

**Life Spaces, Mobility and the Metropolis:  
Dialoguing with Geography**

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**Abstract**

Mobility is one of the outstanding features of contemporary urban life and it is generating broad changes in the urban structure as well as in people's lifestyles. These changes are having an enormous impact on metropolises and are bringing to the surface a number of new issues that can no longer be apprehended through the classic paradigms for studying mobility, as these paradigms are based mainly on the simple binomial of home-and-work. As a result, demographers have developed the concept of life space not only to broaden their analytical approach to the spatial mobility of the population, but also to add a qualitative dimension to current theoretical models in demography. Here we intend to discuss the context and implications of this concept of life space in the contemporary metropolis in an attempt to establish dialogue with geography and its long-consolidated theoretical and conceptual instruments, including notions such as place, existential space and territory (from a cultural approach). With this paper we seek interdisciplinarity, hoping in this way to strengthen the spatial nature of the relationships people develop with their environment and reflect on the nature of mobility in the contemporary metropolis.

**Key words:** life space, mobility, metropolitan life, place

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## **Maze**

*"There will never be a door. You are inside  
And the fortress embraces the universe  
And there is neither front side nor backside  
Neither outside wall nor secret center.  
Expect not that the rigor of your path,  
That stubbornly bifurcates into another,  
Will have an end. Your fate is of iron  
Like your judge. Wait not for the  
Bull, that is a man, to lunge forward,  
This beast whose strange  
Plural form adds terror to the entangled plot  
Of interminable intertwined stone.  
It does not exist. Hope for nothing. Not even  
The beast in the black nightfall."*

*Compliment of the Shadow*

Jorge Luis Borges

## **Introduction**

In Hauser's and Duncan's classic view (Hauser and Duncan 1975), demography is composed of a hard core, oriented toward the development of quantitative methods aimed at analyzing data, surrounded by a fluid sphere seen as a place for interfaces and connections with other, more qualitative, disciplines. This sphere also consists basically of qualitative analytical approaches. From the perspective of these authors, the borderline between one discipline and another should lead demography to dialogue with the other disciplines that deal with the same problems and issues or have similar and/or complementary methodological propositions.

This openness to dialogue seems more necessary today than ever before, where the status of absolute truth in science is being seriously questioned. Dialog is also urgent because of the complexity and multidimensionality involved in contemporary phenomena. In this sense, the search for interdisciplinarity and the current approximation of demography to other sciences is perhaps even overdue. The limitations of unidisciplinary approaches become clear, for example, when we set out to understand complex contemporary urban social dynamics that are strongly marked by the spatial mobility of the population and by the incorporation of new places into the network of the life spaces of those who live and work in metropolitan regions of developing countries such as Brazil.

Multiple phenomena are occurring in this area, and they imply the development of intricate networks of relationships and phenomena of different natures. The life spaces of individuals living in metropolises are expanding continually as new places are also created, making people's lives more complex and more dynamic. New analytical tools are therefore needed that will enable us to perceive and understand more deeply the relations between new life spaces and their influence on and reciprocity in the organization of urban and metropolitan spaces. The impacts and consequences of these phenomena on the lives of the individuals who experience them must also be studied in depth.

The concept of place, which has been intensely and extensively developed by a number of authors in the area of geography, can enrich the discussion on life spaces and highlight the experiences of individuals who live in these dynamic and complex urban-metropolitan spatial areas. By understanding how and to what extent individuals incorporate and abandon places as they construct their life spaces, we can develop a deeper understanding of the relations they establish with their surroundings and the spaces where they live.

Several central issues emerge from these reflections, among them the spatial mobility of the population in the context of metropolitan life and its implications for urban organization and administration. This concern arises in the context of an interdisciplinary project involving researchers and scholars from demography, geography, social sciences, economics, urbanism, engineering and the environmental sciences. One of the main objectives of this project is to contribute to academic and conceptual analyses of the complex urban social dynamics of the metropolitan regions in the State of São Paulo, Brazil.

Understanding and discussing these issues is especially demanding in today's context, as we recognize the limitations of many of our traditional concepts and analytical tools. One of the most important contributions to a more sophisticated and refined understanding of these dynamic processes is the concept of "life space," developed by the French demographer Daniel Courgeau approximately 20 years ago. The main virtue of a concept like this, which is still being developed, is to make us re-think traditional demographic questions in the light of the realities of the contemporary metropolis. We are thus obliged to reorganize the concepts and assumptions we use to understand human relationships and mobilities in the context of contemporary society.

