
TRAC Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference

www.trac.org.uk

Paper Information:

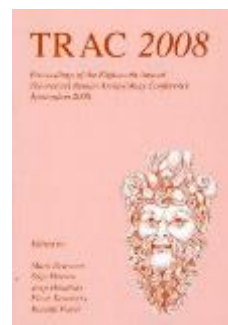
Title: Centrality in its Place: Defining Urban Space in the City of Rome

Author: David J. Newsome

Pages: 25–38

DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC2008_25_38

Publication Date: 17 April 2009



Volume Information:

Driessen, M., Heeren, S., Hendriks, J., Kemmers, F., and Visser, R. (eds) 2009. *TRAC 2008: Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Amsterdam 2008*. Oxford: Oxbow Books

Copyright and Hardcopy Editions:

The following paper was originally published in print format by Oxbow Books for TRAC. Hard copy editions of this volume may still be available, and can be purchased direct from Oxbow at <http://www.oxbowbooks.com>.

TRAC has now made this paper available as Open Access through an agreement with the publisher. Copyright remains with TRAC and the individual author(s), and all use or quotation of this paper and/or its contents must be acknowledged. This paper was released in digital Open Access format in April 2013.

Centrality in its Place: Defining Urban Space in the City of Rome

David J. Newsome

‘Wherever in the city one is, nothing prevents him from being in its centre all the same.’ (Aelius Aristides, *Roman Oration*, 26.7)

Introduction: The ‘Spatial Turn’

The session from which this paper developed carried the pre-title ‘The Spatial Turn’, a phrase applied to the broad development of interest in space that has permeated many disciplines, including archaeology and Roman history, with particular vigour over the last two decades (Soja 2000: 7). This interest goes deeper than writing descriptive histories of, in this case, urban topography. Rather, it is an interest in *spatiality*, wherein space is the object of study rather than the setting; dialogues *of* space, rather than *in* space. Although the ‘spatial turn’ is a label that hides debate, disagreement and variability under a neat and concise heading, one point of consensus is the importance of the French sociologist, Henri Lefebvre. If he has not quite defined a theoretical zeitgeist, he has at the very least been the catalyst for the invigoration of urban spatial studies.

In Roman archaeology, Lefebvre’s influence is most apparent in the emphasis on social interaction and its conceptualisation as historically specific ‘spatialisations’ (Shields 1999: 167; cf. Hitchcock 2008: 164–168; Laurence 2008). The attraction of archaeologists to ‘the everyday’ is often brought under the theories of phenomenology; our desire to contextualise the past as one of multiple, discrete realities, though Lefebvre himself criticised phenomenology for prioritising the experiential aspects of space, at the expense of the representational. Lefebvre’s spatial framework does not dictate this line of research but, at times, provides useful guidelines from urban sociology (for criticisms of sociology framing archaeological inquiry cf. Allison 2001, with rebuttals in Laurence 2004: 104–106). It is probably healthy to be aware that the previous statements contain a number of what might be perceived as ‘buzzwords’: action; interaction; representation. It is a reflection of the success of the ‘spatial turn’ that these words are now common to those of us working in a discipline that until relatively recently was entrenched in much less critical buzzwords: models, plans, imitations. Roman urbanism is no longer debated solely in terms of orthogonal planning and symbolic models (however significant these issues remain, cf. Lagopoulos 2008) but by the specificity of practice.

However, the notion of centrality has received little attention in all of this. Its definition is either ignored altogether or at best formed on equally problematic terms such as the ‘symbolic’ or ‘religious’ (but cf. Livy 5.52.2, ‘there is no place in our city that is not filled with religious meaning and with gods’ – how do *we* write a hierarchy of such places? Is Jupiter on the Capitoline more ‘central’ than Hercules at the Ara Maxima?). Centrality is still regarded, it would seem from a cursory review of almost any general work on Roman topography, to be where the temples were, where the Senate sat, and so on. ‘*Centrality? You mean the forum*’

– either a question or an assertion, depending on the particular theoretical inclination of the person in question (inclinations that are particularly apparent in translations of spatial terms, cf. Morstein-Marx 2004: 40, who rather uncritically translates Asconius' (*Mil.* 41) use of *fori* as 'any central square'). To be clear, the issue is not one of disproving the centrality of *fora*, but demonstrating whether such opinion is or is not valid based on Roman attitudes to space. Traditionally, centrality was synonymous with the apex of a hierarchy of monumental, civic architectures. Regrettably, little has changed, despite the 'spatial turn'.

In this paper I will examine some of Lefebvre's theories of urban centrality and the ways in which they might inform a rethinking of our own definition of centrality in the Roman city. It is clear that we need to define our terms more clearly. On the one hand there are familiar, 'representational' centres – the symbolic and ideological. On the other, there are the centres of everyday 'rhythms' and interactions, wherein the definition of space is based to a large extent on an overlap of practice, concept and experience (Lefebvre 1991; cf. précis in Laurence 1997: 9–10). The paper begins by considering Lefebvre's thoughts on Roman urban space, before examining some of the commonly ascribed centres within Rome. It ends with an overview of Roman concepts of movement and space as outlined in Varro; though there is no single definition which might speed us along. '[T]he question of centrality in general, and of urban centrality in particular, is not a very simple one' (Lefebvre 1991: 331).

