The Rumors of Action: Young People and Reflexive Dynamics in Urban Peripheries in Southern Brazil

By Leandro R. Pinheiro

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GJHSS-C Classification: FOR Code: 1608
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Introduction

The analysis of reflexivity in the social sciences is recurrent and goes back to different theoretical approaches consolidated in the field, at least throughout the 20th century. Questioning oneself about existing relationships between individual action and reality, connections between perception, personal knowledge, and the constitutive characteristics of the world is a current social characteristic in modernity and has, as a rule, a meaning that is as pertinent as it is problematic.

The term’s semantic plurality highlights that any inference about reflexivity inevitably refers to a complex space of related issues, a space linked to the domain of construction of meanings to social action. We refer to epistemological and/or gnoseological questions, but also to identity apprehensions and/or the scope of the agency: what role does the social actor play in defining social reality; how much one recognizes themselves in their actions; what links can we establish between subjectivity and structural elements in the production of social action and the social spaces, etc. (Author 2, 2021).

Given this, if we turn to youths from the urban peripheries of a country with high rates of social inequality (OECD, 2018), such as Brazil, we can add histories of precarious access to work, school, and urban infrastructure and, thus, to cultural apparatuses that we could suppose linked to the formation of reflective inclinations. In these scenarios, on the other hand, goods related to the cultural industry are widely disseminated and occupy a significant part of youth sociability bonds, often before the school bond (Setton, 2004; Martin-Barbero, 2017).

In the sociology of youth, moreover, we have noted youth participation in contemporary cultural markets as consumers and, sometimes, as producers (Reguillo, 2012), so that practices built between peers in this area, with a strong identity content, have generated problematizations on the active participation of actors in their socialization processes (Dayrell and Carrano, 2014; Leão and Carrano, 2013). It leads us to another question concerning the potentially tense or eccentric relationship with institutional references (Dubet and Martuccelli, 1998), even though the country has noticed a recent expansion of access by popular groups to secondary and higher education (Silva, 2020).

So, from this set of elements, we have proposed to understand how young people develop reflexive dynamics in socially vulnerable contexts, attentive to relational and significant in loco arrangements. Authors from different approaches have discussed reflexivity as a constituent of contemporary social life (Archer, 2011; Beck, Giddens, and Lash, 2012; Boltanski, 2014; Caetano, 2017) and, in this sense, we seek to interpret its diffraction in peripheralized social spaces, by pondering how actors manage symbolic referents and build intelligibility. Which allows us, with the support of an anthropological view, also discuss the specificity of this reflexivity, as regular extrospective practice not necessarily linked to crises or uncertainty.

1. Reflexivities: About Referents in the Context

In its ordinary uses, the word “reflect” (re-flectere; bend again) can designate the actions of ‘deviating, reverberating’ or ‘cogitating’. A step further, reflexivity has been adequate to refer to the ability to think (cogitate, therefore) about oneself so that the authors of the considerations are also their destination as a way of communicating with themselves (Motta et al., 2013). It is necessary to recognize that such uses indicate how the West, and especially Western modernity, has produced norms about the subject-
object relationship and, therefore, interpellations by subjects conscientious of their experiences of themselves, including practices in the field of education (Larrosa, 1994).

Not rarely, directed at the relationship between the individual and the context, in achieving social actions, reflexivity is situated in a game between the routinization of social practices and the socially engendered need for objectification and (self) monitoring. The examination now addresses participation in socio-cultural practices that provide it, as discussed by the French dispositionalist school (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron, 2002; Lahire, 2002); sometimes, it happens through the recognition of situations of maladjustment inscribed in biographical paths or in the observation of historically recent morphogenetic transformations (more specifically, from the 1980s onward), which would establish circumstances of contextual incongruity (Archer, 2011).

If we turn to the political arena, we can also find problematizations. Boltanski (2014) seeks to admit reflexivity as part of everyday life built under the imperative of justification. While this author does not ignore that we can operate practices almost automatically, he claims these would coexist with a certain “Metapragmatics,” in which the relationship between symbolic forms and the state of things would not be taken indifferently. Metapragmatics would contribute to the disposition of interpretive competencies and, above all, on the transformation of concerns into critical and/or existential questions produced in the clash between social reality (institutionally produced) and experiences of the world.

So, The perspectives developed by Beck, Giddens, and Lash (2012) attribute recursive structural contours to the reflective as a repercussion of the exacerbation of characteristics typical of modernity. The infiltration of “risk” as an experience and category of interpretation, the dissemination of experts’ knowledge, the de-traditionalization of the modern normative framework, and a vast profusion of cultural artifacts launched for daily appropriation compose a social scenario in which choices would tend to be configured as imperative. Thus, current changes in late modernity are highlighted, emphasizing the growing intrusion of knowledge into everyday activities, the establishment of political conflicts, standard practices (overflowing institutionalized politics), and the overall accountability of individuals in maintaining their existence.

