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A Day and a Night in the People's Theatre
A Rhythmanalysis of Gentrification and Everyday Acts of Resilience in Budapest

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Abstract:
Budapest's VIII district is undergoing widespread and divergent forms of gentrification. The process is driven by the market, spurred on by middle-class resident's demands, mediated by the local state and administered by all of the above and more. These often global processes and their local effects are revealed through a rhythm-focused ethnography of one of the district's most well known streets. This 'rhythmanalysis' uncovers the temporal and spatial aspects of gentrification as well as everyday acts of resilience. The article concludes that 1) rhythmanalysis is a useful methodological tool for research into the multiple temporalities and spatialities of gentrification; and 2) it is constructive to explain the less than successful purification of the street's public places through the term 'everyday acts of resilience' as it a) metaphorically highlights the disaster like qualities of gentrification; b) focuses on the public acts of the body in space and time; and c) is clearly distinguishable from conscious acts of resistance.

Key words: gentrification, rhythmanalysis, Budapest, time and space, resilience, rhythms, body

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> Political power dominates or rather seeks to dominate space; whence the importance of monuments and squares...Through a certain use of time the citizen resists the state. A struggle for appropriation is therefore unleashed, in which rhythms play a major role. Through them civil, therefore social, time seeks to and succeeds in withdrawing itself from linear, unirhythmic, measuring/measured state time. Thus public space, the space of representation, becomes 'spontaneously' a place for walks and encounters, intrigues, diplomacy, deals and negotiations – it theatralises itself.
> *Lefebvre (2004: 96)*

> Kiss me where the sun don't shine,
> The past was yours but the future's mine,
> You're all out of time.
> *The Stone Roses, She Bangs the Drums*

Népszínház utca is a street that begs to be the subject of study. Its name, People's Theatre Street, produces expectations that are fully met. Its surroundings are a mix of shops, pubs, hotels, homeless shelters, churches, trams, a building site and a market; it is a heavily utilised public space with a character, colour and attitude that animates the area. It cuts right through Budapest's VIII district, Józsefváros, a part of town that is as notorious as it is diverse; the same state agencies demarcate one part a ghetto, whilst celebrate another for its rich history[1].

Driven by the market, spurred on by middle-class resident's demands, mediated by the state and administered by all of the above and more, Népszínház utca is rapidly changing. Though the imagined futures and relative power of different groups that imagine these futures are markedly different, in general it can be said that the street is undergoing a process of attempted purification as part of the wider gentrification of the district. However, as this ethnography in and around the street reveals, Népszínház utca is resilient to cleansing of its public places; the everyday activities of those who live work and play in the street undermine, to some extent, the process of gentrification.

To help understand the persistent play that is underway in the People's Theatre, I first turn to the

1 This paper is based on intermittent research conducted over one year from May 2008. The work that that forms the backbone of the ethnography however is from an intensive one-month period in April 2009.

literature on gentrification and discuss its relevance to urban change in Budapest. I argue that to understand the everydayness of gentrification an approach that analyses both the spatial and temporal aspects of this process is needed; an approach that utilises the insights of the 'spatial turn' to escape the teleological underpinnings of linear historical time, whilst recognising the importance of the intertwined temporalities of repetition and change. With this in mind, I turn to Lefebvre's 'rhythmanalysis' (2004). I then introduce certain processes that are underway in the district, with a focus on attempts by the local state to remake the district. In the third section a rhythmanalysis of Népszínház utca reveals the everydayness of this process – I choose a day as the temporally bound unit of analysis so as to hone in on the daily rhythmic clashes that gentrification produces. I suggest that gentrification can be understood as a drawn out disaster for certain groups in the district. Borrowing the term *resilience* from ecology, I use it part-metaphorically to suggest that the public practices on display in the street are not acts of political resistance, but nevertheless constitute obstacles to the multiple actors that are gentrifying the district. Thus my argument is twofold: firstly I argue that an ethnographically inclined rhythmanalysis is a novel methodological approach that allows a deeper understanding of the day-to-day aspects of the comparatively long process of gentrification; and secondly, that it is useful to refer the obstacles to gentrification in the street as *everyday acts of resilience* as this term highlights the disaster like effects of the process, focuses on the acts of the body in space and time and is clearly distinguishable from conscious acts of resistance.