Lefebvre's Rome and Urban Centrality

Whilst Lefebvre's broader theoretical understanding of space might inform our reinterpretation of Roman centrality, it is important to note that his own musings on the topic are somewhat unconvincing. In his history of space – itself characterised by the kind of rigid 'phases' that archaeology would rather avoid – Rome fell into both the second and third phases – 'absolute'/'sacred' and 'historical' space – the former being the epoch of Romulean foundation, the latter being the ideologically saturated period of the Republic and Empire. Such phases are sequential, but have a tendency to overlap where ideologically or politically expedient. For example, Augustus' restorations of the Lupercal, the cave where the she-wolf suckled Romulus and Remus (Ovid, *Fasti* 2.421), could be seen as Romulean tradition forming 'the bedrock of historical space and the basis of representational spaces (religious, magical and political symbolism)' (Lefebvre 1991: 48). Rome is replete with examples of successive periods making use of previous spaces for ideological purposes. Unsurprisingly, such uses are almost always in public space (Lefebvre 2004: 96).

Lefebvre characterised the geocentrism of Greece and Rome as 'cosmological space' (1991: 236), with the notion that their settlement was physically and metaphorically central in their concepts of the world. There is some familiarity in all of this. It is not too much of a stretch to see in Lefebvre's model the influence of, in particular, Augustan ideology on the city of Rome as the centre of the world (1991: 243–244; Clarke 1999: 217–218; Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 6.1.10–11). One wonders what Lefebvre would have made of Agrippa's famous map of the (Roman) world in the Porticus Vipsania (completed by Augustus; Pliny *NH* 3.17); a map no doubt imbued with the ideology of empire and like all maps, representational, selective and subjective (Nicolet 1991: 98–111; Dilke 1998: 41–53).

When one moves from Rome *as* centre to the centre *of* Rome, Lefebvre's writings are disappointing. This is not necessarily true of his writings on the space of the city overall, but

certainly of his definition of centrality within it. For example, he recognised that dominant ideologies of space in monumentality and urban planning could be appropriated by the users of the city into their own particular spaces of representation (Lefebvre 1991: 244). In Rome, we can recognise how ideological space was redefined by lived space; of women, slaves, children, soldiers (one thinks of Ovid recasting the imperial space of the Porticus Liviae as a space of sexual promiscuity; *Ars amatoria* 1.71). Conversely, the success of ideology in redefining lived space can also be traced, as in the example of the *Regiones Quattuordecim* and the independent use of new concepts of urban space very soon after their ‘imposition’ in 7 B.C. (e.g. *CIL* 6.899, 39207; *plebs urbana quae habitat in regione urbis XIII* cf. primarily Lott 2004; also Laurence 1991; Wallace-Hadrill 2003).

However, it would seem that the concept of centrality in Rome, owing to its necessity to fit into one of his historical phases, is left under-theorised:

‘In the Greek and Roman cities, centrality is attached to an empty space, the agora and the forum. It is a place of assembly. There is an important difference between the agora and the forum. Prohibitions characterise the latter and buildings will quickly cover it up, taking away from its character of open space.’ (Lefebvre, *le droit à la ville*, cited in 1996: 169)

That the Roman forum (that is, the forum of a Roman city, not the Forum Romanum in the city of Rome) will be developed with buildings, changing its spatial character in the process, offers a way to develop this issue. This is more than a difference between the Greek agora and the Roman forum, as Lefebvre states. It is, more importantly, a difference between the Roman forum from one period to the next. His attitude appears to be influenced by Le Corbusier’s famous remark about Rome itself: ‘the forum must have been ugly’ (1931: 156). It was a space of ‘bric-à-brac’, devoid of any semblance of planning or layout. Lefebvre’s vision of the forum is one ‘encumbered by objects’ (1991: 239), but such generalisation is misleading. One need only think of the various attempts to clear the Forum Romanum, for example Publius Cornelius Scipio and Marcus Popilius removing the statues of self-aggrandizing magistrates (158 B.C., Pliny *NH* 34.30), or when Varro (*ad. Non.* 532) perceived the increase in the dignity of the forum to be explicitly linked to the relocation of cluttering retail from the open space. These changes are, of course, of both practice and perception (The *LTVR* entries, Coarelli 1995, Purcell 1995a and 1995b, remain the most accessible introductions to the history of this space, though all propagate a straightforward notion of centrality).

Lefebvre continues: ‘...it is not disjointed from the centre of the world: the hole, the sacred-damned *mundus*, the place from which souls leave, where the condemned and unwanted children are thrown’ (1991: 239). Evocative as this may be, Lefebvre is not the most accurate guide through Rome’s topography; throwing in references to the *mundus* and the Tarpeian Rock, in a collage of myth and topographic and historical confusion. It would be unfair to criticise too much, since Lefebvre never projects himself as an ancient historian, much less a specialist in Rome’s historical topography between text and archaeology (In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre names Cicero, Seneca and Pliny, as well as repeated references to Vitruvius. Owing to his style of dictating his works, we lack the references necessary to check which Latin or Greek texts he was familiar with).

However, by locking Roman centrality within phase three of his rigid history of space, Lefebvre ultimately denies these spaces any history of their own, at least, any history that *changes* their own spatiality. It need hardly be stated that the forum of Servius Tullius was a different space to that of Diocletian, in physical terms (cf. Coarelli 1999: 27–33), just as the forum of Plautus was different to that of Cicero, or again to Ammianus Marcellinus, in conceptual terms (on the interplay of topography, memory and representation cf. Vasaly 1993: esp. 34–43; cf. Dyson and Prior 1995; Spencer 2007). This historical specificity of centrality must be accounted for and, at least in Lefebvre’s definition above, this specificity is one that we ought to be able to recognise in developing architectures and patterns of accessibility and enclosure (cf. La Rocca 2001; La Rocca 2006: 142–143 on the differing *logic* of accessibility in the Forum Romanum and the Imperial *fora*. A valuable synthesis is Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 2007; cf. Coarelli 1999: 30, who interprets the substantial changes to the Forum Romanum in the early fourth century as a ‘centralization’ of Tetrarchical power; significantly, such intentions are again manifest in the enclosing of ‘open’ space. My thesis deals with these issues in more detail than is possible here).