This concept of life space has a very important spatial dimension, beyond the effort to incorporate qualitative elements into the analysis. For this reason, the dialogue with geography looks promising. Geography has a long tradition of studying the spatial dimension of the relationships which men and women develop with their environment, with nature and with society. In addition, it uses concepts and analytic categories related to the concept of life space. "Place," "existential space" and "territory" (in a broad cultural approach) are among the geographical concepts and categories that can be used in different ways in the dialogue and thus contribute to the discussion on the issues referred to here.

The main objective of this paper is to discuss the possible connections between the demographic concept of "life space" and geographical theories, in an effort to enrich and enhance the analyses made by demography. Hopes are also that a new set of analytic tools may be developed that will allow us to better understand the complex dynamics of contemporary urban life and metropolitan demographic realities.

The second part of the present inter-disciplinary project consists of an attempt to complement the discussion on the category of "place" and its possibilities, together with the notion of "life space." The broader objective, therefore, is to develop new approaches toward planning and

participating in urban environmental decision-making processes, especially in metropolises (Marandola Jr. and Mello 2005; Marandola Jr. 2005). This will represent a step forward in the dialogue between geography and demography, in order to carry out a broader discussion on the methods and theories regarding mobility and meaning in contemporary cities.

We thus support current efforts to develop a newer, broader and more inclusive approach for studying and analyzing the spatial mobility of populations, as this mobility is considered one of the aspects of the broad complex of human relations, beyond the simple binomials of home-to-work or origin-to-destination. By using the concept of life space, demographers have sought to develop such an approach. Geography also has a fundamental role in this process, especially in regard to the relationships between people and their environment, and between people and places, in the hopes of deepening our present knowledge of the organic relationships between human beings and their environment.

Such an approach will require new methods for gathering and analyzing data, where transversal models are replaced by other, longitudinal models. From this point of view, migration is considered one of the aspects of the spatial mobility of the population. Retrospective and prospective research can also provide valuable empirical references, despite their inconveniences and limitations.

In addition, in recent years a number of researchers have developed non-parametric, parametric and semi-parametric types of analytical procedures that now allow us to better understand the interactions among family, professional and migratory biographies. However, their potential is limited by deficiencies in the sources of data. The new approach toward the spatial mobility of the population may improve as the approximation among the human sciences becomes stronger.

It is exactly in this direction that we hope to move in terms of the dialog between demography and geography as we work towards the mutual enrichment and enhancement of our sciences in the area of interdisciplinary cooperation.

With this in mind, we begin our text by recalling the nature of mobility in large contemporary cities and its repercussions in the life styles and life spaces of the people who live in them. The traditional methods for studying movement in contemporary society are clearly inadequate. Based on new proposals for conceiving mobility, we will attempt to analyze how concepts and categories used in geography can enhance the models used by demographers, thus

working toward the development of inter-disciplinary approaches to mobility and metropolitan life.

## **Mobility and Metropolitan Life: Recent Dynamics**

Large cities, or metropolises, are spaces of mobility. The growth of cities during the 20th century represented a constant increase in the mobility and in interconnections among places, regions, cities and countries around the world. In fact, it was precisely the development of communication and transportation technologies that made this growth possible (Lévy 2001; Ascher 1998).

The complexification of social relationships, scaled relationships and intersubjective relationships has been based on ever more sophisticated technology that has expanded human capacity for communication and long-distance action. This process, in turn, contributed to changes in patterns of mobility, which, until then had been limited to small spaces and short periods, and consisted basically of simple binary relationships: home-job, home-school, home-downtown.

With this evolution, spatial mobility became an important need in the everyday life of dwellers of large cities, now characterized by the dissociation between home and work and by the fragmentation of urban life. As a result, moving about in a metropolis often involves complex, slow and costly logistics.

Cities continue to grow frenetically, and the means of transportation and communication that allow greater spatial mobility are expanding at a corresponding rate. In many places on the planet automobiles powered by internal combustion engines that burn fossil fuels – together with their variations, such as buses, trucks, boats and airplanes – have become the predominant means of transportation, thus contributing to the construction of an imaginary individual freedom to come and go, characterized in the ideals of liberalism.

In other words, even as people become more sedentary in some aspects, they continue being nomadic on the streets, roads, airways and shipping routes that wind around the globe.

The processes of metropolization and spatial mobility are becoming so fused together that it can be said that the essence of living in a metropolis consists of constant movement from one place to another, permanent change in position, an eternal search for somewhere else.

We might then say that the essence of metropolitan life is mobility, as it defines areas of influence, places and life spaces in the broader metropolitan space. Mobility also distinguishes metropolitan life from that in other cities. A given city might not even be so large, but nevertheless show patterns of mobility among its inhabitants that allow it to be understood and classified as a

metropolis or part of a metropolitan area.