If, on the one hand, we can admit the historical establishment of finalistic or even instrumental rationalities (evoking the famous thesis of Weber, 1982), with tactical outcomes in popular means in addition (Certeau, 2011), the sociological references alluded to assume their dissemination, intensification, and resizing, in this case, towards (self)monitoring. In the meantime, we can identify attempts to categorize individual reflective experiences, as seen in Archer (2011) and Caetano (2017) studies. These tend to propose characterizations from levels of depth, scope, (self) referentiality, and temporality. We can also observe discussions that take reflexivity as a dialogical device with a political-formative emphasis, whether in decolonial problematizations about collective action (Liwanag and Rhule, 2021) or investigations about narration devices (Motta et al., 2013).

A position taken

For a consistent position, we can assume that reflexivity constitutes a practice especially related to late modernity, with particular social dissemination in the last four decades. We can also suggest aspects to consider in the historically recent configuration of reflexive actions, according the literature above. Firstly, it arises from socio-historical changes that generally affect the relationship between subject and environment, notably via tensioning of reference marks of action and/or interpretation of reality. For that, we can place the generalization of the use of writing and/or other symbolic devices of objectification and perspective of the practice and specialized arrangements of argumentation and propositional justification, but not only that. The institutional demands for individual accountability and articulated concerns in the face of frequent situations of contextual inconsistency are also mobilizers so that the resources for objectification, perspective, and justification are oriented towards self-referentiality in actions.

However, as we move forward in our incursions with young people from urban peripheries in southern Brazil, we see the need to re-dimension the delimitation parameters. In this case, we consider the production of reflexivities in places characterized by precarious access to legitimized cultural and symbolic resources, high levels of violence (and restriction of speech), and historical experiences of instability and vulnerability of social rights typical of modernity. This has not prevented, however, a certain informational and imagery intensification of experiences via media access (TV and Internet) and, in some cases, the politicization of every day and identity aspects.

As we will try to address in the following topics, the tensions between routinization and monitoring in social actions need a close look at the dynamics that articulate and nuance cogito and bending-deviation, which, in addition to being recursive and self-referring, can be bricolage and interactional or that, even, can admit propositional logics and also narratives. We consider it possible, in this sense, to take the structuring axes that we deduce from the categorizations known in the literature, especially from Archer (2011) and Caetano (2017), to inflect them in the face of aspects that we consider relevant in the field. Within the limits of this writing, and for operationalization purposes, we indicate:
(i) Deepening – functional to meta-analytical levels;  
(ii) Scope – practical-sectorized to existential-general;  
(iii) Referentiality – intimate-individual to eco-logical;  
and  
(iv) Temporality – immediate to long term.

In summary, if we can attribute reflexive capacities to actors in general (in the form of internal conversations about attitudes, goals, and beliefs), modulating them, also according to socioeconomic and cultural conditions, the itinerary covered went through the understanding of the dynamics diffracted in socially vulnerable contexts. We bear in mind, in this case, that the construction of reflection in urban peripheries is shown to be “baroque” in everyday life, arising obliquely from different sources (challenges faced, specialized training, media programming, etc.), even if the experts are those that credit it with a certain legitimacy in the late modernity (Martuccelli, 2006).

In such a way, the contributions of Martuccelli (2005) on the consistency of the social, on the flexible configuration between “textures” (layers of meanings) and social coercions, have proved to be a relevant inspiration. Concerning dialogues in the field, it means considering the reflexive agency of individuals and the effective inscription arrangements between action and interpretation to suggest how the “clashes” with reality and the symbolic bases are managed in the changes of direction before spaces of possibilities with relative malleability.

In this way, we direct our empirical effort to: (1) identify what we will name here as gnoseological arrangements, with a view to the intelligibility matrices that the actors set in motion; (2) know the daily arrangements concerning the mobilization of enunciation devices, highlighting those mobilized by young people; and 3), from there, problematize the reflexive outcomes present in youth political actions. This results in considering the modes of reflexivity suggested by the approaches mentioned above but also avoiding dwelling a priori on propositional and/or proleptic objectification-perspective-justification dynamics common to academic intellectuality and/or modern institutional policy.

On the field...

Here, the result of the effort of immersion and the recording of the field experience is an ensemble of interpretations circumscribed by a narrative exercise from which the authors gives agency to facts, subjects, and times aiming a referenced intelligibility. However, it is also a configuration of dialogue’s temporality, between shared experiences in the field and the elaboration of some reflexive notes (Rocha e Eckert, 1998; 2008). In addition, it is an attempt to open up new possibilities for thinking about social experience, as education of attention (“to attend”) for new perspectives concerning mutual understanding and knowledge production (Ingold, 2016).

It requires emphasizing, between 2010 and 2019, ours incursions into the territories attended the practices the actors ordinarily produced, carrying out thematic talking circles later. Thus, we seek to qualify the dialogicity in the construction of testimonies but also to generate possibilities to contrast the accounts. In this sense, it should be noted that we used a narrative device, contributing an age cohort, intending to distinguish reflective inflections among young people.

