Henri Lefebvre's Spatial Theory as Methodology –

A Methodological Reconsideration of the Spatial Triad

Johan Vaide[+] (Sweden)

Abstract

This article presents a methodological toolset for qualitative socio-spatial analyses based on sociologist Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory (Lefebvre, 1991). While Lefebvre has been extensively treated as an urban theorist, his work has not been widely explored from a methodological perspective. In the article, Lefebvre's spatial triad is particularly used to develop a concrete methodology for qualitative socio-spatial analyses. While simultaneously focusing on general methodological aspects, this article draws on how the author applied Lefebvre's spatial theory in a sociological study about intercultural engagements in Shanghai in the context of China's opening up reforms. More specifically, Lefebvre's spatial triad is discussed in relation to a bodily engaged research practice, ethnography and four theory of social science approaches.

Keywords: *Henri Lefebvre, The Spatial Triad, Methodology, Qualitative Methods, China*

+   Johan Vaide, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Department of Social Studies, Linnaeus University, Sweden.
    email: Johan.Vaide@lnu.se.

Introduction

> [a] criticism of Lefebvre's analysis is that it does not provide sufficient illustrative and sub-stantial detail of the operation, the workings, of each of his dynamic elements. It is an abstract theoretical analysis that identifies a number of macro and micro social factors without specific consideration of the implications and applications of each of his elements. (Zieleniec, 2007:93)

In this article, I present a methodological toolset based on my application of sociologist Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory (Vaide, 2015). Lefebvre has been extensively treated as an urban theorist, but his work has not been widely explored from a methodological perspective. Particularly, I use Lefebvre's spatial triad (Lefebvre, 1991) to develop a concrete methodology for qualitative spatial analyses. While simultaneously focusing on general methodological aspects, I address how I applied Lefebvre's spatial theory in my own work. Conducting ethnographic fieldwork and analyzing my empirical material on intercultural engagements in the context of Shanghai's opening up, I recognized that China's societal changes (since its inception in late 1970s) are highly spatial and I therefore needed a sociological approach that considers socio-spatial relations. While struggling with the theoretical framing of my study, Lefebvre's spatial theory – and particularly the spatial triad and related concepts in *The Production of Space* (1991) – helped me to arrange and analyze my collected empirical material. What I encountered during my ethnographic fieldwork was a seemingly rapidly changing urban space, modernizing identities, and the country's re-globalization rhetoric.

As Lefebvre's theory has received criticism for being too vague and abstract, applying his theory is indeed an interesting challenge. Several theorists have stated, such as Andrzej Zieleniec (2007) above and Setha Low (2017), that Lefebvre does not provide enough details for how to conduct spatial analysis using his framework. Low (2017:18) suggests that Lefebvre is unclear about how the different parts of the spatial triad interact and work empirically. However, others, such as Andy Merrifield (2006), have pointed out that Lefebvre's way of writing opens up for different interpretations of his theories. Regarding the spatial triad, Merrifield (2006:109) writes that Lefebvre "sketches this out only in preliminary fashion, leaving us to add our own flesh, our own content, to rewrite it as part of our own chapter or agenda." Although Lefebvre's spatial theory has been widely used as an analytical tool, there are surprisingly few extensive methodological considerations of the spatial triad (Carp, 2008; Pierce and Martin, 2015). While Carp (2008) provides a description of how to use the spatial triad in planning education, Pierce and Martin (2015) argues for a contextualization of the triad in relation to relational understandings of place as to enable a more concrete use of Lefebvre's theory. With above in mind, the operationalization of Lefebvre's spatial triad that I present here is an exploratory open endeavor.

An Interpretative Approach and Urban Space as a Backdrop

Working with an interpretive approach and immersing myself in Shanghai through ethnographic fieldwork, I came to notice early on that "space" is essential to China's development through the vast changes of the city's urban fabric. To get to know the city, the immersion consisted of extensive walks, visits to several places and neighborhoods, and colloquial talks and interviews with local Shanghainese and Chinese from other parts of the country. Along the long walks, I registered a highly changing urban space. Some neighborhoods were under demolition, while others clearly were newly redeveloped. Shanghai's space was seemingly reconfigured to host the re-globalization (and thus modernization) of the city. Through colloquial conversations and formal interviews, I listened to stories about the city,

people's intercultural experiences, and how these experiences relate to Shanghai's semi-colonial past and contemporary openness towards the outside world. By this practice, the city emerged as a material and storied contact space of Chinese and foreign cultures. As an example, Mr. Zhao, a local Shanghainese white-collar worker, elaborated on the grounds for Shanghai's contemporary openness:

> You know, Shanghai was very westernized in the 1920s and 1930s. It was the place in China that got the most influence from Western countries. A lot of countries made concessions in Shanghai. At that time, Shanghainese got more influence from Western people and Western companies. There were a lot of Western companies, and a lot of Western people came to Shanghai. And so, the Shanghainese can accept the Western way very easily. And, about thirty years ago, Shanghai open to other countries, so it is more open. And nowadays, it has become a finance and economic center, and more and more Western people come to Shanghai, and a lot of Chinese people go abroad and come back to China. So they can easily understand the Western way. And some people work in Western companies, foreign companies. So they get a lot of contact with foreigners, so they can easy understand the Western way.

In Mr. Zhao's depiction, Shanghai is described as a city grounded in its historical openness towards foreign cultures as a result of Western colonialism and today's opening up reforms. I will get back to how I unpacked this story applying Lefebvre later in the article. With an interpretive approach, I strived to be sensitive to the social life of the city and to provide myself with first-hand knowledge and ultimately to contribute to a flexible and open understanding of Shanghai and contemporary China.

As I made ethnographic descriptions of intercultural engagements in Shanghai and embarked on analyzing the interviews, I was not analytically satisfied. Lacking appropriate theoretical tools, I focused on activities and experiences in and across space, such as what they were doing together, where the interactions took place, how they detailed their experiences through different examples and how these activities and experiences of intercultural contact unfolded in the interviews. Although intellectually experiencing that "space" was an issue (and obviously experiencing the change of the city's urban space), I still treated the space(s) of Shanghai as a mere backdrop to the interviewees' intercultural engagements. While getting to know the city through walks and people's stories, I started to experience the need to connect and analyze my collected material to wider parts of the city (the implementation of the opening-up reforms through urban planning) and the country as a whole (the opening up reforms). Examining the interviews from an exploratory spatial perspective, such as Mr. Zhao above, I concluded that I required a social theory that connects situated individual stories with wider socio-spatial changes. At this point, I decided to work with Lefebvre's spatial framework. (Lefebvre, 1991)

Grounding Lefebvre's Spatial Triad in Research on Intercultural Engagements in Shanghai and China's Opening Up Reforms

Reading *The Production of Space* (1991), I was intrigued by Lefebvre's social theory of societal spatial production that covers an integrated understanding of society and space. Within Lefebvre's theory lies a critique of how the relationship between society and space has been conceptualized and examined (in the West). Principally, this conceptualization produced a separation between society and space, which shaped how research was conducted

historically, and formed theoretical approaches and ways of producing knowledge (Lefebvre 1991; Kinkaid 2019; Soja 1996; Watkins 2005). In this context, Lefebvre (1991) suggests that modern societies have been producing a specific understanding of societal spatial production, which he labels abstract space. Crucial to the development of modern sciences and the creation of the researcher as a seemingly objective disembodied knowledge producer, this understanding of socio-spatial relations laid out the contours of the separation, dichotomization and hierarchization of natural and social/humanist sciences and, quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Kinkaid 2019; Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1996; Watkins 2005). Based on cartesian logic, the dichotomy between society and space was manufactured by and enacted through Western sciences, nations, bureaucracy, capitalism, warfare, and colonialism. While temporality became the structuring principle for modernizing societies (symbolizing progression and development), abstract space produced an understanding that space is empty, given, objective and neutral, and ready to be filled, exchanged, and exploited. Treating space as a mere backdrop to social life (here exemplified by intercultural engagements in Shanghai) as I did at an early stage in my research is arguably grounded in the philosophical separation between society and space. At this point, I clearly was not accustomed to socio-spatial thinking. Given this, my fieldwork in Shanghai and Lefebvre opened up my thinking to go beyond the dichotomy of society and space.