Living in a metropolis, then, is much more closely related to how its inhabitants move about in space and how they structure their life spaces. These life spaces generally consist of places separated by long distances that are almost always connected by expressways along which one can, at least in theory, travel at high speeds and in individually occupied automobiles.

These changes and new dynamics in metropolitan spaces have in turn changed people's patterns and forms of mobility. At the same time, however, the methods for studying them, especially demographic methods based on census data, have not kept pace with this evolution and degree of sophistication.

A number of demographers and other scholars have sought to study these new forms of urban existence and their repercussions on metropolitan mobility and life in general. We will first discuss the contribution of Daniel Courgeau, who proposes a broader approach to the study of the spatial mobility of populations by seeing it as just one of the many aspects of a vast complex of human relationships. This approach requires new methods for collecting and analyzing data, where transversal models are replaced by longitudinal models, in which migration is considered just one aspect of spatial mobility (Courgeau 1988, 1990).

Courgeau reminds his readers that a number of analytic procedures have been developed that enable researchers to understand the interactions among family, professional and migratory biographies. But the possibilities of these new procedures have been limited by the shortcomings in the sources of data, especially demographic data based on censuses, and the forms of collecting the information that exists.

This new approach to the spatial mobility of the population can be refined to the extent that our gradual approximation among the humanities also advances. The essence of Courgeau's theoretical construction can be briefly summarized as:

the traditional analytical approach to the population's spatial mobility is based on a restrictive concept of migration that depends only on the changes individuals make in their residences, and this implies ignoring other important types of movement. Many studies describe migration separately from other demographic events, while others take it as an independent variable, supposing that it exerts influence on individual behavior. Migration has also been treated as a variable that is dependant on various factors. The proposal here is to overcome these limitations by taking a broader approach to spatial mobility, seeing it as one of the components in the complex interrelations that make up people's lives (Courgeau 1990, 55).

In other words, spatial mobility, of which migration, in its traditional sense, is but a part, "is not an isolated occurrence that can be regarded as a dependent or independent variable." It can only be understood "in its interaction with other demographic, economic and political factors that make up a human being's life" (Courgeau 1990, 58). The breadth of the analysis of the related phenomena and causal relationships, in order to understand and accompany these recent dynamics must therefore be broadened.

The approach traditionally adopted by demography "negates human freedom and ignores the multiplicity of decisions an individual can make in a given situation" (Courgeau 1990, 59). This is a common error in social sciences, which, influenced by the theory of the rational actor, presuppose a rationality applied by individuals who, in the various situations in their lives, will always optimize their resources and take decisions according to the objectives they have clearly defined for their lives. But this view does not stand up, nor is it even reflected, in each person's experience (Sen 1999, Giddens 2002).

According to Courgeau, a number of studies that run contrary to this somewhat fragmented current of analysis have been developed in recent decades, even though classical demographic procedures continue to lead some demographers to analyze facts in a dissociated way and seek in them a "pure" state without the disturbances or distortions that arise from other aspects of social dynamics. But Courgeau is increasingly convinced that there is a need to "study how the passage through various stages of one's personal, family and professional life affects each person's perception of time and space" (Courgeau 1990, 60). This information will lead to a more organic perspective of the relationships in a person's life space, including his or her historical and geographic aspects.

In fact, the most important thing is not a high level of precision in collecting and processing data related to the phenomenon. In the short-term, at least, this would seem impossible. Methods of measurement are needed that will allow longitudinal analyses whose results "are unaffected by these shortcomings" (Courgeau 1990, 64).

Courgeau therefore attempts to construct an analysis of the methods used, and seeks to clarify their nature and identify their possibilities. The first category of methods, which he refers to as **non-parametric**, "generalize interactions that are more complex than those that analyze a single phenomenon, as do classical demographic procedures of a longitudinal type, by using quotients" (Courgeau 1990, 67).

The second, **parametric**, category

generalizes multiple regression procedures used especially in economics, including the functional dependence of the probability of migrating on the length of the stay, as well as the relationships among an individual's various characteristics. [...] The use of a model of this type makes it possible to consider a great number of explanatory variables and is most useful for understanding the interactions between migration, on the one hand, and family, professional and political realities, and other aspects of life, on the other" (Courgeau 1990, 68).

The third and final category, which is **semi-parametric**, is "a synthesis of those preceding it. It maintains the estimation of the instantaneous independent quotient of all theoretical modeling and makes it possible to estimate the effect of various characteristics on this quotient" (Courgeau 1990, 68).

Although this proposal presented by Courgeau is basic, it has its shortcomings. The author himself insists on the need to broaden it and subject it to more extensive discussions on mobility, separating it from migratory processes but also associating it to all of an individual's demographic and social dynamics. Moving away from the classical approach to migration therefore means facing the complexity of the patterns of mobility in contemporary society and seeking to develop analyses and measurements that are equally complex, in a joint and global perspective of demographic dynamics.

