at any hour as of 1888” (Frehse, 2017, p. 525).

Even migrants owing properties – the nuclei of future middle classes – used the public sphere in a different manner. Many founded stores in their houses, opening them to the streets. The formerly very strict distinction between the private and public spheres came under pressure. According to contemporary witnesses, local clients became used to going for shopping all day long, so that restrictions of shop hours came to appear as inadequate and old-fashioned. Even in 1874, the chief of the local police department proclaimed the end of these restrictions “imported” from other Brazilian cities: the daily practices of the inhabitants of São Paulo were different¹². At the end of nineteenth century, many old buildings in the city centre were renovated in order to establish shops, to be able to provide items for sale in newly established show windows, for many others constructions the accessibility was improved by changing front windows by doors¹³. The limits between private and public vanished.

12. See, for example “Ofício do Chefe de Polícia à Câmara”, in *Papéis avulsos*, 1874, v. 5, manuscrito, quoted in Bastos (1996, pp. 35; 84).

13. Cf. Arquivo Histórico Municipal do São Paulo, Fundo PMSP – Caixas Directoria de obras e viação (DOV), Obras particulares and Fundo CMSP/INTDM/PMSP, Série: Assuntos Diversos (Alvará-Licença – Ambulantes e Estabelecimentos Comerciais).

Now, especially since the end of the century it has become possible to observe even women from the higher classes appropriating the streets (Frehse, 2011, pp. 339-347; 419-530). Following Pinto, the different groups of immigrants created different “new spaces of cultural and collective life” (Pinto, 1994, p. 27). Sênia Bastos has concluded that the former concept of São Paulo as a “small static town” (Bastos, 1996, p. 95) collapsed. In her authoritative study examining the street life of São Paulo, Frehse maintained that the street as a public space now became historically possible to many more social groups (Frehse, 2011, pp. 179-186; 430-445): “passers-by became the new protagonists of the regular to-and-from in São Paulo’s central streets and squares” (Frehse, 2017, p. 525).

Many leading figures in politics and society appropriated these everyday practices in the street and the corresponding international recognition as “Yankee City of Brazil”¹⁴, and transformed it into a new concept of São Paulo. Continuing the “idea of the pioneering spirit of São Paulo” into the present and especially into the future, thereby counting on the enormous economic prosperity in the region, São Paulo was supposed to appear as “the engine of progress that would lead the country into a modern future” (Brefe, 2005, p. 190). Many disputes in this period sought to naturalize this claim for spatio-temporal supremacy (Weinstein, 2015). For example, in his sociological study *Raça de gigantes* (1926), Alfredo Ellis Junior argued that “the *Paulistano* highland is a region that is predestined for success and prosperity” (Ellis Júnior, 1926, p. 362).

Even if this was only a short look at the various activities of different social groups appropriating São Paulo, I would like to highlight different potential and critical aspects of the appropriation-concept as proposed by Henri Lefebvre.

Reassessing the potential for, and critics of appropriating for urban studies

One of the main potentials one can argue for is that this concept guides one’s perspective to the practices and to the appropriating actors. Thus, the ideas concerning the production of space – acknowledged as fundamental for the so-called “spatial turn” – become concretely applicable. The criticized space as container-space vanishes and it becomes methodologically clear that space is historically produced, which means appropriated by actors, as well as distinct images of concrete spaces, for example that of São Paulo as the progressive Yankee City. It also becomes apparent that container-spaces are constructions made by acts of appropriation “in order to

14. As indicated by an anonymous in the *New York Times* in 1900. In 1913 we find a similar statement in the *New York Times* (Reyes, 1913).

serve the needs and possibilities of a group” (Lefebvre, [1974] 2012, p. 165). In this sense it is more convenient to speak about “containered” spaces.

This focus on appropriation does not allow us to make proclamations about structures or linear processes – but it clarifies that structures, processes, etc. are statements made by (interested) observers, be they contemporaneous or retrospective as well as we historians. Historical work can thus be described in a broader sense as an act of appropriation¹⁵. In this sense, historians and other interested people in the end of nineteenth century (as well as some up to the present days) appropriated details of São Paulo’s spatial history for building up the image of São Paulo as “locomotive of progress”.