1. The Rhythms of the Market at the Urban Scale

I take a broad definition of gentrification, namely the class-based colonisation of a poorer neighbourhood and the reinvestment in (including demolition and complete rebuilding of) housing stock. This does not mean that the results of gentrification are always detrimental to a city or

district. Indeed, the ‘social mixing’ that leads to the arrival of middle class residents is certainly often welcomed by local governments as a tool for ‘improving’ an area (Lees, 2008), which may not even lead to gentrification-induced displacement if social housing is provided close by to newly built 'middle-income' housing (Rose, 2004). Benefits of gentrification, such as increased property prices and improved services, are openly celebrated on the websites of real estate companies[2] and hotels[3]. And whilst this may not be overly surprising, it is important to note that the same benefits are often welcomed by local residents (Freeman, 2006). Having said this, in spite of certain perceived improvements, social mixing is more often than not one sided – the rich into poor areas (Smith, 2002: 98). Moreover, it is accepted uncritically by local governments despite evidence of deliberate segregation and seclusion on part of the newly arriving middle class residents (Lees, 2008), possibly due to the false assumption by local governments that there is equality amongst residents (Bloomley, 2004: 99). It is not surprising therefore that a review of all English-language empirical research between 1964 and 2001 (Atkinson, 2002) revealed that for a majority of the studied districts, the results of gentrification were largely negative and included displacement, loss of social diversity, increased conflict and loss of affordable housing.

The causes of gentrification are no less controversial than the effects. However, there seems little point in getting bogged down in the tired 'economic' vs. 'cultural' debate (Slater, 2006), but rather focusing on attempting to offer a novel approach for understanding the effects of the process[4]. Skipping the debate and moving straight to the conclusion, this research was framed from the position that gentrification is made possible by economic factors, as capital seeks to maximise profit

2 www.erkelhaz.hu retrieved 22/5/2009

3 http://www.expedia.co.uk/Jozsefvaros-Budapest-Hotels.0-n6051657-0.Travel-Guide-Filter-Hotels retrieved 22/5/2009

4 For better or worse, summaries of gentrification literature often begin by setting apart in an antagonistic fashion those who see the causes of gentrification as either ‘economic’ or ‘cultural’ (for example, see: Atkinson, 2003) with the root of the argument based on a back-to-the-city movement of capital versus a back-to-the-city movement of people (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005). With Neil Smith (1979, 1996, 2002) in the ‘economic corner’ and David Ley (1986, 1996) in the ‘cultural corner’ engaging in heated exchanges, the stage is well set for others to join in the academic ruckus.

in devalorised areas, but that it is given its specific form and is lubricated by changes in consumption patterns and the actors involved. It is an example of uneven development at the urban scale, given its specificity due to the long turn over period of capital in the built environment. Historically, in the US and western Europe when the inner city was still valorising, it made sense for capital to expand to the suburbs, once it had finished the process the ground rent in the inner city was low and capital moved back to the areas where the difference was greatest between the actual and potential future rent (Smith, 1979, 1996: 52-73). It is possible to trace the periodic shifts of capital in the built environment over time, as it correlates to the shifts in the wider economy, with the built environment proving an attractive investment opportunity especially in times of crisis (Harvey, 1982). Indeed, this can be called the ‘rhythm of capital’ in the built environment as reinvestment is linked to the broader rhythms of national and international economies and the availability of fresh investment opportunities after revalorisation (Smith, 1996: 86). As certain categories of the middle class begin to move into an area, the cultural value of a place is abstracted into market culture, with the new middle classes helping perceive, appreciate and consume a landscape through their cultural mediation and labour (Zukin, 1991: 205); a district is changed not just through increased house prices but also through the rhythms of the newcomers' day-to-day activities, shopping habits and desired services.

The situation in Hungary, due to its socialist legacy, was of course very different; however there are also striking similarities as well as instances of gentrification both before and after the system change. Certain patterns of disinvestment and reinvestment took place in Budapest, albeit for different reasons (Bodnar, 2001: 71-77) which led to a cleansing of parts of the IX district in favour of the wealthy (Sýkora, 2005) and a specific type of ‘socialist urban renewal’ taking place in the VII district (Bodnar, 2001: 79). From 1989 onwards gentrification of the historical inner city districts has accelerated (ANAH, 2009: 13), although research shows it is not limited to the traditional

‘downtown’ (see: Benedek, 2004). The state accelerated the commodification of housing through its withdrawal from the building and provision of state housing, whilst also shaping the impact of new housing developments and pushing developers into financing projects by offering cheap land in return for subsequent public or semi-public use (Bodnar and Molnar, 2009). This close-knit gentrification-facilitating interplay between state and private interests can be found in cities in many post-socialist settings. A prime example is the Moscow district of Ostozhenka where ‘entrepreneurial urban governance’ (cf. Harvey, 1989), close personal ties between city hall and developers, a relaxed attitude towards conservation and the state’s proactive role in displacement of residents played a major role in the gentrification process (Badyina and Golubchikov 2005). Józsefváros is no stranger to these processes, as can be seen through the following examination of urban change in the district.

2. Known, Drawn and Quartered

According to a report commissioned by the European Commission, the VIII. district is regarded as the most problematic in the city, “the name ‘Józsefváros’ has several negative implications for the outsiders: it means prostitution, crime, violence, Romas, homeless shelters, poverty and after all the living place of the worst off social groups.” (NEHOM, 2000, n.p.) Or to be more blunt, as Kati, a young rich women from the nice part of Buda, puts it, “it’s where civilisation ends.” However, Józsefváros is far from homogeneous. The district is spread over 685 hectares, reaching from the downtown to the start of suburbia and encompasses well-to-do areas with large spacious housing as well as crumbling government owned blocks with the highest concentration of social housing in the city. Moreover, as can be seen from the all too brief excursion into the district below, the VIII. is undergoing widespread changes including the implementation of state and quasi-state development programmes, the building of a multi-purpose 'downtown', the sanitising of public space based and the crumbling of old housing stock.