While others have written extensively on Lefebvre (Elden, 2004; Fraser, 2015; Goonewardena et al, 2008; Harvey, 1989; Merrifield, 2006; Schmid, 2008; Shields, 2013; Soja, 1996; Stanek 2011), I will summarize his key ideas on socio-spatial production. To establish a non-dualistic understanding of society and space, Lefebvre introduces the concept social space. Lefebvre (1991) suggests that societal production is fundamentally spatial, and that society and space should instead be understood as an integrated whole. Lefebvre (1991:411) states "space can no longer be looked upon as an "essence," as an object distinct from the point of view (or as compared with) "subjects," as answering to a logic of its own." Instead of analyzing "things in space" (treating space as objective), it is crucial to analyze the actual "production of space" and illuminate how space is integral to societal production. (Lefebvre, 1991) While space has been understood as passive and a container of social relations in Western philosophy, space should be understood as relationally produced. Principally, society is produced (and reproduced) through the creation of built and landscaped environments and activities in and through (a socially produced) space, dominant representations of space, and lived experiences. Thus, Lefebvre (1991) argues that societal spatial production can be understood through a three-way process. Through what Lefebvre labels "the conceptual triad," social space is produced by the integrated means of spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces. Firstly, the concept spatial practices involve material space and what uses and movements it enables (space as perceived, built, and landscaped, and enacted through everyday practices). Secondly, the concept representations of space involve dominant conceptualizations of space, such as plans, maps, visions, policies, strategies, and research (space as conceived and imagined by politicians, planners, architects, and researchers). Thirdly, the concept representational spaces involve people's situated understandings (and negotiations) of space.

As I approached Lefebvre's theory, I began to analyze my collected material along the spatial triad. Through this process, I became aware of the importance of different levels of social space (thus societal spatial production) and illuminating the levels analytically.

Re-listening to and re-reading my interviews, I started to understand the interviewees' accounts as representational spaces and thus partly constitutive of social space. Similar to Lefebvre's definition of representational spaces, the interviewees applied "associated images and symbols" (Lefebvre, 1991:39) to describe and construct their own intercultural engagements in relation the city's historical and contemporary openness. Centering on their personal intercultural engagements, the interviewees often used the economic reforms and opening-up, particular places in the city (international companies and leisure and entertainment venues) and Shanghai's history as reference points while detailing their own intercultural experiences.

Applying Lefebvre's framework to my reading of Mr. Zhao, I identified several levels of the spatial triad. By doing this, I realized that the interviewees' accounts (representational spaces) could be analytically related to the city's space (spatial practices) and dominant representations of the city's and country's history and development (representations of space). At the level of representations of space, Zhao addresses Shanghai as the most westernized city on the Chinese mainland. By doing this, Zhao evokes the idea of the city's Haipai culture, which indicates the culture of openness that developed out of the colonial presence in Shanghai (Gamble, 2003; Greenspan, 2012; Shih, 2001; Zhang, 1996 and Zhong, 2012). At the level of spatial practices, Zhao mentions the city's concessions, which refers to the colonial enclaves established by several foreign powers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Abbas 2000; Bergère 2009; Lee 1999 and Zhu 2009). At the level of representational spaces, Zhao also addresses the city's inhabitants of colonial Shanghai as people that could easily understand Western culture (Lee, 1999 and Shih, 2001). Moreover, Zhao also addresses contemporary Shanghai by referring to the opening-up of the city in the 1990s and its status as a finance and economic center (Wu, 2000 and Wu, 2003). Due to these changes, Zhao also highlights that people (representational spaces) are more accustomed to "the Western way."

As several interviews focused on colonial Shanghai, as exemplified by Zhao, I decided to situate the study in relation to postcolonial studies and Shanghai's colonial heritage to address the historical context of the city and the country as a whole. As also indicated, the interviewees used the city's newly produced material space, and particular places in the city as reference points. To address this through Lefebvre's spatial triad, I included material that details the emerging (material) space in Shanghai mentioned by the interviewees. This material consisted of official, public, and corporate representations, and my own descriptions of certain places.

As Zhao and other interviewees highlighted the city's opening up, I included an analysis of how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the local Shanghai government envisioned, implemented, and promoted the opening up reforms. Understood as constitutive of representations of space, the material consisted of CCP political rhetoric (Deng Xiaoping speeches) and official spatial planning discourse (diverse material from the Shanghai Municipal Government). By including this material, I was able to analyze the broader ideological and discursive features of the opening-up reforms within an interpretive framework as to understand how the personal intercultural engagements were emplaced in and constructed through official visions regarding the emerging society. Thus, I was able to analyze the CCP ideology that has been endorsed since late 1970s. Interestingly, this material consisted of

details of the emerging society's production in terms of encouraged ideologies (opening up rhetoric), spatialities (special economic zones, open coastal cities, free trade zones) and subjectivities (educated urbanities).