The version we will present below concerns mainly to five of the most vulnerable peripheral locations in Porto Alegre/RS, Southern Brazil. The regions are: Ilhas (West of the municipality), Cruzeiro (Central-South), Lomba do Pinheiro (East), Mário Quintana (North), and Restinga (South). For comparative parameters, the highest HDI between the regions of the municipality was 0.935 in 2010, while in the loci of our incursions, it was, on average, 0.688. The self-declared black population of the city was approximately 20%, reaching 40% in those locations. The number of deaths of young black men from homicide was 70% in the city and more than 80% in the neighborhoods analyzed (ObservaPoa, 2021). Porto Alegre is also the state capital with the highest racial segregation in the country, with a difference of 18.2% between the HDI of whites and blacks (IPEA, 2017).

In these contexts, we have also produced two collections. The first corpus is formed by a set of just over 170 comprehensive interviews (Kaufmann, 2013) dedicated to knowing individual itineraries in terms of institutional links and regular cultural accesses, social challenges faced in the experiences, textures, and symbolic devices enunciated in their narrations. It is an intentional sample whose completion was defined according our roaming for the neighborhoods and by saturation of theoretical and methodological purposes (Fontanella et al., 2011). In the analysis of the narratives, we examined cross-sectional experiences to personal itineraries, sometimes grouping specific experiences of socialization and reflexivity.

The second collection is based on a questionnaire survey with young students from different levels of education, applied in public schools based in the same locations between 2017 and 2019. The

7 Notes

The interviews occurred with individuals with different work, artistic, or sports activities. Approximately 47% of the subjects had primary education (incomplete or complete) during the interviews. In comparison, 31% declared having secondary education (incomplete or complete), and 22% higher education (complete or incomplete). The contingent has 38% of young individuals (15 to 29 years old), 46% of adults (30 to 59 years old), and 16% of older people. The records have a slightly higher number of consultations with women (55%), in general, because of the dialogue with people working in education and social assistance.
collection instruments, in this case, dealt with the consumption of audiovisual narratives\(^2\), occupation of time, and the schooling process. We reached 780 observations, with intentional (and not probabilistic) sampling, as access to students was carried out as we obtained the consent of educational institutions, paying attention, however, to having public schools with a significant presence of young people. With this type of sample we don’t aim statistical extrapolations but meaningful analysis with the support of the other techniques (Field, 2009).

The questionnaire survey was considered complementary after a partial analysis of the interviews. Our objective was to obtain information from a segment of young adolescents whose access to schooling and communication and information technologies (CIT) is historically and comparatively superior to other age groups in the country (Kubota, 2016). Thus, we sought to deepen the extent of contrasting habits between age groups, verified when analyzing the interviews and the field notes.

After systematizing the information from both materials, we conducted a final stage of investigation aimed at political-student activists from socially vulnerable contexts. Through five thematic debate circles held in 2021 (combating racism, gender disputes, struggles for territories, cultural conflicts, and clashes for the right to education), we dialogued with different subjects about their agendas and militancy itineraries, comparing the conditions, arrangements, and devices of the reflexive dynamics they integrated. Thus, we seek to outline elements of understanding reflexivity in urban peripheries and, in addition, to signal changes at stake when entering the school and/or the activism.

II. Peripheral Arrangements, Bases for Understanding

Initially, recalling the discussion established elsewhere is convenient and pertinent to analyzing life itineraries in urban peripheries, especially among adults and older people. In this, we have built an approximation to the notion of hyper agency, as reported by Martuccelli (2010), to Latin America. Briefly, a historical process of individuation in which social actors are faced with the contradictions of an “indicative power,” which theatricalizes its action, beckons with promises and/or rights, but does not really implement them, making use of violence in containment and domestication of individuals, if deemed necessary. People who, in the face of adversity and the inconstancies of power, seek support and ontological security in the maintenance of close ties. Our incursions indicate that this condition is embodied particularly in the precariousness of the possibilities of economic and cultural dispute, the inadequacy of public services, and the chronic experiences of violence. It is important to emphasize this because it will be in recursion with this condition that we will understand the appropriation and production of gnoseological arrangements in the field.

Our interlocutors bring different experiences of individual responsibility already in childhood, of dropping out of school to support the family, the need to invent their own job opportunities (often informal), and the creation of tactics and networks to inhabit vulnerable and/or belligerent territories (Author 1, 2020a). As a result, social domains to which reflexive individualization processes are usually attributed (skilled work, higher education, for example) became truncated and/or intermittent arenas of participation. The interlocutions indicated, therefore, the need to emphasize the interpretation of reflexive dynamics before textures located in arenas of sociability, cultural performances, and narrative consumption. Without any intention of being exhaustive, we propose briefly analyzing three matrices of intelligibility still current in urban peripheries: experiences of popular religiosity, leanings of black culture, and narrative appropriations in mass media.

Such segmentation has analytical purposes only, given that the recursion on the actions hybridizes the references in everyday life. We will not dedicate ourselves to the countless meanings evoked in each case. We are interested in suggesting what we understand to be gnoseological configurations for engendering dissimilar reflexivities, allowing us to discuss some inflections among young people.