Józsefváros was divided into eleven different quarters in 2000 by the local government and Révő, a publicly owned company responsible for the rejuvenation of the district. “We did this because different parts of the district have very different data. The Palace Quarter and the Magdolna Quarter are very different in terms of unemployment, flats without amenities and flat ownership,” states György Alföldi Révő's CEO. So different approaches for the different parts of the district? “No, the same approach but different tools.” Or to put it another way, as the coordinator of the local activities of the Young Greens (ZöFi) – an NGO who have recently opened an office in the district – Móni Bálint does, “they decided which bits they could make money out of by selling and with which parts it was impossible to do so.”

Révő sits somewhere between two scales of Budapest’s local state. The city exhibits extremely autonomous governance at a district level, a result of the 1990 Act of Local Governments that gave economic, administrational and political responsibilities to the district municipalities, including control over financial management, local taxes and building permits[5]. The rejuvenation company was set up in 1997 and is owned partly by the Municipality of Józsefváros (60.9 per cent) and partly by the Municipality of the City of Budapest (39.1 per cent). Though a separate company, the independence of Révő is limited with major decisions requiring the agreement of the elected local governments. The initial work of the company was concerned for the most part with the improvement of buildings in the upmarket Palace Quarter, however research revealed that the work had done little to change the image of the district overall. Thus a strategic review in 1998 led to a focus on the most deprived part of the district from 2000 onwards with the staff roster increasing from two to twenty five (expanded to include urban planners, social workers and architects).

5 The Municipality of Józsefváros consists of a 28-member general assembly, with 10 different committees, including a Committee on Urbanism and the Environment as well as three delegated councillors specialising in urbanism, sport and youth and minorities to help the running of the council. The Municipality of the City of Budapest has 67 members and fifteen committees, including the Committee on Urban Development and Urban Image and the Committee on Large Development Projects.

Aside from the work in the Palace Quarter, which after a nine-year break started again in 2009, Rév8 has two major projects. The one of which they are “most proud” is the Magdolna Quarter Project. This socially-orientated urban rejuvenation project aims to empower the local population through employment, education and community building, as well as to renovate government-owned housing in cooperation with the tenants[6]. The project that is most well known however, is the Corvin Promenade project. Spread over 22 hectares, upon the project's completion in 2012, there will be 500,000 square metres of residential, commercial and office space and 20,000 square metres of “new public space.”[7] To make way for Corvin, 1100 flats were demolished, many of which were reportedly in poor condition and lacking in certain amenities such as private bathrooms. According to the promotional material, “Corvin Promenade will be the manifestation of a new kind of thinking regarding the utility of public spaces within the urban framework. Open, foliage-infused spaces with progressive design approaches will be most characteristic of these new places.” The ‘foliage-infused spaces’ will be manned by a team of private security personnel and monitored by security cameras, adding to the 96 state-run cameras currently watching the district.

Video cameras first started to appear on the sides of the district’s buildings in 2000. “[The local government] decided to introduce CCTV due to the large amount of crime that took place in the streets and since then, I think around 80 per cent of crime has been removed from the street,” György Alföldi states. However, others have questioned the effectiveness of CCTV in crime prevention in Budapest (see: Molnár, 2002). Even though residents are reportedly suspicious of the police – with comparative research in Budapest showing that there is a stronger desire for restricted police access to CCTV than in all other surveyed cities (Urbaneye, 2006: 47) – cameras are on the increase. Indeed, they were generally spoken about in favourable terms by my informants,

6 Encompassing around 400 individual flats, roughly 10 per cent of all the flats in the quarter.
7 www.corvinpromenade.hu retrieved 22/5/2009

especially small business owners and managers, as they have made people behave in a 'better' manner in public.

Better behaviour and a cleaner more orderly district are demanded by middle-class residents at public meetings held to promote the discuss the changes in the district. Complaints about rubbish, graffiti, kids 'hanging around using drugs' and a lack of car parking spaces were the main concerns of the residents at these meetings, many of whom were affiliated to local civic associations. Symbiotically, presentations at both meetings (one organised by Rév8, the other by the youth wing of the local socialist party MSZP) highlighted the beautification work and general sprucing up of certain areas in the district. It is through such exchanges that the class-dimension of the gentrification process can be clearly seen, with sections of the middle classes calling for a general cleaning of Józsefváros' eyesores.