Despite such reservations with Lefebvre’s attitude to the forum, it is from his work that we can develop our theorising of Roman central space. Although he declared, ‘[T]here is no urbanity without *a* centre’ (1996: 208; my italics), elsewhere his definition of urban centrality (that is, the centre of the city, rather than the city as centre in relation to the rural periphery) is more nuanced; suggesting the existence of multiple centres. The point that finds most resonance for this present paper is his assertion that “[C]entrality is movable” (Lefebvre 1991: 332). He offers the example of the Greek city, a city in which the centre was forever being moved:

‘From the semicircular area where chiefs and warriors conferred about their expeditions and divided up their booty to the city temple, and from the temple to the agora, a place of political assembly (and later, thanks to annexed arches and galleries, of commerce). This means that in ancient Greece a complex relationship existed between urban space and temporality (rhythms) of urban life...’ (Lefebvre 1991: 332; cf. Vlassopoulos 2007 on the variety of spaces in the agora)

“The same goes for modern cities”, he concluded (1991: 332). True, and the same went for ancient Rome, had he ventured the suggestion. We might “inventory the various shifts in centrality” (1991: 332), at least at an anecdotal level: Remus on the Aventine and Romulus on the Palatine; the forum valley, after it had been drained; the Temple of Vesta; the Rostra; the Capitoline and the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus; the Campus Martius superseding the traditional *Urbs* in Strabo’s ‘space of representation’ (5.3.8; cf. Haselberger 2007); the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine; the Compitum Acilii; the Meta Sudans. All of these, and many more besides, could rightly be posited as ‘a centre’ at some point or other in Rome’s long, complex history. It depends on our definition of centrality or, more importantly, on Roman definitions of centrality; their own understanding of space, in both practice and representation. When Lefebvre remarked that, ‘in the future, the city will invariably be polycentric, a multiplicity of centres’ (1996: 208), he could easily have applied this back to the Roman city. After all, Rome itself had, by the time of Pliny (*NH* 3.66), 265 *vici* across its 14 *regiones*. Moreover, in identifying the street as ‘central to social and urban life’ (Elden 2004: 145), and in suggesting that centrality, both

mental and social, is defined by the gathering together of objects (people), Lefebvre indirectly offers a close fit for the concepts of centrality in Roman thought and experience.

Representational Centres in Rome

Before examining the street in definitions of centrality, it is first necessary to demonstrate why examples of traditional ‘centres’ are problematic. It has already been noted how Lefebvre placed a special emphasis on the *mundus* as the centre of Rome, in representational if not geometric terms (cf. Rykwert 1988: 98–99). It is worth briefly considering these representational centres, as they are essentially a part of Lefebvre’s second aspect of space – representations – the domain of ideology and of the architect and urban planner.

There are numerous candidates for the *representation* of the centre of the city of Rome: the *mundus*; *Roma Quadrata* (cf. Wiseman 2007); the Rostra; the *Miliarium Aureum*; the *Umbilicus Romae*. The Capitoline is another (Purcell 2007: 188), as ‘the highest head’ of the Roman city and Roman state (Isidore, *Etymologiae* 15.2.31). Lefebvre himself was well aware of the concepts of *omphalos* (ὁ ὀμφαλός) and *umbilicus*, of which there were physical manifestations in Delphi and in Rome. He considered such spaces to be “in the centre of the world, the point of departure and arrival” (1996: 168) – though in this passage he is referring to the Asiatic rather than Roman city. Such concepts were usefully discussed by Varro (*LL* 7.17). In his description, it is noteworthy that he locates the ‘centre’ of Delphi at its side, not in the topographic centre at all (*et terrae medium, non hoc, sed quod vocant, delphis in aede ad latus est*). This point is useful for demonstrating how models of centrality that hold the centre and the middle (ὁ μέσος; *medium*) as synonymous are invalid (cf. Menander Rhetor 1.352.10–15). Even the definition of *umbilicus*, the middle part of the middle lands named from the centre of the human body is, according to Varro, erroneous (*quod ultrumque est falsum*). In such statements, it is likely that Varro is denying Delphi its claim to centrality, rather than denying the very existence of a centre at all (although Varro’s overall discussion is tinged with scepticism – *si quod medium* – ‘if there is a centre’). However, whilst denying Delphi, Varro never posits an alternative, Roman centre, despite his lengthy topographical description of the city (5.41–54). Perhaps this is just the point. His lack of discussion of this phenomenon might suggest a lack of consensus, or even a lack of engagement with this issue, rather than being an omission or a lacuna. Perhaps there was no centre or, at least, not one above all others. Varro is clearly well aware of the ‘representation of space’ that is exemplified by the *umbilicus* and *omphalos* and yet his own ‘spaces of representation’ do not engage with these sorts of definitions.

A monument that fits with Lefebvre’s definition of a centre as ‘the point of departure and arrival’, is the *Miliarium Aureum* in the Forum Romanum (Mari 1996). Constructed in 20 B.C., the ‘golden milestone’ commemorated Augustus’ inauguration of the office of *cura viarum* (Cass. Dio 54.8.4). It was considered, at least by some, to be the point at which Roman Italy’s road network converged (Plutarch, *Galba* 24.4, ‘at which all the roads that intersect Italy terminate’). If, as is the general idiom, all roads led to Rome, then according to Plutarch they all led to the *Miliarium Aureum*. In terms of departure and arrival, one can hardly be more central than that. However, the issue is not so straightforward. It is interesting to note in Cassius Dio that the golden milestone was a given, popular name – “as it was called” (similar to Varro’s *sed quod vocant*, above) – not necessarily an official title. In Lefebvre’s terms, this may indicate that the representation of space, enforced under Augustan ideology to project the *Miliarium Aureum* as