As illustrated, conceptualizing intercultural engagements as socio-spatial phenomena allowed me to relate the interview content to intercultural features in urban space (spaces of contact and the city's semicolonial past) and political rhetoric (the opening up policy). Realizing that the interviewees' accounts could be understood as partly constitutive of social space was an important moment. While previously treating space as a backdrop to the interviewees' accounts, I could understand them as integral and crucial to socio-spatial production.

In the remainder of this article, I further explore how Lefebvre's spatial theory can be applied as methodological tool for engaging in socio-spatial production from an ethnographic approach.

Embodied Research Practice and Immersion

> "Western philosophy has betrayed the body; it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has abandoned the body; and it has denied the body." (Lefebvre, 1991:407, italics in original)

From a methodological perspective, Lefebvre's understanding of modern socio-spatial production and situating researchers as part of representations of space become crucial as to understand how scientists should engage with society. With Lefebvre's spatial framework, it becomes clear that scholars cannot engage with urban space from a distant, disembodied, and objective position. The embodied subject is crucial in Lefebvre's understanding of societal spatial production. While bodies, senses, emotions, and experiences have been rendered obsolete by abstract space, social space proceeds from the body, Lefebvre (1991:405) argues. While space is experienced through every part of the body, Lefebvre (1991:162) claims that "it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived – and produced." Drawing on Lefebvre, it becomes possible to state that our analytical understanding of social space should also proceed from the body, the scholar's embodied research practice. Similarly, Lefebvre's position aligns with my own approach to conducting fieldwork. Immersing myself in Shanghai through ethnographic fieldwork was crucial as to get a profound and embodied understanding of intercultural encounters within the context of the changing city. As an individual trained in qualitative sociology, I embraced an approach where my initial focus was conducting on-the-ground fieldwork, prioritizing firsthand experiences over relying on maps and official rhetoric. Within the wider social science debates on positionality, the embodiment of research practices has been raised by scholars within the fields of gender studies (Haraway, 1988), critical phenomenology (Kinkaid, 2019), ethnography (Crang and Cook, 2007; Low, 2017) and multisensory ethnography (Pink, 2015).

While Lefebvre does not detail the researcher's own embodied position in *The Production of Space*, he does explore this in *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 2004). In this book, Lefebvre (2004) envisions a sensing and immersive researcher – a rhythm-analyst – using his/her own body to "listen" to the everydayness of space. By paying attention to one's own bodily sensations, a rhythm-analyst "thinks with his body, not in the abstract, but in lived temporality" (Lefe-

bvre, 2004:21). According to Lefebvre (2004), the researcher should make use of all his/her senses while analyzing the rhythms of everyday life by being attentive to his/her own body and his/her surroundings. Rhythms exist in the "interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy" (Lefebvre, 2004:15). A rhythm-analyst, Lefebvre (2004:19) writes: "listens – and first to his body; he learns rhythm from it, in order consequently to appreciate external rhythms. His body serves him as a metronome." In terms of the spatial triad, the rhythm-analysis mobilizes particularly the interplay between spatial practices (the built environment and its uses) and representational spaces (lived experiences), as Lefebvre focuses on how rhythms are bodily created and experienced through the use of physical space. In the end of *The Production of Space,* Lefebvre (1991:405) briefly envisions the rhythm analysis as the finishing touch "to the exposition of the production of space." Moreover, Lefebvre's rhythm analysis has been widely applied as a methodological tool (Lyon, 2019) and exhibits similarities with auto-ethnography and sensory ethnography (Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015; Pink, 2015). Auto-ethnographic accounts centers on the researcher's experiential engagement with society, and how this personal engagement illuminates cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences. Making use of a careful and deep self-reflexivity, auto-ethnographic researchers identify and interrogate the intersection of self and society (Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015). Meanwhile, sensory ethnography focuses on how the researcher is "self-consciously and reflexively attending to the senses throughout the research process" allowing the researcher "to re-think both established and new participatory and collaborative ethnographic research techniques in terms of sensory perception, categories, meanings and values, ways of knowing and practices" (Pink, 2015:7).