Other notable 'eyesores' are the shabby three to five storey houses that make up a large section of the district's housing stock. Built sometime towards the end of the nineteenth century, they have had ambiguous futures since the system change. Though limited privatisation took place from 1969 onwards, it was the 1993 Act on Housing – which obliged the local governments to sell if the residents wanted to buy – that lead to wide scale privatisation of public rental flats in Hungary. Flats in the district were sold at a price much lower that their market value – available for only 7-15 per cent of their total market price – which although advantageous for a great number of new owners, left poorer residents without the means to pay for the upkeep of their newly owned flats, much like in other deprived parts of the city (NEHOM, 2004, n.p.). The local state in Józsefváros retained a far higher than average number of flats as of 2001, owning 26.6% of the flats in the district compared to a city average of 8.5%[8].

8 www.ksh.hu retrieved 22/5/2009. This was before the demolition of 800 state-owned flats to make way for the Corvin Promenade.

Amongst those who desire to change in the district there is a vast diversity of aims and in practices. This applies not only the differences found between middle-class residents that attend public meetings about the district, the local state, and potential and current investors, but also *within* these groups as well. Whilst this research was not ethnographic research from 'above', but rather concerned itself with the effects of the gentrification from perspective of the street, the diversity of the often conflicting are still evident. It is over simplistic to suggest that there is a seamless all-powerful amalgamation of state and capital that sweeps all before it. Rév8 is probably the best example of such an ambiguous actor, as it facilitates displacement and regeneration of working class housing from the same office, but contradictions and diversity are evident at all levels. As can be seen below, this is to some extent because of the only partial 'successful' transformation of the district. The multiple pathways of capital, state-led 'regeneration' and middle-class demands are only one side of this story; there is more to why parts of the district have proved themselves resilient to change. To uncover the practices that produce this resilience a methodology that drags global processes down to street level is needed, a methodology that analyses the multiple spatio-temporalities of gentrification.

3. Methodology: Time for Space/Space for Time

Whilst the tipping points of gentrification can be uncovered through extant historiographies, revealing the ongoing day-to-day processes requires an approach that is sensitive to the different temporalities of this spatial reordering. This is something that I believe can be done through the analysis of urban rhythms. It has been argued that despite the increased usage of space and spatiality in social theory and social sciences, the 'spatial turn' has been stunted by the unhelpful dualism created around space and time that prioritises spatiality, even amongst those who argue for

a more dynamic conception of space (May and Thrift, 2003: 2). Gentrification is clearly about space in its common sense understanding, as it is about the change in population in a specific area of a city. The importance of time is also clear, as gentrification describes change over a period of time; the different tipping points from when gentrifying pioneers first begin to arrive in an area to the more widespread displacement through the actions of real estate companies have been traced by many different studies (e.g. Monterescu, 2009; Ley, 1996; Zukin, 1982). What I am interested in understanding here however are the spatio-temporalities of everyday repetition and how, if at all, they help or hinder gentrification.

An appropriate framework through which to analyse the repetitions and differences of gentrification is Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis (2004), his unfinished project of the analysis of rhythms. This conception of rhythms is a little different from the common understanding of what constitutes a rhythm; for Lefebvre, a rhythm is produced through a dialectical triad of **space**, **time** and **energy**: whenever there is a meeting of time, space and energy, there is a rhythm (Lefebvre 2004). There are two basic oppositions of rhythms: "repetition and difference; mechanical and organic; discovery and creation; cyclical and linear; continuous and discontinuous; quantitative and qualitative . . ." (p.9). Though we can separate out these two categories when we analyse them, the world is made up of innumerable interactions between the two. From here it is possible to analyse rhythms in terms of: a) **repetition** (movements, gestures, actions, situations, differences); b) **interferences** of linear processes and cyclical processes; and c) **lifespan**, i.e. birth, growth, peak, decline and end (p. 15). In sum: the world is made up of a collection of (time-space-energy) rhythms, these rhythms are either cyclical or linear (or their corresponding categories) and can be analysed in terms of their repetitiveness, interferences and lifespans. The repetitions of everyday life increasingly come into conflict with the linear differences of gentrification; these conflicts are a window into how the rhythm of a public place changes and how it is resilient to this change. Rhythmanalyses have been

employed in other settings to explore cultural artefacts that relate to the city (Highmore, 2005), the hybrid temporalities of street performers and their environments (Simpson 2008) and as a novel way of engaging with the interrelation of time and space as people walk to work in London (Middleton 2009), but to my knowledge not in the study of gentrification.

I took the name of the street seriously; it's a theatre, and I focussed on the play, or to put it another way the visible practices of the actors as they went about their everyday lives. I spent a lot of time in the street at all times of the day and night attempting, as proposed by Lefebvre, to use my body a metronome through which a comparison could be made with the street around me (Lefebvre, 2004: 19). I also conducted 21 interviews with people who live, work or regularly use the street for one reason or another; attended two public forums for local residents on changes to the district; was present at one meeting between the residents of a condominium and the company they employ for the maintenance of the building; viewed flats just of the street as a potential buyer[9]; made in-depth interviews with informants who worked for institutions (an NGO and urban development company) to complement the wider contextual frame; and finally conducted two walking tours, one which was an organised 'alternative' tour of the district allowing foreigners to experience the slummy side of the city.