Popular religiosity

That time was still when we were going to meetings to get, you know, land and a house, everything. And there, I don’t know why, they shut it off, you know. Because before, they used to do a lot of parties and birthdays and things like that at the residents’ association […]. And then, one day, I still lived in the back of my sister’s house, right? And Gilvan said to me, “Eva, they are invading the association. Are we going to invade too?” I say, “No, we are not going to invade anything; Let’s wait.” So I said: “No, Gilvan, let’s put it in God’s hands. I’m going to pray. If, until dawn, that other side is empty, it is an answer from God that is for us.” And there, said and done. I prayed, I put it in God’s hands, and the other day, he looked and said: “Eva, the other side is empty!” I say, “So, we’re going to move there!”

Then, I was cleaning with the hose and washing everything. At this, the association’s president, Beto, arrived. He arrived and said, “Who is there?” I say, “It’s me, Beto.” He said: “Oh, Eva, thank God, this place here was reserved for you.”

[Author 1, 56 years old, Evangelical, Restinga, 2015]

\(^2\) It should be added that we dedicate ourselves to watching episodes of the artifacts most cited by young students (approximately 85 hours of work) to learn about the plots and better understand the relationship between young people and the narratives that have deserved their deference. In this case, the analysis was guided by the plots’ characters, relational arrangements, and the episodes’ recurrent narrative configuration.
Although religious diversity in Brazil today is mainly Christian, contextualized immersion indicates the need to allude to popular religiosity. By problematizing it, in fact, Torre (2012) characterizes the social production of an “in-between means,” i.e., of a practice capable of hybridizing references (new and old) and creating ways of being together. The religious institution is shown to be necessary, but as a reference from which to act so that popular practices can transversalize institutional scopes and transit through different symbolic-esoteric references.

In the quotation above, our interlocutor seeks justifications for the passage of the itinerary. A position that tactically appropriates the codes of its religious community, and how not to mention has moral support from others in recognition of the neighbor. Here, we can evoke Weber’s arguments (1982) about the rationalization contained in the “commandments of salvation” and the reciprocity that establishes between peers, with the exception that popular religiosity does not necessarily follow the limits of the formal congregation in the delimitation ‘we-they,’ in the case configured from the common adverse situation.

The narratives produced in the field (particularly with adults and older people) suggest that the relationship with transcendence foresees symbolic and/or mystical assemblages, mobilizing esoteric beings for earthly action. Thus, one can operate with sagacity in everyday life without disregarding an ultimate foundation: the transcendent, which explains the imponderable, ensures and reassures (but not without tensions) the temporal experience in the face of the adverse or the contingent. As Geertz (2014) states, based on the example of “witchcraft” among the Azandians, transcendence would not necessarily be part of a mystifying intelligibility; it can be the symbolic constituent of everyday practices and their irregularities, the reconnection when the convictions of “common sense” break down.

**Inclinations of black culture**

We were in a capoeira circle there on Getúlio [Avenue]. Then, Gato Preto, who was always with me (I taught him, you know), was in the circle, and Mestre Gavião arrived with a guia imperial across his chest. Who wears a guia imperial is from religion. Then, the circle was heating up, and Gato Preto only had the third belt [level], but he was a “phenomenon” in the fight. After a while, the circle started tightening, and they were almost at each other’s throats [fighting]. Then, Mestre Gavião made a turn, and Ogun arrived: “Hum!” And Gato, also from a religious family, looked at me near the berimbau. “So?” I said: “Go on, beat him! Ogun, give me a break…” Bah, Negão beat him, which made Ogun run through Getúlio, and he lost his horse in the process. [Bolívar, 55 years old, Born Jesus, 2019]

Turning to the inclinations of black culture, it should be remembered that rhythm (set to music) would be a device for experiencing time and, in traditional African culture, capable of articulation with other semantic and performative networks (dance, religion, objects, etc.). When samba was born, by the way, the lyrics of this musical genre would have a proverbial character, which was close to the oral tales, the apologists that guided the popular daily life. They would be transitive discourses, narrating what was lived and done as a utopia of day-to-day change (Sodré, 1998).

According to Azevedo (2018), such aesthetic principles would have been the most resistant throughout history, fleeing written rational logic and, at the same time, sensitizing different social classes. Therefore, it is necessary to remember that performance places the body as the main enunciation and resistance device, from which life would be celebrated through movement, painting, and the evocation of ancestors. The world’s particular “enchantment” would be maintained based on corporeality in interaction with the natural (in the affection of teases, herbs, stones, guides, etc.) and the supernatural.

In the quotation above, the anecdote illustrates what we say and expresses popular humor (in this case, the irony), a device that does not seem minor to us. On different occasions, we noticed in the field the delight in sharing the joking play, even in the precarious condition or the interposition of adversity, as if they were there in an enunciative game that indicates reality, indicating the ethics to play: the adverse happens, and one must move on. In addition to playing with judgments and moral limits, supporting standard codes of conduct, it is possible to observe that the example condenses a certain displacement, operating, however, more as an outcome than a confrontation, which ends up celebrating the agency and malleable link.