One central aspect for broadening this discussion is the study of the relationships people have with places and how they gravitate around these places. The various places in a city (for work, residence, leisure, study, shopping, services, etc.), which used to be clearer and much closer, have become multiple, regional and distant in today's metropolitan context. In this regard, the home, or residence, has been seen as the main (or only) fixed point in the contemporary metropolis (Ascher, 1998), and is therefore an important pivot for understanding the new dynamics of mobility.

Hervé Domenach and Michel Picouet have gone further into this problematic by introducing a more complex level into the discussion on residence. They suggest that the concepts of spatial mobility of populations be discussed more deeply in order to go beyond the use of the criterion of "change in residence" in studies on the various forms of contemporary migratory flows (Domenach and Picouet, 1990).

For example, by introducing the possible reversibility of migrations, researchers can advance a little farther in their analyses of Courgeau's notion of life space.

This concept of life space is treated here within the notion of "base-residence." Using this new conception, Domenach and Picouet hold that one can define different types of flow that were not included in the concept of change in residence. They thus seek overcome the dichotomy between permanent and temporary displacements.

These authors return to the discussion opened up by Courgeau in regard to the construction of a new way of understanding and analyzing contemporary migratory flows, going beyond the classical procedure of determining origins and destinations of flows by defining the places of residence of migrants. The authors seek to expand the concept of "life space," introduced by Courgeau, by considering that "it is virtually impossible to translate this concept of life space and its evolution in quantitative terms, in view of the diversity of [today's] personal situations" (Domenach and Picouet, 1990, 55). These authors seek to sustain this central idea by presenting a new conceptual basis and a new typology of contemporary migratory flows based on it.

The first concept introduced and discussed is that of "base-residence," defined by the authors as a place or set of places regarding which displacements have a higher probability of return, no matter how long the individual may stay in another place during his or her lifetime. Consequently, when there is a very low probability that the individual will return, we could then speak of the creation of a new base-residence in another place (Domenach and Picouet 1990, 55).

This definition leads to a discussion as to the degree of reversibility of migratory flows. They are thus divided into reversible and irreversible depending on their taking place with reference to a determined base-residence.

Reversible flows are defined as those which "refer to a given 'base-residence.' The departure points of displacements are always the same and change no more than the destinations. Such flows involve one or more places with pre-established itineraries, under the condition that the individual always returns to the base-residence" (Domenach and Picouet 1990, 55). However,

when there are long-term stays away from the base-residence the individual could have one or more additional residences which could be classified as 'residences away' (in the sense of being away from the base-residence). Contrary to a base-residence, a residence away implies a very high probability of transfer and return to the base-residence. This residence away might play the role of a "headquarters" for temporary moves. When an individual, before returning to his or her base-residence, has more than one residence away, these would be classified according to status as of the first long stay away. We thus have the first-status residence away, second-status residence away, etc., until eventual return to the base-residence. The structure of these flows in time comprises a

chain of events (Domenach and Picouet 1990, 55-56).

Irreversible flows, on the other hand, are those where “new residences may be established without reference or resource to the former residence, which is thus abandoned and no longer affects the family and the socio-economic reproduction system of the group that emigrated” (Domenach and Picouet 1990, 56). There is thus a move away from the base-residence, which may be a former residence away and becomes “the headquarters for all of the displacements made from it. In this case the chain of events remains open” (Domenach and Picouet 1990, 56).

Domenach and Picouet also propose a new typology of migratory flows presented briefly in Chart 1. This topology is based on the concept of base-residence and on its reversibility or irreversibility.

The main contribution of the concept of the reversibility of migration is that it enables researchers to highlight certain characteristics of contemporary mobility, especially: a) those related to multiple residences and places of residence; b) those related to the dimension and form of life spaces and, according to the authors; c) those related to the introduction of random time sequences in the itinerary. But what criteria will allow one to judge the possible reversibility of a migration? Domenach and Picouet (1990, 64) describe three elements for a possible answer:

1. A redefinition of the idea of “base-residence,” including in its delimitation the socioeconomic possibility a given population has to establish a spatial scale of mobility and its possible reversibility;
2. The forms and the “area of action” of displacements are determined by the sequence, duration, frequency and hierarchized places of stays in time and in space; and
3. The nature and intensity of the possible reversibility of a migration are related to where the second generations of migrants stop, as an indicator of the schemes of social and family reproduction and their evolution.