The rhythmanalysis that is follows aims to be fluid and flowing – to avoid a static representation of researcher-constructed present. The present, for Lefebvre, is only a simulacrum of a *presence* – the present is a copy that is often mistaken for presence. He describes presence as the "facts of both nature and culture, at the same time sensible, affective and moral rather than imaginary" (Lefebvre 2004:47). It is something that is felt – embodied – not represented. It has a wholly temporal nature, it concerned with movement through time. This is in contrast to the present, which is a representation of a presence; an attempt at fixing or freezing temporal flows.

[9] This is somewhat ethically dubious, but all requests for interviews were ignored.

> (a) presence survives and imposes itself by introducing a rhythm (a time). The act of rhythmanalysis [le geste rythmanalytique] transforms everything into presences, including the present, grasped and perceived as such. The act [geste] does not imprison itself in the ideology of the thing. It perceives the thing in the proximity of the present, an instance of the present, just as the image is another instance. Thus the thing makes itself *present* but not *presence*. On the contrary, the act of rhythmanalysis integrates these things – this wall, this table, these trees – in a dramatic becoming, in an ensemble full of meaning, transforming them no longer into diverse things, but into presences. (p. 23 original emphasis)

In an attempt to bring the presences of the street to life I take inspiration from Handleman (2004) and write from a 'prospective perspective', following individuals through time (from the beginning of the analysis forwards) and space (in the various locations they move) thus escaping linearity, and producing an analysis that resplendent with the surprises of life. The meaning embedded in the following analysis is paradoxical, plural and diverse. It resides in its rhythm, and is uncovered playfully and repetitively, thus challenging liner conceptions of historical time (cf. Ermarth, 1992).

3. A Rhythmanalysis of Népszínház utca

Early Morning

Dawn breaks on a sunny spring day in Népszínház utca. As the sun casts its first warming rays over the tops of buildings, the ‘Beer Corner’ pub responds to its call, whisking up its metal shutters with a clatter, disturbing the slumber of a sleeping homeless man on the bench close by, but ready and open for those who need a drink at **6 a.m**. Street cleaners begin to arrive, sweeping away the debris from the day before, their metal dustpans scraping on the floor, as they steadily work. The homeless man awakes, stretches and heads over to the sunny side of the street, appreciative of the sun’s warmth after a long night in the open. A handful of elderly gentlemen make their way out of the homeless shelter on the adjoining Alföldi utca and take up their regular place on the corner, some roll cigarettes whilst others pass comment on passers by to pass the time.

“You can learn all you need to know about Népszínház utca,” says Orsi a shop assistant who has worked on the street for six months but lives elsewhere in Budapest, “through the fact it’s next to a homeless shelter.” She complains that the homeless urinate on the street. The sun supports her argument, heating up the stale urine, so it momentarily twitches the nostril hairs before the smell of freshly baked strudels overpowers it. “Of course I’ve never had any trouble in this street,” Orsi admits.

Istvan walks past chatting before stopping at a rubbish bin and rummaging through the contents. He is looking for, among other things, empty bottles of alcohol that can be redeemed for money. There is nothing on Népszínház utca this morning, like most mornings, so he heads away from the street towards another part of the city in search of bottles. He crosses the street, past the front of the Atlantic Hotel and out of sight. A manager from the hotel, who has been working in the street for a little over a year is far more sympathetic towards the poorer residents, “they are not really bad people, just a bit strange” she says. Some guests from the hotel have decided to start the day early and quickly make their way to the tram stop that will take them to the ‘city centre’ in only two stops. It is a weekday, so a tram clatters by every few minutes. They do not wait long.

There are two hotels on Népszínház utca, the Atlantic and the Atlas, and they both arrived within a few months of each other in 2005. Before both the hotels, the land was flat, two empty spaces in the middle of the street utilised as car parks. Before the cars there were structures, “one or two storey buildings in really bad condition,” remembers an elderly resident “but they started to fall down by themselves. The people moved out when it became dangerous.” The receptionist at Hotel Atlas, the more upmarket of the two reports, “it’s not a nice street and we don’t want to talk about it” before kindly pointing to the door and out onto part of the street with a well-cleaned pavement and no

benches upon which to sit, unlike to on other parts of Népszínház utca.

Late Morning

Back across the road, one of the workers from the Chinese clothing store is busy washing away the urine from the front of her shop. Another little patch of clean at **9 a.m.** each morning. It looks like it will be another hot day and, if as usual, she decides to sit out the front of the shop chatting to her colleagues it is better if the ground is clean. A young couple pass her by on the way to work, saying hello to their elderly neighbour who is already returning home from a morning trip. As the shop owner brushes vigorously, water splashing around her trainers, the CCTV camera directly opposite her swivels inside its protective casing, making a sharp mechanical noise barely audible over the growing din of the morning street. The sound of crime fighting in action.