As argued elsewhere, I see especially three critical aspects in Lefebvre’s concept (Dorsch, 2018). Firstly, it implies romanticised and essentializing ideas of “Nature”, natural space, etc. It does not fit into the concept of socially produced space. For whom it is natural? Who defines space as natural? Looking at São Paulo: was the space the Portuguese encountered in the sixteenth century natural, was it the space the new migrants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came across? Is the urban “second nature” natural – or is it not appropriated and maybe naturalized? Secondly, looking at the dichotomy established by Lefebvre between appropriation and domination gives the impression that this is mainly a question of one’s own perspective. While appropriation means nature and lived space-time, the second term is connected to interchangeability, in which abstract quantity superimposes itself over concretely lived quality and in which nature is/will be destroyed. But what happens when we put nature into perspective and thus “destroy” this Archimedean point? Is appropriation what the new immigrants did to the streets of São Paulo at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries? Could it be a form of domination over the old (natural?) traditions? Or is it the formation of a *pax estatica* via the advancement of state institutions? And thirdly, why do we talk almost exclusively about *social* acts of appropriation, almost ignoring the individual? Would it not be more applicable (and less ideological) to speak about different, sometimes controversial individual, in addition to the social, acts of appropriation?

Having pointed to the potential and the critics (and their potential) of the Lefebvrian concept of appropriation, the advantages of a spatio-temporal analysis of the “urban phenomenon” should become clear. With it we can analyse if, how and which people made the city of São Paulo into their own space, which conflicts

15. Lefebvre called the appropriation of the past an act of revivification: “current work, including brain work” that “takes up the results of the past and revivifies them” (Lefebvre, [1974] 2012, p. 349). Recently, the German historian Achim Landwehr called this practice “chronoferece”, a practice interconnecting present and absent times (Landwehr, 2016).

came along with their appropriation practices, and how, not to mention by whom, this image of an “urban” city was built up. In this moment the mentioned Lefebvrian space triad (the spatial practices, the representation of space and the spaces of representation) becomes virulent. Even if it is superfluous to say, it should be underlined that, of course, appropriating does not mean generally acting voluntarily. We have to look very closely into the concrete situations. Then we can observe the power relations between different actors and how they were condensed in (urban) space, for example in architecture (in the construction of morally clean and linear streets) or in laws regulating the forms of enlivening the city. It becomes clear how historically unstable and differentiated urban space(s) has/have been, and which spatio-temporal stabilization-attempts (for example linear narratives of progress or of state-building) were introduced and by whom.

The urban phenomenon means “no longer-static/dynamic” (Bastos), “progressive and future-orientated” (Brefe) or “mobilized-nomadic” (Pinto). One could get the impression that these interpretations are following certain Western progressive modernist claims for a modern(ized) city. The question of whether we can appropriate these interpretations, and with them a certain image of São Paulo as usable for our investigation, or if we have to decipher them as “ideologist” in the sense of aiming at a previously given result (here progress), is a matter of our decision-making and of evaluating methodological quality. Making this clear, the studies advanced by Frehse with Lefebvre’s ideas in mind questioning the progressive narrative are of very high value: there are no linear developments from the traditional to the modern but very different actors and temporally complex manners of appropriating the space.

In the end, the question is this: can we trust the arguments of the authors we read? And, thus appropriation becomes a tool that hints not only at (past) objects of investigation, but also at us as decision-makers. Moreover, it implicates us as agents of knowledge today, indicating our own place in a web of signifying and power-reflection.

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Abstract

Urban phenomena in São Paulo's nineteenth and twentieth centuries: appropriating local spatio-temporalities

The article seeks to investigate urban phenomena in São Paulo's 19th and 20th centuries by utilizing Henri Lefebvre's concept of appropriation. Thus, I focus on the relations between urban space(s) and its inhabitants, and the analysis of the city – usually perceived as space – becomes a spatio-temporal and relational analysis regarding dynamic practices, conflicts, etc. understood as urban phenomena. How did the inhabitants appropriate São Paulo? May we state special forms by comparing it to other Latin American cities of former times? How did the migrants arriving at the end of 19th century change old forms of living in the city? I conclude with remarks and critics on the potential of using the concept of appropriation in urban studies.

Keywords: São Paulo; Appropriation; Henri Lefebvre; Spatio-temporalities; Urban studies.

Resumo

Fenômenos urbanos na São Paulo dos séculos XIX e XX: apropriando-se de espaçotemporalidades locais

O artigo investiga fenômenos urbanos na São Paulo dos séculos XIX e XX lançando mão do conceito de apropriação de Henri Lefebvre. Assim, enfoco as relações entre espaço(s) urbano(s) e seus habitantes, e a análise da cidade – usualmente percebida como espaço – se torna análise espaçotemporal e relacional de práticas, conflitos etc. dinâmicos, entendidos como fenômenos urbanos. Como os habitantes se apropriaram de São Paulo? É possível aferir formas especiais via comparação com outras cidades latino-americanas de tempos mais antigos? Como os (i)migrantes chegados no final do século XIX modificaram formas antigas de se viver na cidade? Concluo com observações e críticas à potencialidade de se usar o conceito de apropriação nos estudos urbanos. Palavras-chave: São Paulo; Apropriação; Henri Lefebvre; Espaçotemporalidades; Estudos urbanos.

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