However, apart from maintaining what was characterized above in the peripheries, black culture will perceive tensions in the interaction with institutionalized arenas. Whether through incursions into the capitalist cultural market, which condensed black musicians’ tactics in search of recognition and the systematization and authorial individualization of compositions gestated, often, in collective circuits (Jost, 2015). Either through the critical rescue of black ethnic knowledge, through which it acted to objectify them to grant them wisdom and codify their pedagogies, beyond (and in line with) body, oral, and narrative expressiveness. In the meantime, the black movement will severely criticize the interpretive logic of miscegenation. It will establish racial conflict as an explanatory factor for Brazilian history and social reality (Santiago Junior, 2012).

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3 In 2019, about 10% of Brazilians said they were not religious. Of those who declared affiliation, 81% were Christians, divided between Catholics (50%) and Evangelicals (31%) (Datafolha, 2020).

4 In the meantime, authors such as Abdias do Nascimento (from Teatro Experimental do Negro) and Alberto Guerreiro Ramos are cited as intellectuals in the 1940s and, following, we will have Beatriz...
Mass media narrative appropriations

Depending on the soap opera because I want to see how the plot unfolds there. Like the story of Moses, you know. He travels, travels, travels, and they never manage to reach the ‘promised land’ [laughs]. [Rosa, 60 years old, Mother of the saint, Umbanda]

In the promised land only at the end of the century! [Marisete, 58 years old, Neo-Pentecostal Evangelical]

I watched the whole [soap opera] ‘The Ten Commandments,’ you know [...] but then I thought like this, if you watch the soap opera, everyone knows that God... They got angry at home when I told them: ‘Guys, God is not that nice thing you think. He says like this, ‘Here, oh, it’s your way, and you follow.’ You have to do it to get help. Look how many people died in this search for the ‘promised land.’’ [Rosa]

[Talking circle, Restinga, November/2017]

Finally, concerning the narrative appropriations, it is necessary to point out that although the electronic media companies started their activities in the middle of the 20th century, under strong state stimulus in the Latin American continent, there was a progressive privatization of these services (TV and radio, especially) until the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. Such a process would be accompanied by an inflection of purposes and themes, from national unification and identification to the daily life of plots. And, in this sense, along with anonymity and city flows, radio and TV begin to compete with the streets in the production of the public sphere, from the domestic space, via dramatization and spectacularization (Cancilini, 2019).

Martín-Barbero (1992; 1997) proposes that audiovisual production in Latin America is based on the commodification of the melodrama formula, whose adhesion potential would be engendered from the relationship established with everyday morality and, in articulation, with the possibilities of identification and projection released to viewers. The soap opera would be the most prominent example, mixing plots that remind us of old serials, composing current themes and technologies, and evoking known formats for industrialized uses (Martín-Barbero, 1992).

Thus, part of the mobilization is based on valuing close social ties and updating popular orality (a certain tell to) and audiovisual technologies (a secondary orality). It is also linked to the symbolization of demands for social justice via aesthetic identification and projection fostered by the intensity and content of the dramatic blows within a restricted relational framework. In this sense, we understand that the configuration of a certain public sense is also at stake here. It should be noted that the historical spatial dynamics of Latin America and the commodification of the city include a set of disputes over public space without significant articulation or easily assimilated to the classic notion of the public sphere and the egalitarian fiction related to the city. The experiences of spatial exclusion, inequality, and insecurity are articulated with the phenomenon of urban fragmentation so that, in urban peripheries, territorial self-construction, everyday inventiveness, and family and neighborhood reciprocity are recurrent (Schlack y Araujo, 2022).

We could argue that, in the contexts under consideration, objectification has a practical and functional referentiality in most cases (Caetano, 2017) with contingent projections. However, there are other aspects to point out. In the matrices we briefly discussed above, we highlight the agentic content that constitutes them and the valuation of reciprocity ties. Furthermore, social reality expands by having esoteric beings in the actors’ narratives. With this, we consider it necessary to highlight a certain elasticity of social reality, operated from the assemblages produced by individuals from and beyond what institutionalization establishes, which we suggest in recursion with the condition of a hyper actor, as reported by Martuccelli (2010).

There is a historical practice in configuring symbolic devices from corporal and musical performances, narrations, and evocations of the esoteric and/or everyday moral justifications through which homologies, juxtapositions, and bricolage are arranged. And here, the agency is combined with a cognitive inclination toward assimilation and adjustment in the face of clashes with reality, i.e., to the appropriation device, without losing sight of transcendence as a background reference, itself tacitly malleable. In other words, referentiality is also anchored in reciprocal ties and projections, and, above all, hopes are shared with the transcendent.

III. Young People and Reflexivities: Diffracted Inflections

Sorj and Martuccelli (2008) point out significant social changes in the Latin American context. The authors claim that urbanization and globalization, the expansion of educational systems and new communication systems, and the diversification of minority mobilizations, among other aspects, would have contributed to individualization and democratization, at least regarding expectations of equality and sociability relations.

Here, remembering Melucci (2001), dialogue with young people can help us understand the diffraction of such phenomena, given that young people tend to experience more vehemently the discontinuities generalized to most of the population. For this topic, we will highlight the dialogues with individuals undergoing schooling during the field trips and those who experienced their youth from the 1990s onward. They
produced their itineraries in urban spaces, with massive access to television programming and the set of reference icons that it started to disseminate (often taking precedence over the school). They will also use digital technologies to reproduce musical and artistic artifacts and, later, of expanded narrative devices (in social networks, in the publication of videos, in the composition of lyrics, and poetry among peers).