the centre of Rome's domain, was appropriated within the common experiences. In the 'lived space' of the inhabitant of Rome, this matter-of-fact name had no ideological centrality at all (as in the 'conceived space' apparently relayed by Plutarch). It is a name relating to its materials and appearance – golden/gilded – and to its perception in everyday life. Its role as a meeting point is clear in both Suetonius (*Otho*, 6) and Plutarch (*Galba* 24.4), but both these accounts refer to extraordinary, politically-tumultuous circumstances, rather than the stuff of everyday, lived space. It is only much later, and in an official document (*Digest* 50.16.154), that this site is called the *Miliarium Urbis* – the milestone of the City – a name which, arguably, is much more the stuff of Lefebvre's conceptual, ideological representations of space. Although it appears to fit a loose definition of a 'symbolic' centre – a golden monument, at a particularly significant nodal point – the *Miliarium Aureum* seems to have never been a central space in the lived experience of the city of Rome (contrary to Haselberger *et al.* 2002).

The same goes for the *Umbilicus Romae*, a third century structure adjoining the Rostra, on the opposite side to the *Miliarium Aureum* (Coarelli 2007: 63–64 dates the original *Umbilicus* to the second century B.C. but if this were the case, and if its symbolism was obvious from that point, we might expect a comparative reference to it in Varro's discussion of the *omphalos* at Delphi. If it were from the second century B.C., account must be taken of the different locations of the republican Rostra and the Rostra Augusti). The *Umbilicus* and *Miliarium* are clearly two different monuments (cf. the *Notitia* and *Curiosum*, both occur in *Reg.* VIII). However, this presented Richardson with some interpretative difficulties, owing to his particular concept of centrality. He thought it incredible that the city authorities would tolerate 'two supposedly precise centres of the city so close to each other' (Richardson 1991: 404). While one can understand the basic argument, it relies on the following assumptions: first, that 'the city' shared the same concept of space in the Augustan and the Severan periods (Richardson does not make clear *who* would be responsible for such representations of space, presumably the *praefectus urbi*); second, that the monuments were indeed considered to be 'precise centres', although they are never referred to as such; and third, that the Roman conceptualisation of space and centrality would not allow for multiple centres, but had instead to be fixed, permanently, to one space only (but cf. Purcell 2007: 185, 'if centrality is good, it is worth over specifying it, with multiple, repeated, overlapping centres'). None of Richardson's basic suppositions is demonstrably true. They are based on an interpretation of centrality that is based not on Roman concepts but modern ones. Coarelli (1996: 95) rightly rejected Richardson's conflation of these two spaces, though his own interpretation is also contentious. Coarelli argued that the two could easily have co-existed because they represented different centres; 'a symbolic contrast between the centre of the Roman world and the centre of the city' (2007: 63). Coarelli claimed the *Umbilicus* as the centre of the city because, he argued, it replaced the *mundus* (1976/77: 346–360; cf. criticisms in Richardson 1980: 53). Here we might think again of Lefebvre's comments on the appropriation of 'sacred space' by 'historical space' (1991: 48). Accordingly, the *Umbilicus Romae* (or as Coarelli 2007 rather disingenuously calls it, the *Umbilicus Urbis*) was a Severan monumentalisation, expressed through the Roman imitation of a Greek *omphalos* and demanded because Rome's imperial expansion necessitated a reassertion of the city's centrality and, in turn, the centre of the city (cf. Purcell 2007: 182: 'symbolic emphasis on the centre to counter the devolution of power unavoidable in so far flung a polity'). Coarelli followed Plutarch (*Romulus* 11.2) in defining the *mundus* as the centre of Rome from where Romulus ploughed out the city, 'as one would make a circle around a centre'. We can use Varro, and Livy (38.48.2) to question the significance of

these ‘symbolic’ representations of centrality in the lived experience of the city. Such definitions can hardly be applied throughout the history of the city when we look to define ‘centrality’ in Roman perceptions of space. Instead, as in Lefebvre’s writings, we should see these as particular, historically specific spatialisations – representations of space which are ideologically valuable but ultimately misleading from our wider concern with the centres of ‘lived space’.

A final representation of space that is of interest here is the well-known Severan *Forma Urbis Romae* (hereafter, the *FUR*), from the start of the third century A.D and originally in the Templum Pacis. To Lefebvre, representations of this kind are particularly potent because of their ability to conjoin ideology and knowledge to the extent that they are indistinguishable (1991: 45; cf. de Certeau 1984: 92–93; Elden 2004: 145–147). Architectural representations have three primary (overlapping) motivational aspects: artistic, technical and political, the balance (or imbalance) between which creates a particular representation of space, or ‘envisioned state of reality’ (Haselberger 1997: 78–79). Monuments, façades, perspectival vistas, and maps; ‘Lefebvre distrusts them all for their composition of coded representation on space itself’ (Shields 1999: 80). In such context, Rome’s *mensores aedificiorum* would be more than technical surveyors; their work was informed by and sustained particular ideologies of space. We have already mentioned Agrippa’s work in the Porticus Vipsania. Lefebvre would have misgivings about this, assumedly panoptic, representation of space, as well he might about the *FUR*, a map that employs various representational devices to establish difference between its spaces – lettering (what is named, how it is named, and what are the size and orientation of the letters); scale (some buildings and areas are larger than the common scale of 1:240, e.g. the Palatine at 1:220; cf. Huelsen 1914: 109; Taub 1993: 9); orientation and extent (what is shown); even colour (recent evidence indicates some streets were coloured, possibly to indicate administrative boundaries between the city’s *regiones*; cf. Ciancio Rossetto 2006). How prominent such maps were in everyday experience of the city is another paper, but here it is worth noting that Agrippa’s world map in the Campus Martius was in a favourite place for the Roman people (Gellius 14.5.1; Pliny remarked that it was “set before the eyes of the world *so it could be seen*”, *NH* 3.16-17; cf. Nicolet 1991: 98–111 and essays in Hinard and Royo 1993). The Templum Pacis was as a frustratingly busy spot, at least according to Pliny (*NH* 36.27), but we do not know how common it would be for people to take note of the *Forma* within the *aula* (on issues of visibility and viewing cf. Trimble 2007; on the similarities in both form and function of the Porticus Vipsania and the Templum Pacis cf. La Rocca 2001: 206–207).