Inside one of the small shops that sell soft drinks, snacks and bread but mostly alcohol, a shopkeeper recounts his recent experience with crime.

“About 2 weeks ago I had a problem here. I beat someone.”

You beat someone?

“Yes, yes, yes. I never did it before in my life; I've never beat anybody. But he was a drunkard, very drunk and he came in here and I told him, ‘man I have work, yes’ and he said ‘what do you want you son of a bitch!’ He told me very, very, very bad things. So I told him, ‘okay, go away!’ And he beat me, you know? Yes, because I didn’t realise what he was doing. So I gave it to him, one here and one there. He was very small, you know?” The shopkeeper winks over the top of the tic tac rack. “I called the police and the policeman who came was a very, very, very good man. Yes. Very, good man. We knew the drunkard that beat me was in the pub next door and so he told me, ‘you have a big shop here, close the door, bring him in and we’ll beat him together.’”

And did you?

"No, I'd beat him already, so I told them to forget it. But the policeman was a very good man."

Midday

As it approaches **12 p.m.**, the sun rises still higher in the sky and the light catches the enormous cranes that swing to an altogether different rhythm, high above the hole in the ground that was once Köztársaság tér and will one day be a station on the new line of the Metro. They are busy "Building a New World." Or so claim the billboards that surround it, as well as the other ten stops of the 195 billion Forint (680 million Euro) project. The billboards and the website, also provide the obligatory computer designed graphic representation of what the station will look like when completed. Spacious, clean, modern and positively sparkling, the vision is noticeably different from the reality in the closest Metro station Blaha Lujza tér. On Népszínház utca the 'new world' of the metro will be especially beneficial because, at least according to the project's website, the "metro can play a significant role in the development of the region... The internal part of Józsefváros can get an unprecedented chance of integration. Property and apartment prices will increase, and the region can finally take part in the development of Budapest."[10]

It is getting on for **2 p.m.** and Marci moves with speed through space from one shop to another. Marci is interested in the movement of people and the predicted increase in property prices, as he owns a number of shops on the street as well as living on Népszínház utca. "I came in April 2000 to look at the street. I came in the morning and came again the next day. Right away I realised that the street had good movement," the businessman says. "Lots of people were moving about the street, lots of walking. The people were not snobby, but normal people." Nine years later he owns two small shops and a larger discount store with a pizza/gyros fast food counter attached.
"For people who invest in small capital like me, we hope the business will be worth more over time. People with more money can arrive, buy the lot and I would be happy."

[10] www.metro4.hu retrieved 22/5/2009

So that is the plan?

“No, no. I just want to rest a bit.”

But there is no rest for the bottle collectors. Istvan enters the shop with a handful of empty bottles, which are duly traded in for (less) full bottles.

Afternoon

In the ‘At Home’ pub the same people that came by for a drink yesterday at **4 p.m.** come again at the same time and greet the friendly bar lady. She looks a little tired of the constant chatter of the pub’s loud mouth who, after boring her with his tales, turns to a young guy who tries in vain to fill out his betting slip as he is dragged into a long conversation. A married couple sit in the corner. The husband sits clutching the shopping bags, as if to make for a quick exit, his attention solely on his beer whilst his wife talks at him through the cigarette smoke.

Back out in on the street two 'real' drinkers sit on the doorstep of the flower shop, sharing a plastic bottle of white wine. “Sometimes the drunk guys come in here to buy flowers for the ladies who work in the bar if they’ve done something to annoy them,” laughs the shop assistant who lives and works in the area. So there is never any trouble?

“No, no. It gets me really angry when people say the VIII. district is bad,” the owner of the shop joins in. “I live in Buda and it is exactly the same there. I’ve had this shop for fifteen years and have never had any trouble. It is a really nice place.” She looks out the window and nods knowingly, as a young professional couple pass the shop, bags laden with food from the recently opened delicatessen 5 minutes walk away.

Evening

The sun is starting to go down on the street, shops start locking up for the night and Istvan has

returned from his long trek around the city collecting bottles. He has come to cash them in at one of the small shops. He has two black eyes and other bruising around his face, but is in a good mood to sit down and give his many opinions on life. A fierce intelligence burns underneath his grubby exterior as he offers up pearls of wisdom, “Moscow didn’t just steal Hungary’s money, but it’s brain and heart too,” “the communist system broke up society into lots of little parts so everyone has to fight each other, this is the problem now,” “sociology is a waste of time, you’ll never get a job with it. Cultural anthropology is much better.” Istvan does not live or work in the street, he works begging in Astoria Metro station and lives a long tram ride away in a shared house in the X. district.