Among young people-adolescents, there are those who most widely enjoy access to schooling extended to high school (albeit intermittent or truncated) and, therefore, to a state and parastatal social protection apparatus established in the country from the 1988 constitution. It will imply the postponement of entering the job market until adolescence at least, with repercussions for the gestation of “times of childhood” and “youth” through the dissemination of the school form (Vincent, Lahire, and Thin, 2001) and the feasibility of a particular, albeit unstable, social moratorium.\(^5\)

a) From the rumors, reflexivities

As for the inflections in popular religiosity, we could take the example of the “theology of prosperity” in the literature, whose reciprocity ties establish a precise segmentation between believers and lay people and emphasize the individual search for worldly success (Montes, 1998), and consider the interaction of religions with other reflective bases (environmental, feminist discourses, etc.).\(^6\) The regulation of faith changes, and among young people, one can notice a marked shift between a secularized conscience and religious belonging or certain flexibility in the bond to dogmas that internally pluralizes institutionalized spaces (Carranza and Sofiati, 2018; Silveira and Sofiati, 2017).

When we dialogue with individuals apart from strict religious affiliations, the aphorisms of “common sense” seem to continue to express the sagacity and naturalness with which they conceive an existentially expanded social reality in interface with the esoteric. A young student from a vocational technical course commented that he attended services at a neo-Pentecostal church. Before that, he was a practitioner of “religion” (as he called churches with a black matrix). He told us that “God is one” and recommended that we attend a church to “open the paths and protect us from the envy of others.” In another instance, a funk MC, narrating various adversities in his personal journey, ended the sentences by stating, “But God is just; he took away a gift from me but put me on another path.”

The nuances are subtle. The allusion to the transcendent remains regular, but everyday life is occupied by the demands of work and schooling or by pragmatic challenges to subsistence, as if in endorsement of practical wisdom in the face of contingencies. Using non-empirical entities as reliable referents in the face of the imponderable retains, in short, a more delimited place for the esoteric facing appeals and transit through multiple and competing discourses. The transcendent remains intuited as omnipresent but displaced to intimate explanations and terminal subterfuges so that one sees less a rupture than a differential gradation in the positions taken.

If the changes in popular religiosity can be associated with a specifically diffracted secularization process, the inflections in the consumption of media narratives provide more significant evidence. When conducting our descriptive survey with students, we invited them to indicate the means most used to search for information. Respondents mainly recorded ‘Internet’ (in 90% of cases) and ‘TV’ (61%). In the first, the most accessed were: ‘social networks’ (79%), ‘music’ (42.4%), ‘movies’ (35%), ‘study content’ (34.2%), followed by ‘series’ (24.3%) and ‘electronic newspapers’ (23.9%).

Turning specifically to the consumption of narratives, we found an increase in citations for the audience of series in a positive correlation with schooling. The most accentuated oscillation occurred among those who attended higher education (technological courses), including internet access for ‘studies’ (52%), consumption of ‘series’ (42%)\(^7\), and ‘electronic newspapers’ (36.8%) among the top four priorities, along with ‘social networks.’ Concerning access to TV, the significant oscillations concerned what was observed in national surveys (SECOM, 2016). We observed that with the increase in schooling (especially higher education), there was a decrease in citations for consumption of ‘soap operas’ and an increase for ‘news’ and ‘series.’

Furthermore, considerable dispersion was observed when consulted about preferred conversation topics (multiple choice). However, if we consider the themes associated with schooling, items such as ‘series,’ ‘studies,’ and ‘politics’ increased (by about 15 percentage points) their citations among those who attended higher education. So, we can allude to Bourdieu’s notorious thesis (2008), including dispositions to the cultural capital advocated by the school, on the one hand and the experience of networks of sociability and cultural cultivation, on the other. However, reflections on the configuration of audiovisual narratives and the testimonies of young students may

\(^5\) It should be noted that the growing appreciation of schooling is also linked to the reconfiguration of the Brazilian job market, at least since the mid-1990s, tending to expand qualification requirements (Arrêche, 2015).

\(^6\) Examples of analyses that emphasize appropriations, resignifications, and negotiations can be found in the research of Guedes (2013), Roese (2018), and Pereira (2018).

\(^7\) Chi-square test, alpha 0.05.

\(^8\) In contrast, the percentage of citations for those who attended elementary school was around 30%.
indicate more elements for understanding the inflection in the appropriation of cultural goods, given that we are talking, in any case, about artifacts of widespread popular consumption.