Type	Subtype	Definition
Irreversible Flows	Forced Flows	[Forced flows] result mainly from natural cataclysms, which may be violent – such as earthquakes or cyclones – or, on the contrary, very gradual – such as droughts or desertification. They may also arise from human situations of conflict – such as national or religious wars – or from political regimes of exclusion [...] and/or situations of serious economic crisis (Domenach and Picouet 1990, 57).
	Provoked Flows	[Provoked flows] include all those that arise from evolutionary situations that have taken on historical dimensions, such as the coming of a new industrial era, recurrent demographic pressure, etc. [...] Certain constants can be seen among populations affected by this type of displacement of a “definitive” character, especially when collective movements are involved. Correlation with age is less evident here than in most migratory movements, and the phenomenon is equally irreversible for the second generations of migrants, who usually stay in the receiving country (Domenach and Picouet 1990, 57).
	Voluntary	[Voluntary migratory flows] are characterized more by individual choices (or dependent on a unifocal family group) than collective choices, and are often due to affective or social “performance” in reference to the region of origin. “Irreversible wandering type displacements” are under included in this category, in that they do not refer to a base-residence. They may be the expression of uprooting or social marginalization, or related to a tendency to snatch up opportunities that arise (professional mobility) (Domenach and Picouet 1990, 58).
Reversible Flows	Long-term Reversibility	[Long-term migration] includes all population movements that have a system of protection for social reproduction in an area suffering from imbalance between population and resources. These are the traditional migrations of workers, often organized by the social group that has assigned part of its human resources to the migration while the sedentary part of the population maintains and cultivates the area of origin. This form of migration is often marked by culture and religion. (Domenach and Picouet 1990, 59).
	Renewed Reversibility	The most important aspect of this type of displacement is socioeconomic and cultural “determinism,” which determines the choice of the place or places where a migrant will exercise his or her activity. Only later do individual considerations (financial, psychological etc.) become relevant. The distribution of absences in time depends on these considerations. (Domenach and Picouet 1990, 61).
	Sporadic Reversibility	Many flows in contemporary mobility are of this [Renewed Reversibility] type, and they differ from the former in two essential aspects [...]: They do not necessarily depend on a specific structure [...], and they are characterized by considerable instability: a) In time: durations that may vary greatly depending on the individuals and, for the same individual, during several displacements [...] b) In space: the receiving places are chosen on the basis of available work, perspectives for better wages, or any other financial or professional motivation; conditions fluctuate according to these factors (Domenach and Picouet 1990, 62-63).

Drawn up on the basis of Domenach and Picouet (1990).

These proposals have multiplied in the field of population studies, based on differing theoretical-methodological constructions and empirical experimentation. They indicate that it is possible to develop new methods that will allow us to grasp the complexity of the dynamics of

contemporary metropolitan mobility in a more refined way. Before making a transition to them, however, the way in which the sciences, especially demography, see and understand this phenomenon must be changed.

Besides discussing the complex data-gathering methods, a careful analysis will be needed of the concepts and assumptions themselves implied in the mainstream of the methodology. Here, especially, dialogue with other sciences, such as geography, may be fundamental for the new theoretical-methodological construction we are seeking. Besides helping researchers understand the spatiality of the mobility process in a more refined manner, geography can help introduce the qualitative dimension of space into the discussion, thus advancing the notion of life space, brought to demography by Courgeau. This notion may well prove indispensable to a broader approach to mobility in the contemporary metropolis.

### **Dialoguing with Geography: Place, Territory and Existential Space**

The concept of life space was introduced into demographic studies by Daniel Courgeau about 20 years ago. The author built up his concept around the perception that, due to the intense spatial mobility that characterizes contemporary societies, it is impossible to monitor all the displacements made by all the individuals at every moment in time. He therefore held that one should first determine what the network of relationships of a given individual consists of and how it is structured. Only then can this person's transformations through time be monitored. Thus,

*Nous définirons donc le concept de mobilité spatiale dans son sens le plus large: ensemble de déplacements dans l'espace physique, d'individus ou de groupes d'individus, quelle que soit la durée et la distance de ces déplacements. Cette définition n'impliquant pas les systèmes sociaux qui engendrent ces déplacements permet une mesure globale en vue d'une analyse qui pourra ensuite faire intervenir ces systèmes sociaux comme éléments d'explication (Courgeau 1988, 3).*

This broad notion of spatial mobility enables researchers to understand the life space as a whole "[...] portion d'espace où l'individu effectue ses activités [...]" including "[...] non seulement les lieux de passage et de séjour, mais également tous les autres lieux avec lesquels l'individu est en rapport." (Courgeau 1988, 17). This definition, although still too imprecise for quantitative methods, allows researchers to delimit the places being studied, as it is limited to those places with which individuals have an immediate relationship, regardless of its nature.