At the top of a hill sits the house in which Istvan lives. Broken objects lie in the garden and piles of salvaged material are stacked high inside. The house is divided in two, with a family on one side and Istvan and László sharing rooms on the other. The area has cycle lanes that people use for recreational purposes, large gardens and is a peaceful and relaxing place. László, complains that Istvan, “never usually spends time at home, that’s why he’s not here now, he’ll be hanging around the centre.” László is lonely and bored. The owner of a failed carpet-beating business he barely survives on the 3000 Forints a month he has left after paying his rent. “I’m alone,” he repeats over and over. Meanwhile, Istvan is drawn to Népszínház utca.

Back on Népszínház many shops and pubs are shutting up sharp at **10 p.m.** but one is staying open later. “We used to have a 24 hour shop,” explains Marci “but then the local government made a law banning the selling of alcohol after 11 in the evening, so we now close at 12.” As he says so, a 30-something man in a suit pops into the shop just before the alcohol ban kicks in, making his way home from a long day in the office. There used to be a bench outside the front of the shop, but Marci asked the local government to remove it. “When we were 24 hours a lot of the people from the homeless shelter used to sit here all night and drink. If they are drunk they are not allowed

inside the shelter. So they would sometimes stay all night and it was dirty in the morning. So I asked the government and they took it away."

The Night

The light of the moon adds to the dim streetlights as a shiny new tram that operates along the ring-road makes its way down Népszínház utca towards the depot where it will spend the night, momentarily sounding out of place with its air conditioning and polite notices in English. Three cars pull up on the corner of Népszínház and Alföldi, playing bawdy dance music on state of the art speakers, until they get restless and leave to find another corner to hang out on. A police car pulls up and asks to see the ID of a young Roma guy. He wearily hands it over and waits whilst they check with the station if he has any outstanding issues. The bored look on his face shows that he is far from worried and this has happened more than once before.

The night rolls on. It is **2 a.m.** and one man cannot make it home in time and decides to urinate in the street. Unluckily for the owners of the Chinese shop, their door provides the perfect spot again, just hidden from the street but not too far away from it either. It is **4 a.m.** and a homeless man who was too drunk for the hostel stirs on his bench as a cyclist whizzes past. It is **5 a.m.** and the anthropologist is cold and sleepy as he sits on an empty bench, waiting for something to write in his field diary or at least for the sun to rise again and put some warmth back in his bones, ready for another day in the People's Theatre.

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And the street goes on. Despite attempted orderings the **cyclical** rhythm of the sun is still the final arbitrator of the start of the day for many, no matter how tram times, shop opening hours or work

schedules might timetable the street's life and eat into the night. This is especially the case for those who spend the night in the street. The lack of paid work or permanent home does not mean the lack of **repetition** of daily cycles however; many begin the daily hunt for bottles, whilst others meet friends at the same corner around about the same time everyday. The body gets tired, thirsty and hungry; bodily rhythms drive the pursuit of rest, drink and food. Sometimes there is a need to empty a bladder. In amongst the urine of resilience two buildings came to the **end** of their linear life. The rhythm died and in its place, first two small scale entrepreneurs organised car parks, before large-scale capital investment came to start new **linear** rhythms on the street.

Népszínház utca is an animated and animating street, a street that still draws characters such as Istvan, who despite quieter more relaxing options – free from black eyes – chooses the street as part of his daily rhythm. The different types of rhythms, the mix of different characters creating the **polyrhythmic**, draws him. Yet here is the perfect example of how the lively, animating rhythms of a person are slowly pushed into **decline**, they are measured and tamed, benches are removed and alcohol sales banned, the rhythmic **everyday repetitions** of Istvan clashing with the rhythmic **differences** of sanitising change. Yet still he comes, the street has life enough in it yet. And the street goes on.

Meanwhile the planned transport hub revels in its abstract conceptions of time and space. It promises a timetabling of the urban as the metro arrives at .07 .10 .13 .16 .19 .21. and expands outwards, as people rush to catch the metro at .13 to whisk them to their downtown office. The **quantified** rhythms emanate from the timetabled space. The new station enters into a relationship not only with the labour force but also the ground rent in the street and its surroundings. Pushing up the prices, edging the district towards the **birth** of the long, slow rhythm of investment and valorisation. However the metro still refuses to arrive on time, delays in construction, problems

with finance and a massive question mark surround the project. Ground rent wavers, new houses fail to fill their rooms. And the street goes on.

The street goes on because of what I term here as *everyday acts of resilience* – these are repetitive public practices of the body that undermine gentrification by theatricality challenging the attempted ordering and purifying of public space. The body is the first point of relation to the city. The body *is* experience – we perceive the world in relation to our body because we have an immediate awareness of our body as it exists towards the world; the world does not come ready made but rather is dialectically constructed through the body's relationship with that external to it (Merleau-Ponty 1992:67-174). In *Rhythmanalysis* Lefebvre suggests the concept of 'dressage', inspired by animal trainers and military drills, as a way of thinking about how rhythms might be embodied. During the discussion on dressage he remarks, in one of his more polemical moments, "[i]t has often been said: 'Capitalism makes masters and slaves, the rich and the poor, the propertied and the proletariat . . .'. This is not wrong, but it does not suffice for measuring the evil power of capital. It constructs and erects itself on a contempt for life and from this foundation: the body, the time of living." (Lefebvre 2004:51). The rhythms gentrification are embodied – the interventions that order and sanitise public space 'dress' the district inhabitants' everyday lives.