Soap opera represents more or less what we go through daily. Usually, it’s what happens in our lives, what we go through as a family. In fact, as a family, nothing is perfect! There’s always that “one against the other” thing. So, we end up liking that plot of the soap opera. [Lúcia, talking circle with high school students at night – Lomba do Pinheiro – Aug/2019]

I really like watching series of heroes. They also have their fantasy part, but they have their dramas, the human element. And in the hero’s part, we manage to escape reality a little. In the case of ‘Daredevil,’ he is a blind superhero, but his other senses are much sharper; and he is a lawyer and has a great sense of justice. [...] Then, I think his serious part is attractive, he has his own personal problems, and he has to match them with being a vigilante. (Ricardo, day high school student – Cruzeiro, Aug/2018)

If we contrast what they said about soap operas and series, it is possible to identify that the former refers to everyday life and moral conflicts; concerning the latter, the condition of fiction or fantasy story is reported, whose scripts would include more innovations and diversifications. The characters in the series also contribute to everyday problems and the purpose of justice. However, the figurative dynamics are not centered on family relationships or, more generally, on the restitution of social ties (with close ones, as a rule). It tends to project the protagonists’ actions into a broader societal scenario, emphasizing individualized and agonistic narratives.

Finally, we suggest that there are devices of recognition with a reflective and singularist content: the characters have individualized itineraries to consider, a past that bequeaths problems and injustices from the relationship with a diffuse and/or diaphanous “system,” or in the face of relationships of specific powers (with parents, with the police, etc.) that are inquisitive. Not infrequently, peculiar weaknesses become a metaphor for difference and part of the protagonists’ power. Furthermore, in most cases, less use is made of a regressive vector revealing injustice, the web of intrigues, and the villain’s judgment; better processes occur regarding unraveling oneself in a reflexive progression in facing adversities.

There are other elements to consider in the agency of matrices and devices to understand the reflexive dynamics among young people. Youth practices analyzed in youth sociology research, especially from the mid-1990s, indicate the creation of informal socialization arenas, when young people manage sociability networks at a relative distance from adult control, produce knowledge among peers, and share symbolic references, often associated with cultural industry icons and communication arenas (Reguillo, 2012).

The cultural industry, on one side, and youth practices in the arts and communication, on the other, participate (asymmetrically) in the production of space for action and recognition, despite the precarious labor insertions and material conditions. CIT also interfere in this process, making it possible for individual identities to be tensioned in differential communicative networks (not necessarily community, local, or institutionalized), and young people are the ones who most lead the use of the internet and the narrativization of themselves, but they are also those who experience the reverse of the deinstitutionalization of their subsistence alternatives.

Prominent examples of those mentioned above can be found in youthful expressions of black cultures, such as Funk, Slam, or Hip Hop practices. Take the example of the latter, whose creation is attributed to young black and Caribbean people in New York neighborhoods and has been present in Brazilian metropolises (including Porto Alegre) since the late 1970s. According to Osumaré (2007), the spread of rap in urban peripheries (and in phonographic markets) across different continents is due to the cultural maintenance of rhythmic force, the use of the sung word, and the assumption of corporeity as an epistemic basis (among other elements of Africanist aesthetics), fused with current technological devices. Performance remains paramount in rap, and the voice is not just a vehicle of content but part of a gestural modulation that creates and communicates, advocating action as an elevation of thought (Osumaré, 2007).

It is not uncommon for Hip Hop actors to use tactics in communicational arenas, using the “secondary orality” that TICs provide and, above all, that the popularization of video production allows. The young adults we talked to spoke about using images (first VHS tapes, then videos on social networks) as expanded memory for mimetic learning of steps and sharing among peers. Thus, even those whose schooling was truncated found forms of collective learning and, often, the production of specific cultural capital, which converted into insertions as social educators in their localities (Author 1, 2020).

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9 It should be noted that TV networks have seen their unifying potential diminish in Brazil (and the cohesion of sociability around specific themes) since the 1990s, with the segmentation of audiences through increased competition, the introduction of cable TV (Hamburguer, 1998), and, later, access to the internet, social networks and streaming platforms. The rigidity of programming schedules is crossed by a la carte options, which contributes not only to expanding the framework of narratives to consume and share but to singularizing consumption.

50 It should be noted that, in recent decades, youth unemployment has been practically double the general average in the country (IBGE, 2021). Young people would also be those most affected by the informality of the job market (Corrochano, 2016).
In this process, we understand a significant inflection regarding the reflexivity dynamics and the hybridized permanence of black matrix elements. The secondary orality differs from conventional oral exchanges (not infrequently referred to as the black vernacular) as it is previously structured as a narrative configuration, then with relative organization and sequence of performances, and later as an object of handling. Thus, we want to state that if the verisimilitude of the images provokes a dissimilar reading of the writing, whose coding apparatus is patent, they still contribute to familiarization with narrative and analytical configurations.

Taking the set of young people from our collection of interviews, we observe an increased consumption compared to the ascendants and the condition of cultural producers in interactive areas. In other words, the expanded and diversified consumption of artifacts from the cultural industry (soap operas, movies, series, etc.), the possibility of composing lyrics and performances, narrativization in online social networks, and/or in sociable practices of free time, and the historical expansion of access to the school form are among the daily supports that, in our understanding, contribute to reflective inclinations.

During this time that I dealt [drugs], I wanted to work, I couldn't, but there was always something that haunted me, that haunts me to this day; there was always something that I really liked to do, listen, hear, write, sing, which is Funk, the music: the reality told by a young person from the periphery, from my point of view [...] Whenever I was in jail, I wrote songs, and these songs I keep with me until today. There's even a song that tells a lot about the reality of my life. I have a YouTube channel with almost 700 subscribers; I have a song with 2,000 views, which tells a little about mine. Its name is 'To get where I got.'