For example, we can focus on the specific displacements between home and work, seeking to accompany their evolution in time together with other connections the individual makes during these displacements. We can also study the different displacements related to activity in the family realm, focusing our attention on the frequency, traveling conditions, costs, time consumed, and other aspects. Another central dimension that can be incorporated consists of the changes in the nature of these displacements during an individual's life course, identifying not only demographic fluctuations (gender and age category), but also historical changes in systems of production, systems of safety and security, and the characteristics of the surrounding urban space.

Another possibility is in regard to ties of kinship and friendship, which can be expressed in frequent displacements between homes or even to more central meeting places. These and other types of social relationships can form networks where mobility tends not to be on the main arteries of transportation, or consists of pendular migration, for example.

However, life space is an **operational** and **objective** notion. In theory it allows people's displacements to be monitored, thus reproducing itineraries and destinations. In order to guarantee operability, however, Courgeau had to weaken the notion of life space, since for him places do not have affective meaning or identification. To enable modeling, the symbolic and hierarchical differences established among places are not conceptually incorporated into the idea of life space, and it is here that the dialogue with geography can bring new elements into the debate.

We will attempt to discuss at least three concepts/categories that take into account a humanistic and cultural approach, in order to substantiate the notion of life space. The aim of this approach is to place a qualitative analysis alongside the present quantitative methodology. We will thus speak of **place**, **territory** and **existential space**.

On the theoretical plane of demography, **place** is considered synonymous with location and does not have the status of a concept. The term can be used in reference to a location, an area, a point or even a space. Broadening the conceptual range of place on the basis of geography can greatly enhance the way demographers understand the population's spatial mobility.

In other papers we have tried to show the relevance of this category for the dialogue between geography and demography, both from the perspective of mobility and risks in the metropolis (Mello et al. 2004) and in reference to the discussion of the notions of place and life space for planning and participation (Marandola Jr. and Mello 2005). Therefore, in this article we

will use a limited number of points to analyze how this dialogue might be organized in the context of mobility in the contemporary metropolis, seen from a broader perspective.

Place can be understood as the smallest possible spatial cell, that which is related to the perspective of human experience (Tuan 1975, 1977; Marandola Jr. 2005b). Place is established on the basis of the relationships between people and their environments, and has no defined size in relation to the body as mediated by the senses. In this sense, a place can be a single rented room, a neighborhood or an entire city. Most importantly, place represents protection, acceptance, security and safety and it is founded on the affective involvement that people develop in a specific way with given portions of space. When this involvement is positive, it is called topophilia and, when negative, equated with repulsion, it is called topophobia (Tuan 1974).

But we do not establish simple relationships with places or develop distinct hierarchies of our places. In fact, the relationships are often very diffuse. Each individual determines his or her favorite places, places for memories, of leisure, pleasure, eating, shopping, needs, family, or places of fear, sports, terror, meeting people, panic, and dispersion. During our lifetime we all establish these ties, that can be built up during one period and dismantled in another. And, of course, they can be weaker during one period and more intense in another (Buttimer 1980).

There are also places of cultural memory, and others of cultural meaning, but they only become part of a person's biography when he or she includes them through experience.

The notion of life space, in contrast, does not incorporate all the existential dynamics involved in the idea of place. Courgeau had to rule out hierarchical differences among places and gave them all the same weight. Although it may appear to be a complex methodological challenge, we must face the question of how to incorporate this qualitative knowledge into the models for analyzing mobility. Why? Because conceiving places in a metropolis on the basis of their individual meaning can reveal connections and reasons for displacement that the raw data of mobility do not reveal. The reason for a trip is not implicitly clear in an item called "reason for trip," which eliminates all the experiential and affective dynamics involved in the person's reason for the displacement.

The increase in mobility in today's metropolitan contexts is not the result only of the dissociation between home and work. Subjective and cultural issues are also strongly linked to this new context. Giddens (2002) lists a few of them when speaking of the prevalence, in contemporary society, of pure relationships, which he understands as relationships that are destitute of external

standards, and must be considered and discussed on their own merits, on the short and long terms. Tradition is no longer a reliable guide to look for answers. Today, technique and society have persistently done away with standards and concepts, making it difficult to establish criteria to measure reliability in the field of interpersonal relationships. The criteria that currently exist are increasingly limited to the relationships themselves, far from any protection by a place or a region, where they were connected to roots, family and tradition. In the fragmented cosmopolitan context of the contemporary metropolis, relationships are established on other levels, away from place (seen as somewhere to live), and this increases people's mobility in order to find partners and maintain sociability and ties of kinship, culture and religion (Ascher 1998).

Any attempt at understanding mobility in this context without taking into account the different relationships people develop with the places that make up their life spaces can be just as arid as the traditional studies that have been produced until now because they equate places as different as those people merely go to (perfunctory fulfillment of needs) and those they purposefully seek out (sacred, affective and family-related places).