Particularly important for this present discussion, representations of geographic ‘reality’ allow for the creation and vindication of subjective, ideological centres. Rodríguez-Almeida (2002: 67) placed the centre of the *FUR* on the Capitoline hill. Given the known limits of the plan it is possible to find the physical centre by making intersections from the four corners. The resulting ‘centre’ is the join of slabs V.10 and V.11 (see <http://formaurbis.stanford.edu>). The centre, identified in this way, is to the northwest of the hill, near to modern day Piazza Venezia and, interestingly, near the southern termination of the busy street of the Via Flaminia/Via Lata (Tacitus *Hist.* 2.64). We must of course remember Varro’s comments on the *omphalos* at Delphi, and consider that the physical centre of this plan need not correspond to the ‘centre’ of the representation. Still, what is intriguing about the *FUR* is that centrality was not explicitly defined where we might expect it. Indeed, it seems likely that the Forum Romanum was not labelled at all on the plan (though its constituent buildings were).

Movement and the Definition of Place

Lefebvre's work on rhythmanalysis has received less detailed attention, and has had less obvious impact, than the theories outlined in *The Production of Space*. Nevertheless, one crucial element is the definition of rhythms as a link between space, time and social activity. Rhythm is found 'in urban life and movement through space' (2004: viii). Recalling his earlier remark that 'centrality is movable', he further speculates, 'what is a centre, if not a producer of rhythms' (2004: 98; cf. 2003: 18–21 closely following Jacobs 1961). Accordingly, Lefebvre's understanding of urban centrality moves from the 'sacred', absolute space to the rhythmic, socially constructed gatherings of people (2004: 97; 'the street, the open space, the square and the monuments'). This takes centrality from the representational to the everyday. Of what value, and how appropriate, is this for a rethinking of Roman urban centrality? To answer such questions, it is necessary to outline the concept of place and examine how movement (rhythms) influenced the definition of urban spaces (I do not deal here with the daily temporality of centrality, though this issue is important in future research). Above all, this suggests that centrality should be considered *relative* and *plural*; bringing us back to Lefebvre's definition of the city as polycentric (cf. Lim 1999: 265–266 who stresses, for the proliferation of Christian spaces in late-antique Rome, that topographical constructions – e.g. 'centrality' – are validated by 'specific patterns or modalities of temporal and spatial use').

That movement was a variable in the definition of place and centrality is clear in the general toponym *locus celeberrimus* – the busiest place (Gros 2005: 209–212; cf. Trifiló 2008 for the use of this term in defining space in imperial *fora*). This description can and was pluralized – *loci celeberrimi* – thereby rendering the city as a space made up of multiple 'busiest places'. Furthermore, if, as will be argued below, we accept movement and traffic intensity to be a determining value in any hierarchy of centrality, *loci celeberrimi* are perhaps the closest we have to a Roman definition of 'centres' (but cf. Morstein-Marx 2004: 59, who argues for a 'historical and physical centrality' of the Rostra because of the senatorial decree that considered it a *locus oculatissimus* (Pliny *NH* 34.24). In contrast, the Temple of Castor and Pollux is not considered 'central', despite being a *locus celeberrimus* (Cic. *in Verr.* 2.186) and despite it serving similar purposes for the holding of *contiones* (Cic. *in Verr.* 1.129). This may reveal an underlying theoretical bias towards prioritising the visual in the 'ideology of publicity' (Morstein-Marx 2004: 9; cf. Millar 1998: 45).

The notion that movement defined place is expressed by Varro. In his discussion of the relationship between motion, body and time, he offered the following definition of place: where anything comes to a standstill, is a place (5.15, *ubi quodque consistit, locus*). This concept of place is intrinsically linked to movement, in so far as place is defined where movement is halted. In this rather narrow sense, place is *a/the* destination; defined by the absence of movement. This definition is related to movement in so far as, being the end result where movement comes to a standstill, it is fundamentally defined as the place where one would move *to*. However, Varro's definition of place as where anything *consistit*, denies the street its role as a place in its own right; rendering it, instead, as merely the passage between other *loci* (Le Corbusier might agree, but Lefebvre would strongly object!). This might account for the relative neglect of the notion that streets can be considered central places within the Roman city. If they were not *loci*, they can hardly have been *loci celeberrimi*.

Yet this final point is demonstrably inaccurate (cf. Seneca, *ad. Marc* 16.2 on the Sacra Via as a *locus celeberrimus*). Indeed, in a preceding passage, Varro defines place as: where it is in motion, is place (5.11, *ubi agitur; locus*). Similarly, in attempting to tie motion, place and body together in their proper relationship, he states: nor is there motion where there is not place and body, because the one is that which is moved, the other is where (5.12, *neque motis, ubi non locus et corpus, quod alterum est quod movetur, alterum ubi*). In this reading, place is defined by movement; it is the place where things move and, consequently, a *via* might justifiably, if not explicitly, be called a *locus*.