Ethnography and the Spatial Triad

Lefebvre (1991:116) argues that it is important to consider the entire spatial triad while analyzing socio-spatial production. This statement opens up for a mixed-methods approach that acknowledges and combines each level of the spatial triad. As demonstrated by my own study earlier, it is central to include a diverse set of empirical material as to establish a more thorough and comprehensive understanding. Given Lefebvre's embodied research practice and definition of the spatial triad, it is crucial to identify specific methods that support an understanding of materiality and its uses (spatial layouts and the bodily engagements they create), people's situated understandings of space (human experiences) and spatial representations (textual documents, plans, pictures, visualizations), and their intricate interplay. Thus, the researcher cannot rely on one isolated method but is required to engage in collecting different kinds of empirical material to understand a given social space. For this purpose, I broadly situate Lefebvre's immersive approach in relation to ethnography. Lefebvre's approach necessitates an ethnographic starting point in which the researcher immerses her/himself in a designated social space. Enabling immersion, ethnography "is a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents, and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly in its own terms, the irreducibility of human experience" (Willis and Trondman, 2000:5). While not centering specifically on Lefebvre, Low (2017:4) suggests: "Conceptualizations of space and place that emerge from the sediment of ethnographic draw on the strength of studying people in situ, producing rich and nuanced sociospatial understandings." As ethnography mobilizes several methods at once, spatial practices can be analyzed primarily through a range of observational methods, representational spaces by people-centered methods, and representations of space by textual, discursive, and visual methods.

Spatial Practices and Observational Methods

Considering Lefebvre's rhythm-analysis and definition of spatial practices, observational methods are crucial to establish an understanding of designated social spaces. As noticed before, I began my immersion into Shanghai by extensive, exploratory walks. While observational methods conventionally treat space as a taken-for-granted setting (Low, 2017), observational methods can also be applied to analyze how space is built, landscaped and organized (how space appears to the researcher) and how space structures people's activities. Through my extensive walks, I got to know a city consisting of dynastic and colonial built environments (Shanghai Old City and former colonial settlements) and Shanghai's more recently constructed urban spaces and redevelopments. Through my walking practice, I also got acquainted with the spaces of contact (often housed in renovated colonial built environments), which later became central to my analyzes. With Lefebvre's critical approach to socio-spatial production, it is possible to suggest that a reflective approach to observing and mapping spatial practices is fundamental. Instead of a distanced and disembodied observer, a reflective approach acknowledges the positionality of the researcher and supports a bodily engaged mapping of space by the use of participatory observation. As a white and Swedish foreigner in the city, my positionality is informed by my interest in East Asian urban cultures, and academic engagements in urban China studies, cultural studies, interpretive sociology, gender studies, urban sociology, and postcolonial studies in Asia. This provided me with a curious, reflective, and open-minded approach grounded in sensitivity for urban China, yearning to understand others, and knowledge of China's historical encounters with colonialism. To avoid early theorizing (and enforcing Lefebvre's spatial triad) or abstracting one's experiences through the use of maps, it is important that the researcher bodily engages her/himself, observes and establishes an understanding of the concrete workings of spatial practices – i.e., the interplay between materiality and the uses it enables/disables. This is supposedly done most effectively by extensive walks and immersing oneself in particular spaces. Whereas the researcher is fully engaged in space, the researcher experiences, explores, details, and maps the materiality and how people enact it through notes, sketches, photos, and videos. After the extensive walks, I often recollected my experiences by taking notes in a notebook and on a computer. Together with the collected material, this recollection was later central to my analytical process as to recall the experiences that emerged during the fieldwork. While the practice of walking has been central to urban sociology since Georg Simmel (1971/[1903]) and Walter Benjamin (1999), auto-ethnography (Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015), rhythm-analysis (Lefebvre, 2004), sensory ethnography (Pink, 2015) and deep mapping (Roberts, 2016) are useful methodological tools.

Representational Spaces and People-Centered Methods

While exploring and getting to know a designated social space through observational methods, it is crucial to deepen the understanding of social space by engaging with people in different ways. Engaging with people, the researcher must first uncover her/his positionality. Similar to what is discussed above, the researcher needs to acknowledge her/his situatedness vis-à-vis the researched subjects (Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015; Haraway, 1988; Lefebvre, 2004; Pink, 2015). During interview engagements, the interaction is also characterized by the representational spaces of both parts (as two subjects with respective expectations taking part in a hierarchized research engagement) and the spatial practices of the engagement (its material or digital situatedness). While studying intercultural engagements in Shanghai, I was also in the midst of China's changes. Consisting of one individual