But the body is a powerful entity, it constructs all that goes before and behind it; one does not exist in space and time without the body, moreover it orientates itself towards the world in the context of "I can" as the central point of intentionality in the world. We make a place by moving through it as possessors of 'mobile spatial fields' stretching out from the body in certain places or whence moving through them (Munn 1996) – places do not only exist as part of a landscape but also simultaneously in *bodily practices*; they emerge through the interaction with other people and objects (Jackson 1983). Thus, rummaging through rubbish, hanging out on street corners with groups of friends and

sleeping on benches produces subversive rhythms – they construct a rhythmic ensemble that undermines the dominant ordering, a rhythmic ensemble that is resilient to purification of public space.

The term *everyday acts of resilience* is inspired by research in ecology, where resilience was first utilised to describe the capacity of a system to return to an equilibrium after displacement, but has since been used for understanding a community's (Norris et al, 2007), society's (Adger, 2000) or city's (Resilience Alliance, 2007) resilience to natural or man-made disasters. Resilience is understood as an ongoing process, not the outcome of a process. This process relies on access to "*adaptive capacities* – resources with dynamic attributes... resources that are robust, redundant or rapidly accessible" (Norris et al, 2007: 131). In the case of Népszínház utca the resource is the body on the stage of the theatre itself. The reclaiming of public space through the repeated theatrical flourishes of everyday life detailed above. The disaster – gentrification – is ongoing, but nevertheless, like other disasters, has temporal markers – in gentrification's case a 'tipping point' that marks the moment of change in a neighbourhood. Though Népszínház utca might prove resilient enough to survive the disaster, it is possible that it will succumb to the hard logic of the market when/if the metro stop is finally built, if talk of the local market being demolished and replaces with new houses finally comes to fruition or if the state intensifies its public space sanitisation programme.

The metaphor of resilience can only be stretched so far however. I was not attempting to analyse the adaptive capacities of Népszínház utca in a way that would satisfy an ecologist, but rather to give a street level perspective. This part-metaphorical use of resilience is also useful because it is markedly different from practices that might be termed *resistance* – from intentional acts that mean to halt gentrification. Whilst a handful of researchers do count *unconscious* acts as resistance (for an

excellent typography of all the different approaches see: Hollander and Einwohner 2004), this weakens the analytical power of the concept by broadening it too far (Rubin, 1996). Indeed it is *intent* rather than *recognition* that is a better indicator of what classifies an act as resistance or not (Scott, 1985: 290).

There is of course resistance in the district. Echoing research in other cities, resistance comes in the shape of both public (i.e. state) and personal strategies (Newman and Wyly, 2006). On a community level The Young Greens (ZöFi) are very active in the district, distributing a newspaper that features the accounts of those marginalised by the urban rejuvenation programmes, while the local state's socially-orientated rejuvenation programme allows poorer residents to remain in Józsefváros through the redeveloping of existing housing stock. More recently (since the research was concluded) a group of homeless, formerly homeless people and housing activists – A Város Mindenkié (The City is Everyone's) – have become active in the city, especially in the VIII district. The tendencies detailed in the ethnography above have intensified, with the newly elected Fidesz (conservative) local government passing legislation forbidding the searching through rubbish bins. A Város Mindenkié responded by organising a mass illegal rubbish rummaging session, which led to many of the activists being arrested and fined. The *everyday acts of resilience* detailed in the ethnography above have been criminalised and thus these practices have morphed into political acts of resistance.

While it is clear the state inculcates the behavioural rhythms that are commensurate with the free flow of capital, it is a complex, contradictory and multi-faceted process in which capital, different scales of the state and middle-class resident’s demands are often at odds with one another. In general however, the state helps to sooth the rhythms of the middle classes with one hand, whilst taking petty actions against the poor with another. Re-regulating the urban; homogenising rhythms.

It all sounds very grand and exciting but it is, in fact, petty, tiresome and mundane. It is the police demands to see identification cards, the noise of the CCTV camera swivelling as you walk home late at night and the regulation of alcohol sales. In one part of the district the state acts as the market's agent is demolishing thousands of flats and part-privatising public space, but on Népszínház utca the state appears in a different form. Sinister and insidious, right down to the minutiae of everyday life, the state cleans public space at the behest of capital; the state is the street-sweeper of the market. Yet it is not always successful. Through daily practices, social time manages to reassert itself from the measuring state (cf. Lefebvre, 2004: 96). The benches meant for beautification become beds and the streets of surveillance become a stage. The urban theatre continues its tragic comedy in new and exciting ways. And the street goes on (for now).

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