Place is thus defined as both where things move and where things have stopped moving. These two definitions are the opposite ends of our general descriptions of social practice. Varro's definition of place, unfortunately the only surviving etymology of the word, is one of apparent contradiction between the most fundamental characteristics of the movement. This is not necessarily a Varronian error. It is unlikely that he would offer two definitions, one antithetical to the other, within 22 lines and within the same general discussion of place. More plausibly, this apparent contradiction shows the overlap between social practice and the role of movement in defining place. For instance, a place is considered 'busy' because it has traffic passing through it, but the fact that this traffic is moving *through* it means that the place, itself, is not inherently busy; this definition is reliant on patterns that are, quite literally, transitory.

From Varro's definitions we see the basic dynamic of movement in determining place – is this a place one moves *to*, or a place one moves *through*? From Varro, albeit in his less than precise way, both can be considered *loci*. The same question can be extended to *loci celeberrimi* – are these destinations or routes? Pliny the Younger's description of a statue *in celeberrimo loco* (2.7.6-9) is prefaced by his eagerness to look at it both as he stops and as he passes it, as he goes along elsewhere – thereby demonstrating that this place, whilst a destination itself, is also on a route. Straightforward though it may seem, the distinction between movement through and movement to is one of the fundamental criteria in evaluating centrality that has, hitherto, gone unexplored. It is important for whether or not a street can rightly be considered a centre, and which of the variables in social practice is given more weight in urban hierarchies of place. This demonstrates the usefulness of defining centrality not as the apex of monumental architectures or the places with the greatest accumulation of civic infrastructural buildings, but as the place characterised by a certain intensity of movement – that most likely to be the scene for social interaction. To repeat Lefebvre, centrality is movable.

In looking at multiple centres, rather than one, it is worth ending with a speech by the Greek orator Aelius Aristides; delivered to the Imperial court in Rome in late A.D. 155 (Thomas 2007: 131). Early in the oration, as is common in Aristides' other panegyric speeches concerned with specific cities, Rome's geography and physical characteristics are reviewed. It is in this context that we find the key point: 'Wherever in the city one is, nothing prevents him from being in its centre all the same' (26.7).

Comparing this to Athens, to which Aristides delivered a speech for the Panathenaic festival, again in A.D. 155, we see that his conceptualisation of Rome's urban fabric is strikingly different. Athens is described in a series of overlapping centralities. Greece is the centre of the world; Attica is the centre of Greece; Athens is the centre of Attica; and, finally, the Acropolis is the centre of Athens (1.16). This focus on the representational space of the Acropolis 'in the midst of the city' is noticeably different to Rome; whose own central hills – the Capitoline or Palatine – go unnoticed in the lengthy oration. Instead, Aristides' comments on Rome bear greater comparison

with his discussions of Smyrna – to which he delivered two orations, first in 157, then in 179. In these speeches, Aristides initially describes Smyrna as dominated by a single, central avenue – the Sacred Way – which crossed the city from west to east, ‘from temple to temple, from hill to hill’ (17.10). Moreover, along this topography, Smyrna’s greatest characteristic was the harmony displayed throughout its urban form; where each part of the city formed part of a consistent, compatible whole (17.9). Yet, on looking closer, at individual streets, junctions and precincts, there is a withdrawal from this statement; a contradiction between urban grid and social practice – ‘I am close to saying what I denied before’, Smyrna has, instead, ‘many cities’ in the compass of its grid; focussed on ‘avenues like market places, intersecting one another four times’ (17.11). It is at this level of spatial resolution, not that of the Acropolis, to which Aristides equates the city of Rome with its endless, multiple centres.

This definition of centrality is based on streets and intersections throughout the urban landscape (cf. Ziolkowski 1996). It is evidence that Aristides and his contemporaries – remembering that he was writing for the Roman imperial court and not for ‘Greeks, ignorant of the city’s topography’ (Ziolkowski 2004: 31) – recognised that urban social practice is generated by and sustains particular arrangements of urban infrastructure. The methodological and interpretative implications of this reading are primarily twofold. First, the middle of the city and the centre of the city are not necessarily analogous. As stated before, the middle is primarily topographic or map-based, whereas centrality is social. One is based on the physical layout of the urban grid (however irregular), the other on the interaction that takes place within it. Centrality is not solely the preserve of the temple precinct – or in Roman contexts, the forum – but is found in streets and their intersections; ‘streets of every kind, some deep in the city, others at its limits’ (17.11). Lefebvre’s theories of space and urban rhythms then open the possibility of exploring the diffusion of centrality, of *loci celeberrimi*, beyond the forum to the city at large. An examination of movement in the Roman city becomes, therefore, an examination of rhythms, and of centrality.

Conclusions

In the Roman city, centrality was defined according to relative patterns of movement throughout the city, rather than on one ‘central’ space, as has been the case in Roman archaeology. Of course, we cannot afford to ignore such ‘representations of space’ in our discussions of centrality. However much we might agree with the general trend toward elucidating ‘the everyday’, it cannot be a case of opening one door whilst shutting another. To ignore conceptual, ideological, symbolic centres would be to ignore a fundamental element of Lefebvre’s spatial triad. Representations of space afford us the opportunity to correlate lived space with conceived space, the better to interpret the motivations for Imperial intervention in areas of the city. A striking example is the Augustan focus on the ‘cellular structure’ of the city (Wallace-Hadrill 2003). Why was it necessary to reform the *Lares Compitalia* and implant the *Lares Augusti* into the focal points of daily life, rather than contain them in explicitly Imperial showpieces in the *fora*? It is because these ‘lived spaces’ of the users of the city had more influence on the inhabitant of Rome’s perception of their world. Therefore, ingratiating the cult into these spaces, rather than trying to impose a new ‘representation of space’ – a single, ‘central’ temple of the *Lares Augusti* – offered a more successful way to permeate society (cf. Laurence 1991).