from China and Sweden respectively, my interviews were indeed intercultural engagements too. With the aim to understand intercultural engagements in Shanghai, the interviews were temporary intercultural encounters in selected spaces of the city (such as Starbucks). While I understood the content that emerge from the interviews as representational spaces, the interviewees also referred to physical spaces in Shanghai (spatial practices) as well as representations of the city (representations of space). As I took part in intercultural engagements daily in Shanghai, it is difficult to say that I was a complete outsider in relation to what I was studying. As the interviewees for my previous study understood themselves as "open to foreign cultures," I can be understood as "open to Chinese cultures." Numerous interviewees, colleagues and friends positioned me as a "good foreigner," as they understood me as being interested in listening to their stories and perspectives and having a genuine interest in China and East Asia.

Through immersive informal conversations and ethnographic interviews (O'Reilly, 2012), guided conversations (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), one-to-one and groups interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015), and go-alongs (Kusenbach, 2003), it is possible to focus on how interviewees understand and construct their own lived experiences vis-à-vis their immediate surroundings, and, subsequently, how their emplaced experiences are connected with wider societal, cultural, imaginative, political, economic, ecological and material aspects. Through this broader thematic combination, it is possible to grasp how the interviewees understand how their lived experiences are emplaced in and through spatial practices and representations of space. During the interviews, I relied on the general theme "intercultural communication in Shanghai" and the associations that the interviewees drew from this broader theme, and what I found relevant in each interview situation. In this associative space, the major conversational topics were culture and language exchanges, the city's history and the colonial built environment, places, working in international companies, the city's opening up, consumption, food, restaurants and nightlife, music, and literature. While above interviewing methods are co-created situations between the interviewer and the interviewee, the researcher can also make use of existing material produced by people, such as content at diverse online platforms (Kozinets, 2020), which oftentimes depict people's own lives and their immediate surroundings (Schwartz and Halegoua, 2015). Meanwhile, interviewees can also textually and visually represent their lived experiences through several analogue and digital means, such as diaries, sketches, maps, photographs, videos, blogs and vlogs. (O'Reilly, 2012; Przybylski, 2021)

Representations of Space and Textual, Discursive, and Visual Methods

Through the immersive methods presented above, the researcher also uncovers how spatial practices and representational spaces are related to and bound up with dominant representations of space. While first exploring and detailing spatial practices and engaging in people's situated understandings of space, the researcher is also required, using Lefebvre's approach, to explore and analyze relevant sources of official and corporate representations of space. They may be maps and plans, laws and regulations, archive materials, mass media and online platforms, research, official and commercial informational and promotional materials, and other textual and visual artefacts. Similarly, through my fieldwork and incorporating Lefebvre as my analytical framework, I realized the necessity to connect my interviews to official rhetoric of the opening up reforms as to understand people's intercultural engagements more thoroughly. By this, I obtained a close understanding of the

opening up processes, and how the re-globalization of Shanghai and people's intercultural engagements were guided by government policies. It is crucial to mention that the relevant sources may vary depending on what it being addressed while conducting observations and interviews and thus relevant sources should not be chosen beforehand. As representations of space contain both textual and visual elements, textual, discursive, and visual methods are useful methodological tools. (Cloke et al., 2004; Dühr, 2015; MacCallum, Babb and Curtis, 2019)

The Spatial Triad and (a few) Theory of Science Approaches

Given the nature of Lefebvre's spatial theory, it is possible to situate the spatial triad in relation to interpretive/hermeneutical, constructivist, critical theory, and postmodern approaches. In my work, I combined the analytical vocabularies of these approaches.

With Lefebvre's approach, I suggest that an interpretive/hermeneutic position is a suitable starting point as this approach "involves the recovery of the meanings present (or presumed to be present) in written texts, human utterances and in other kinds of human artifacts and activities" (Cloke et al, 2004:310). Grounded in sociologist Max Weber's verstehen, an interpretive/hermeneutical approach refers to "understanding the meaning of action from the actor's point of view" (Ray, 2007:5195). Similarly, an interpretive/hermeneutical approach denotes an attempt to get 'inside' the concepts people use to organize their understanding of the world (David, 2010). While Lefebvre's spatial theory helped me to put the interviews in a larger socio-spatial context at a later stage in the research process, the interpretive/hermeneutical approach largely influenced both my fieldwork and analysis, as I strived to comprehend intercultural engagements and China's opening up reforms through the lens of local Chinese perspectives. Moreover, Zieleniec has proposed that Lefebvre's theorization of social space exhibits similarities with a hermeneutic approach. Briefly situating Lefebvre in the context of hermeneutics, Zieleniec (2017) writes:

> To understand the whole [social space], it is necessary to understand the parts [of the spatial triad]. Space is produced in a dynamic relationship between all three parts. The whole [social space] can be deconstructed to its constituent parts [spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces] to reveal the influence of each to the whole, and vice versa. There is thus a reciprocal relationship between the elements involved in its production. (390)

With Zieleniec's elaboration in mind, an interpretive/hermeneutical approach to Lefebvre's spatial triad includes an immersed understanding of the interplay between spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces. Applying Lefebvre in my analysis, I came to treat Shanghai's opening up processes as an integrated socio-spatial phenomenon comprising official ideology, particular spatialities (spaces of contact in the city) and people's experiences of the opening up reforms through intercultural engagements. Moreover, the interpretive/hermeneutical approach to Lefebvre can benefit from being situated in relation to social constructivism (Low, 2017), critical theory (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000 and Brenner, 2019), and postmodern discourse analysis (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000 and Soja, 1996).

Spatial practices can be studied by focusing on how material space is constituted and how it enables certain activities (in space) and movements (across space). Combining men-

tioned approaches, it is possible to understand how meanings, ideologies and discourses are materially constructed. Similarly, it also allows for analysis of how meanings, ideologies and discourses in material space are produced through representations of space, and constructed, upheld, negotiated, or challenged by people. Representational spaces – or people's understandings of space – are analyzed by centering on how people understand and construct their experiences, and how they potentially relate to spatial practices and representations of space. Similarly, representational spaces can also be examined by focusing on how people uphold, negotiate or challenge ideologies and discourses produced through representations of space. Lastly, representations of space are studied by focusing on understanding how diverse societal actors, such as governments and companies, construct representations of particular cities, places, and people. Similarly, it is possible to analyze how governments and companies endorse certain ideological visions of spatial practices and representational space. In relation to this, representations of space could be analyzed through the lens of discursive practices, as the use of language and visual means is central to how governments and companies represent cities, places, and people in particular ways.

Conclusions

With this article, I have contributed to how Lefebvre's spatial triad can be developed into a methodological tool. Through a methodological reconceptualization illustrated by my application of Lefebvre, I have situated his spatial theory in relation to a bodily engaged research practice, ethnography as an immersive tool for conducting fieldwork and four theory of social science approaches. By applying Lefebvre's spatial triad, it is possible to identify and analyze socio-spatial topics in diverse empirical material. Realizing that the interviewees' accounts could be understood as partly constitutive of social space was a defining moment. While previously treating space as a backdrop to the interviewees' accounts, I could understand them as integral and crucial to socio-spatial production. By making use of Lefebvre's spatial triad, it is possible situate interviewees' experiences in a wider socio-spatial context. As illustrated, I was able to analyze the interviewees' utterances (representational spaces) about the country's and city's development, and particular places in the city, and analytically situate them in relation to the opening up reforms (representations of space) and the city's built environment (spatial practices).

References

Abbas A. "Cosmopolitan De-scriptions: Shanghai and Hong Kong." *Public Culture* 12(3) (2000):769-786.

Adams, T. E., S. Jones Holman & C. Ellis. *Autoethnography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Alvesson, M. & S. Deetz. *Doing Critical Management Research*. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000.

Benjamin, W. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Bergère, M-C. Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Brenner, N. "What is Critical Urban Theory?" *City* 13 (2-3) (2009):198-207.

Brinkmann S. & S. Kvale. *Interviews. Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing.* London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2015.

Carp, J. "Ground-truthing" Representations of Social Space. Using Lefebvre's Conceptual Triad. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 28 (2008):129-142.

Cloke, P., I. Cook, P. Crang, M. Goodwin, J. Painter & Philo. *Practising Human Geography*. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004.

Crang, M. & I. Cook. *Doing Ethnographies*. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007.

David, M. "Editor's Introduction: Methods of Interpretive Sociology." In: David M (ed) *Methods of Interpretive Sociology*. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2010:xxiii-xlii.

Dühr, S. "Analysing Cartographic Representations in Spatial Planning." In: E. A. Silva, P. Healey, N. Harris & P. Van Den Broeck (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Planning Research Methods*. London and New York: Routledge, 2015. 192-201.