But life space is not merely a set of places. It also consists of itineraries, that is, the routes that connect these places to one another. A first difference can easily be seen in the words of Yi-Fu Tuan, who says that place is a pause in one's movement, while space is the passageway, the vastness, the movement itself (Tuan 1977). In this sense, anywhere devoid of pauses, where there is no stopping and no time to develop involvement, is space, unsignified space for that individual.

Life space is thus like an articulated network containing both signified places (in varying degrees) and unsignified places (that serve only as passageways). This image of a network is useful for our purposes. It consists of a set of places (points) and itineraries (lines) that make up an empty area. Such empty areas are like dark spots, often completely unknown by (and without relationship to) the individuals. In the sprawling metropolitan space, with its frayed urban fabric, we see these individual and family networks become increasingly stretched out, with fine threads leading to distant points, constantly taking people through vast areas that resemble tubes, where one is familiar with the walls but not with their insides.<sup>1</sup>

Related to this idea of network we could conceive of the idea of **territory** in the manner it is treated through the cultural approach in geography. Here we are dealing with a perspective that

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<sup>1</sup> We are referring here, of course, to short trips along streets using either individual or collective combustion-based transportation in order to reduce time and space to a minimum.

gives territory a more original meaning related to roots and culture. Beyond the focus that political analysis has given it, territory has an older meaning, essentially connected to power, no doubt, but without any direct connection to the idea of coercion-power, state-power or politics-power. Historically, the idea of territory emerged from human nature itself. In its constitution, it represents the establishment of control over certain areas in order to institute not only safety and security, but involvement and stability as well, that guarantee the species itself. Such control is not directly related to any given political or financial status. According to Robert Sack, one of the key words for understanding territory and different territorialities is the idea of **affect**, derived from the verb "to affect" (Sack 1986). This notion opens the door to an understanding of the forces that establish territories: affectation over a given area be it of a cultural, financial, political, ecological, or even cognitive nature (on the basis of experience).

This notion of territory is reinforced by Jöel Bonnemaïson's definition, according to which territory can be understood as "A set of hierarchized places connected to a network of itineraries" (Bonnemaïson 2002, 99). This idea joins things that are mobile (itineraries) to things that are stable (places), as experienced by an individual or group. It is not closed or rigidly delimited space; it is as fluid as one's experience of the environment.

The concept of life space as the basic material of everyday territories broadens the perspective of place, as it links itineraries (displacements) to such a hierarchized set of places that people experience. It also allows one to presume that if we have a territory, we have control over it, especially through knowledge in this case, and this provides us with safety and security and increases our mobility. But itineraries sometimes leave our own territory and oblige us to go through other territories that are unknown to us or that are not related to our affect, and this makes them potentially dangerous.

This notion of territory, therefore, as well as that of life space, is not based on the idea of area. It is more directly related to the perspective of a network that interconnects and intertwines routes and places in the vast metropolitan space.

Finally, **existential space** adds the final element we intend to bring into this dialog at the moment. Existential space refers to the world that is experienced (from a phenomenological perspective) and that involves the relationship of the knowing (existing) being with the other (intersubjectivity) (Merleau-Ponty 1971) and with space itself (geographicity) in a relationship of inherent integration (Dardel 1952). If life space is the objectification of all the points in the

metropolis where one lives out one's life, existential space, in contrast, is about the relationship one establishes with the world, ranging from the cultural and social circles he participates in, to the landscapes, places and territories where he lives.

The idea of existential space is characterized by the centrality of people's being in the world, to take a Heideggerian approach. According to J. Nicholas Entriken, existential space supposes a spatial and temporal position consisting of the intentional and emotional ties that men and women have in relation to other human beings and to the objects around them. According to that author, the basic essential meanings of spatial concepts (such as place, territory, region and landscape) are understood as affective ties between people and their world, and are distinct from the objective space of physical science and geometry. Spatial concepts are thus seen as abstractions of the fundamental existential space (Entrikin 1976).

In the existential space distances are affective and subjectively attributed. Their center is a person, an I, who lives and experiences and, by means of existential space, establishes his or her existence. This space consists of people, objects and places. It is an egocentric perspective of life space itself. Life space, as methodological operationality, is objectivation carried out by the researching subject, whereas existential space, even if based on life space, cannot be objectivated or even fully expressed by he or she who exists (Marandola Jr, 2004). So then, what is the purpose of this notion?