Such urban change links all three of Lefebvre's spatial elements, which should not be approached as separate producers of space but as complementary. It is not necessary to imply causality from one to the other, in a linear way from practice to concept, although this is often the most easily identifiable in the archaeological and literary record. For instance, changing a street so that it is blocked to wheeled traffic is to change 'spatial practice'. This, in turn, means that space can no longer be used in the same way, and different patterns of use arise. Finally, because of this new pattern of use, the concept of that space is changed. Changing perceptions of the *fora* in response to changes in architecture and social practice are yet to receive detailed treatment but offer considerable opportunity. For example, the perception of the Forum Romanum changed once the Forum Iulium was built alongside it, as in Cassius Dio (43.22.2); 'it increased the reputation of the other so that that was called the Great Forum', a name which survives in the Regionary Catalogues. Similarly, explaining the development of an inherent logic of inaccessibility for later 'public' spaces (cf. La Rocca 2001: 211) demands further attention.

To some extent, this means thinking with Lefebvre against Lefebvre, or at least against his notions of central space in the city of Rome. As stated above, Lefebvre imagined the forum as a space encumbered by objects but, nevertheless, somehow constant in its definition and its relation to the rest of the city. However, every other facet of his spatial theory would question this and, indeed, reject it. As archaeologists with an increasing body of empirically observable data about infrastructure and chronological change, we can use such data to inform our rethinking of space in the Roman city. What is required is sensitivity to Roman concepts and understanding of the ways in which urban spaces were produced maintained and redefined, as well as physically remodelled. 'The path marked out by these concepts thus opens itself onto finer analyses. To be undertaken' (Lefebvre 2004: 99).

Institute of Archaeology & Antiquity, University of Birmingham

Acknowledgements

I thank Jeremy Hartnett and Hanna Stöger for the invitation to take part in their session, the TRAC committee in the Netherlands and all fellow delegates. This paper has benefited from discussions with Neil Allies, Ray Laurence, Francesco Trifiló, Diana Spencer, Simon Esmonde Cleary, Penny Goodman and the anonymous referees; *gratias vobis ago*. All errors are my own. I am grateful to the University of Birmingham for funding my PhD research, my parents for all their support, and Amy, for allowing our 'holiday' in Rome to turn into an exhausting research trip. This paper is dedicated to my grandfather, who died during its completion.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

LTVR = Steinby, E.M. (ed.) 1993-2000. *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, 6 vols. Rome: Edizioni Quasar.

Ancient Sources

All translations are from the Loeb Classical Library with the exception of the following:

- Aelius Aristides (Translated by C.A. Behr 1986) *The Complete Works, vol. 2. Orations XVII–LIII*. London: Heinemann.
- Isidore (Translated by S.A. Barney *et al.* 2006) *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Menander Rhetor (Translated by D.A. Russell and N.G. Wilson 1981) *Menander Rhetor*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Modern Sources

- Allison, P.M. 2001. Using the material and written sources: turn of the millennium approaches to Roman domestic space. *American Journal of Archaeology* 105: 181–208.
- Clarke, K. 1999. *Between Geography and History: Hellenistic Constructions of the Roman World*. Oxford: Oxford Classical Monographs.
- Ciancio Rossetto, P. 2006. Il nuovo frammento della *Forma Severiana* relativo al Circo Massimo. In R. Meneghini and R. Santagneli Valenzani (eds.) *Formae Urbis Romae: Nuovi frammenti di Pianta Marmorea dallo scavo dei Fori Imperiali*. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider: 127–142.
- Coarelli, F. 1976/77. Ara Saturni, mundus, senaculum: la parte occidentale del foro in età arcaica. *Dialoghi di Archeologia* 9-10: 346–377.
- Coarelli, F. 1995. s.v. “Forum Romanum (fino alla prima età repubblicana)”. *LTVR* II: 313–325.
- Coarelli, F. 1996. s.v. “Umbilicus Romae”. *LTVR* V: 95–96.
- Coarelli, F. 1999. L'edilizia pubblica in Roma in età tetrarchia. In W.V. Harris (ed.) *The Transformations of Urbs Roma in Late Antiquity*. Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 33. Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology: 23–34.
- Coarelli, F. (Translated by J.J. Clauss and D.P. Harmon) 2007. *Rome and Environs: An Archaeological Guide*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- De Certeau, M. (Translated by S.F. Rendall) 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dilke, O.A.W. 1998. *Greek and Roman Maps*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Dyson, S.L. and Prior, R.E. 1995. Horace, Martial and Rome: Two Outsiders Read the Ancient City, *Arethusa* 28: 245–263.
- Elden, S. 2004. *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible*. London: Continuum.
- Gros, P. 2005. Le rôle du peuple de Rome dans le définition, l'organisation et le déplacement des lieux de la convergence sous l'empire. In G. Urso (ed.) *Popolo e potere nel mondo antico*. Pisa: ETS: 191–214.
- Haselberger, L. 1997. Architectural Likenesses: models and plans of architecture in classical antiquity. *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 10: 77–94.
- Haselberger, L. (Translated by A. Thein) 2007. Urbem Adornare: Die Stadt Rom Und Ihre Gestaltumwandlung Unter Augustus/ Rome's Urban Metamorphosis Under Augustus. Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 64. Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology.
- Haselberger, L. *et al.* 2002. *Mapping Augustan Rome*. Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 50. Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology.
- Hinard, F. and Royo, M. (eds.) 1991. *Rome: l'espace urbain et ses représentations*. Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne.
- Hitchcock, L. 2008. *Theory for Classics: A Student's Guide*. London: Routledge.
- Huelsen, C. 1914. La rappresentazione degli edifici palatini nella ‘Forma Urbis’. *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia, Dissertazioni* 11: 101–120.
- Jacobs, J. 1961. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. London: Vintage