Elden, S. *Understanding Henri Lefebvre. Theory and the Possible*. London and New York: Continuum, 2004.

Fraser, B. *Toward an Urban Cultural Studies: Henri Lefebvre and the Humanities*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.

Gamble, J. *Shanghai in Transition. Changing Perspectives and Social Contours of a Chinese Metropolis*. London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003.

Goonewardena, K., S. Kipfer, R. Milgrom & C. Schmid. (eds) *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*. New York and London: Routledge, 2008.

Greenspan, A. "The Power of Spectacle." *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 4 (2012):81-95.

Haraway, D. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14(3) (1988):575-599.

Harvey, D. *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989.

Kinkaid, E. "Re-encountering Lefebvre: Toward a Critical Phenomenology of Social Space." *EPD: Society and Space* 38(1) (2020):167-186.

Kozinets, R. *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2020.

Kusenbach, M. "Street Phenomenology: The Go-along as Ethnographic Research Tool." *Ethnography* 4(3) (2003):455-485.

Lee, O-F. L. *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China 1930-1945*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991.

Lefebvre, H. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life.* London and New York: Continuum, 2004.

Low, S. *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place.* London and New York: Routledge, 2017.

Lyon, D. *What is Rhythmanalysis?* London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

MacCallum, D., C. Babb & C. Curtis, C. *Doing Research in Urban and Regional Planning: Lessons in Practical Methods.* London and New York: Routledge, 2019.

Merrifield, A. *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction.* London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

O'Reilly, K. *Ethnographic Methods.* Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012.

Pierce, J. & D. G. Martin. "Placing Lefebvre." *Antipode* 47(5) (2015):1279-1299.

Pink, S. *Doing Sensory Ethnography,* 2nd edition. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2015.

Przybylski, L. *Hybrid Ethnography. Online, Offline, and In Between.* London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2021.

Ray, L. "Verstehen." In: Ritzer G. (ed) *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology.* Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2007:5195-5196.

Roberts, L. (ed) "Deep Mapping." *Humanities: Special Issue*. Basel: MDPI Books, 2016.

Rubin, H. J. & I. S. Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data.* London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995.

Schmid, C. "Henri Lefebvre's Theory of the Production of Space: Towards a Three-dimensional Dialectic." In: K. Goonewardena, S. Kipfer, R. Milgrom & C. Schmid (eds) *Space, Difference, Everyday Life. Reading Henri Lefebvre.* New York and London: Routledge, 2008.27-45.

Schwartz, R. & G. R. Halegoua. "The Spatial Self: Location-based Identity Performance on Social Media." *New Media & Society* 17(10) (2015):1643-1660.

Shields, R. *Spatial Questions. Cultural Topologies and Social Spatialisations.* London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013.

Shih, S. M. *The Lure of the Modern. Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937.* Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001.

Simmel, G. *The Metropolis of Modern Life.* In Levine, Donald (ed.), *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971/1903.

Soja, E. *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places.* Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

Stanek, L. *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory.* Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Vaide, J. *Contact Space: Shanghai. The Chinese Dream and the Production of a New Society.* Lund: Media-Tryck, 2015.

Watkins, C. "Representations of Space, Spatial Practices and Spaces of Representation: An Application of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad." *Culture and Organization* 11(3) (2005):209-220.

Willis, P. & M. Trondman. "Manifesto for Ethnography." *Ethnography* 1(1) (2000):5-16.

Wu, F. "The Global and Local Dimensions of Place-Making: Remaking Shanghai as a World City." *Urban Studies* 37(8) (2000):1359-1377.

Wu, F. "The (Post-) Socialist Entrepreneurial City as a State Project: Shanghai's Reglobalisation in Question." *Urban Studies* 40(9) (2003):1673-1698.

Zhang, Y. *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time and Gender.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Zhong, S. "Production, Creative Firms and Urban Space in Shanghai." *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 4 (2012):169-191.

Zhu, J. *Architecture of Modern China. A Historical Critique.* London and New York: Routledge. 2009.

Zieleniec, A. *Space and Social Theory.* London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. 2007.

Zieleniec, A. "The Hermeneutics of the Urban Spatial Sociologies of Simmel, Benjamin and Lefebvre." In Janz, BB (ed) *Place, Space and Hermeneutics.* Cham: Springer International Publishing, (2017):379-393.