An attempt to understand the relationship of existential space with territories and places in the configuration of the life space may reveal other connections of meaning and intentionality behind displacements and stability. Existential space also helps connect subjective dynamics to other strata of information about a person's historicity and geographicity, such as his or her memories, cultural references, intellectual influences, and ideologies. It can also reveal connections with other places, even if they are not currently included in the person's life spaces, but were included at some time in the past. Finally, it enables us to understand the experience of the metropolis in its entirety, connecting the different times and spaces in the configuration of mobility and current way of life we observe and study.

Obviously, to bring this notion into a pragmatic and quantitative field can be a difficult endeavor. But to ignore its depth and refuse to consider it, especially in the conceptual proposal of models and of the theoretical and methodological mainstream, would be to ignore the nature of displacements themselves and their repercussions not only on the micro-scale, on places, but also

on the whole of the metropolitan space, its forms and its interconnections.

Adding the other three notions discussed here to our notion of life space will help us to expand our understanding as we move toward a humanistic approach to mobility. They encompass the involvement and meaning of hierarchized places and the different levels of affectation of the routes people take through the territories they traverse, on the basis of an intentionality experienced by subjects in movement. The objective is not to quantify or qualify all life spaces, but rather to give this objective notion qualitative knowledge deriving from the experience of the metropolis. This addition can broaden our understanding and reading of the meaning of life spaces, enabling us to expand our own understanding of the meaning of the forms and meanings of the different patterns of mobility and their repercussions in the structuring of the contemporary metropolis.

### **Possibilities and Challenges**

It seems that the more we think the more deeply committed and the more lost we become. The problematic of spatial mobility of the population is no longer limited to migrations in their traditional sense. It goes far beyond the relationship of one's place of residence with his or her place of work, study, or leisure. Today it even goes beyond the meanings attributed to pendularity. What therefore can we do to keep up with this expansion of life spaces and their increasing complexification? How can we quantify, qualify and understand such mobility? What repercussions does the mobility have for the structure of metropolitan space on the macro-scale and for people's lives on the micro-scale?

This essay brings up at least two types of problems and issues to be solved. The first refers to the incapacity of current demographic methods based on censuses to encompass the complexity and range of these questions. It is impossible to measure and analyze spatial movement as the mere daily commuting between two or more places based on data that are collected at regular but very spaced-out intervals.

On the other hand, any change in this data-gathering methodology would mean much higher costs. At the moment, the central question is whether the additional investment would truly improve our understanding of the phenomenon being studied. We feel that a greater number of studies carried out at shorter intervals than the ten years normally used for the demographic censuses, and focused on certain regions, might be a feasible solution.

The other type of problematic emerges from the theoretical and methodological basis the concepts are grounded on, both in terms of collecting the data and analyzing them. Beyond the operational problems involved in the process of collecting the data, we note a latent gap between recent dynamics and our ability to broaden the knowledge available regarding the nature of the phenomena we study. To see mobility only as displacement, without qualifying the spaces, people and intentionalities involved, will continue to limit our conclusions to structural aspects that keep us from going beyond the threshold of the macro-structures and macro-processes. Our perspective is like the perpendicular view had by an airplane pilot at maximum altitude who cannot clearly distinguish things on the ground. Everything looks blended together, condensed, into a single image, where cities, fields, farms, rivers and forests gradually separate from one another as the view from above becomes less abstract (Saint-Exupéry 1969). It is essential to try to ally methods and perspectives not only between scientific disciplines, like our present interface between geography and demography. It is also important to establish the same type of dialogue with knowledge of a philosophical nature. Only through this type of initiative can we broaden our ability to understand processes that are taking place,<sup>2</sup> as we fly at different levels and thus increase the amount of detail we are able to take in.

It is also impossible to ignore the enormous obstacles that exist regarding the execution of this type of enterprise. But magnitude is not a sufficient reason to close our eyes. If we are to understand the mobility and the life spaces in contemporary society more thoroughly, we must seek to broaden inter-disciplinary knowledge and methods of research that will integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches (quanti-qualitative methodologies) at the same time. This is also necessary if we truly want to understand more fully not only the mobility and life spaces that are present in contemporary society, but especially to help us grasp the meaning of metropolitan life in the megacities that are spreading around the globe.

This type of inter-disciplinary experience can provide us with new categories and other ways of understanding and analyzing metropolitan reality. They can also help us develop new methods for collecting, treating and analyzing data related to the processes of the population's spatial mobility. Most importantly, however, they can provide us with greater openness as we question our own bases and understandings, encouraging us and stimulating us to open ourselves up

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<sup>2</sup> In this sense, anthropology and a number of studies in urban sociology deserve not only our attention, but also our efforts at establishing dialog, since they have long traditions of research and qualitative methods and have faced many of

to the unknown.

This is the direction we want to move in...

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the methodological and conceptual questions we are now confronted with.

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