- La Rocca, E. 2001. La nuova immagine dei fori Imperiali: appunti in margine agli scavi. *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 108: 171–213.
- La Rocca, E. 2006. Passeggiando intorno ai Fori Imperiali. In L. Haselberger and J. Humphrey (eds.) *Imaging Ancient Rome: Documentation – Visualization – Imagination*. Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 61. Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology: 120–143.
- Lagapoulos, A.P. 2008. The symbolic meaning of the Vitruvian city. In P.P.A. Funari, R.S. Garraffoni and B. Letalien (eds.) *New Perspectives on the Ancient World: Modern perceptions, ancient representations*. British Archaeological Reports International Series 1782. Oxford: Archaeopress: 79–88.
- Laurence, R. 1991. The Urban *vicus*: the spatial organisation of power in the Roman city. In E. Herring, R. Whitehouse and J. Wilkins (eds.) *Papers of the Fourth Conference of Italian Archaeology, vol. 1*. London: Accordia Research Centre: 145–150.
- Laurence, R. 1997. Space and Text. In R. Laurence and A. Wallace-Hadrill (eds.) *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*. Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 22. Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology: 7–14.
- Laurence, R. 2004. The uneasy dialogue between ancient history and archaeology. In E.W. Sauer (ed.) *Archaeology and Ancient History: Breaking Down the Boundaries*. London: Routledge: 99–113.
- Laurence, R. 2008. City Traffic and the Archaeology of Roman Streets From Rome to Pompeii. In D. Mertens (ed.) *Stadtverkehr in der Antiken Welt. Internationales Kolloquium zur 175-Jahrfeier des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Rom, 21. bis 23. April 2004*, Palilia 18. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag.
- Le Corbusier (Translated by F. Etchells) 1931. *Towards a New Architecture*. London: John Rodker.
- Lefebvre, H. (Translated by D. Nicholson-Smith) 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lefebvre, H. (Translated and edited by E. Kofman and E. Lebas) 1996. *Writings on Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lefebvre, H. (Translated by R. Bononno) 2003. *The Urban Revolution*. London: The University of Minnesota Press.
- Lefebvre, H. (Translated by S. Elden and G. Moore) 2004. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. London: Continuum
- Lim, R. 1999. People as power: games, munificence, and contested topography. In W.V. Harris (ed.) *The Transformations of Urbs Roma in Late Antiquity*. Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 33. Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology: 265–281.
- Lott, J.B. 2004. *The Neighbourhoods of Augustan Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mari, Z. 1996. s.v. “Miliarium Aureum”, *LTVR* III: 250–251.
- Meneghini, R. and Santangeli Valenzani, R. 2007. *I Fori Imperiali. Gli scavi del Comune di Roma (1991–2007)*. Rome: Viviani Editore.
- Millar, F. 1998. *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Morstein-Marx, R. 2004. *Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Late Roman Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nicolet, C. 1991. *Space, Geography and Politics in the Early Roman Empire*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Purcell, N. 1995a. s.v. “Forum Romanum (Republican Period)”. *LTVR* II: 325–336.
- Purcell, N. 1995b. s.v. “Forum Romanum (Imperial Period)”. *LTVR* II: 336–342.
- Purcell, N. 2007. Urban Spaces and Central Places: The Roman World. In S.E. Alcock and R. Osborne (eds.) *Classical Archaeology*. Oxford: Blackwell: 182–202.
- Richardson, L. jr. 1980. The Approach to the Temple of Saturn in Rome. *American Journal of Archaeology* 84: 51–62.
- Richardson, L. jr. 1991. *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Rodríguez-Almeida, E. 2002. *Formae Urbis Antiquae: le mappe marmoree di Roma tra la Repubblica e Settimio Severo*. Rome: Edizioni Quasar.

- Rykwert, J. 1988. *The Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Shields, R. 1999. *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics*. London: Routledge.
- Soja, E.W. 2000. *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Spencer, D.J. 2007. Rome at a gallop: Livy, on not gazing, jumping, or toppling into the void. In D.H.J. Lamour and D.J. Spencer (eds.) *The Sites of Rome. Time, Space, Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 61–101.
- Taub, L. 1993. The Historical Function of the *Forma Urbis Romae*. *Imago Mundi* 45: 9–19.
- Thomas, E.V. 2007. *Monumentality and the Roman Empire: Architecture in the Antonine Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Trifiló, F. 2008. Power, Architecture and Community in the Distribution of Honorary Statues in Roman Public Space. In C. Fenwick, M. Wiggins and D. Wythe (eds.) *TRAC 2007: Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, London 2007*. Oxford: Oxbow Books: 109–120.
- Trimble, J. 2007. Visibility and Viewing on the Severan Marble Plan. In S. Swain, S. Harrison and J. Elsner (eds.) *Severan Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 368–384.
- Vasaly, A. 1993. *Representations: Images of the World in Ciceronian Oratory*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Vlassopoulos, K. 2007. Free Spaces: Identity, Experience and Democracy in Classical Athens. *Classical Quarterly* 57.1: 33–52.
- Wallace-Hadrill, A. 2003. The Streets of Rome as a Representation of Imperial Power. In L. de Blois *et al.* (eds.) *The Representation and Perception of Imperial Power. Proceedings of the third Workshop of the international network "Impact and Empire (Roman Empire, c.200 B.C. – A.D. 476)", Netherlands Institute in Rome, March 20–23, 2002*. Amsterdam: Gieben: 189–206.
- Wiseman, T.P. 2007. Andrea Carandini and *Roma Quadrata*, *Accordia Research Papers* 10: 103–126.
- Ziolkowski, A. 1996. Of Streets and Crossroads: The Location of the Carinae. *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 41: 121–151.
- Ziolkowski, A. 2004. *Sacra Via: Twenty Years After*. The Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplement 3. Warsaw: Journal of Juristic Papyrology.