[...] My girlfriend's rape led me to search for other ideas, and I found myself in a lesbian collective. There they told me: "React; otherwise, you will be next." Hence, other readings begin to arrive for you; you see the sense of not being alone. And I came to an understanding of who I am in this world.

Our job is to break a normative pattern that dictates policies for our bodies; to make the connection with real women's agendas.

[Daiana, 41 years old, LGBTQIA+ activist, talking circle, 2021]

Let's return to the itineraries narrated by the young people to contrast the trajectories and networks in reflexive dynamics. When we consider the activists' trajectories still rooted in peripheral contexts and whose militancy is concentrated in their communities of origin, the experiential frameworks do not change significantly regarding structural conditions in family, work, and school spheres. Concerning the involvement with cultural practices: they begin with musical enjoyment among peers, often from neighboring networks existing in the neighborhood, finding support for performance and recognition. What distinguishes the activist practice, on the other hand, lies next to the appropriate signs of interpretation and justification along the way, adding elements of criticality (Boltanski, 2014) in approaching engaged collectives, notably in Hip Hop and Slam, among other forms of black cultural expression.

In the dialogue with the activists, they sought to bring about political and moral displacements by affirming the productions of their localities, contradicting...
the stigmas, and evoking ancestry as the basis of their productions. Not infrequently, they used the notion of “system”: sometimes, this word prompted the exploitation experienced as if it indicated the dominant agents without locating them; sometimes, it was incarnated in more specific figures, such as the “boss” or the illicit drug trafficking market. At other times, the performances, without losing their denunciatory verve, mentioned God, the support of family members, and messages of peace. We again observed the reference to reciprocity ties, transcendence, and everyday dilemmas. However, the narration articulated a polarization that we did not perceive as usual in our interviews (we and they; exploited and exploiters). On the one hand, we approach here a particular socialization process, crossed by belonging and action in political-cultural arenas; on the other hand, we noticed that the marks of engaged politicalness were mixed with the matrices of intelligibility and agency that we presented before.

The testimonies contained connections of relative precision between itineraries and historiography, featuring in the narrative especially resistance (the life of “a survivor” – evoking the figure of young people, primarily black in urban peripheries in Brazil) and the notion of “overcoming,” both constructed thanks to the symbolic and interactional support of the arts supposedly. According to our interpretation, for these activists, engagement is built up in agonistic performances collectively enjoyed in situations of contextual inconsistency, in advance (or over) school practices.

If we can argue that reflexivity is expressed there as “the act of recognizing individual positionality and motivation when engaging with the rhetoric about the transformation of systems” (Liwanag and Rhule, 2021, p. 01), we can suggest nuances to the reflexive dynamics between activists. In other words, it is necessary to recover here the consequences of the schooling process, with a view to the inflections of the reflective. In this sense, it is not just a question of recognizing the existence of a significant accumulation of cultural capital incorporated in some instances, but observing the relational meshes of life-politics (Giddens, 2012) built in loco, among which we understand that everyday life is a starting point and that existentialism and affections are significant vectors of action.

So, it is necessary to point out that, in most cases known in our talking circles, political subjectivation and reflexivity were produced in interactions with high school and, above all, undergraduate classmates. So, if we can suggest the effects of the recent expansion of access to higher education in the country (Silva, 2020), it is necessary to characterize how such symbolic immersion is constituted. As our meetings took place, we perceived an extensive and diversified network of collectives, mobilizations, and representative entities that the activists knew and/or integrated. In these cases, the groups they joined gave rise to experiences of identification and sharing that the relational networks of origin (in the family and the neighborhood) did not always allow.

If the beginning of activism occurred in student and university youth in particular, concerns were raised in part before the educational spaces themselves, criticized for their hetero-normativity, whiteness, and/or machismo. The recommended readings in teaching institutions were criticized for their “unreality,” even when contrasted with the world of our interlocutors’ experiences. Thus, universities were seen not only as spaces of access to intellectualized knowledge but as places of affection in the tensioning of knowledge and encounters with new possible experiences. In short, political (and also sociable) interactions in the academic sphere constituted significant support for immersion in increasingly propositional reflexive bases through the construction of networks of reciprocity and recognition essential to the (re)elaboration of existential concerns and anxieties.

As verbalized in one of the meetings, “In the collective, we organize the pain, the anger, the fuel to fight!” Thus, they narrated reflective versus discursive dynamics, delineating historicities and conditions to discuss projections, solitary and societal references, and broad and radical interpretative notions (from socio-structural analyses). This is without failing to resort to the narrative content to express what had been lived together and sustain the bond between singularities (individual) and the common (collective).

There is also a sense of struggle intertwined with intelligibility, which defines the political priorities to be discussed and wants to give visibility to militant knowledge (even if they do not systematize it via written objectification), the result of intense immersion in the activism network. They dealt with knowledge appropriated from and to one or more belongings and militancy, under the desire to reconfigure life in common. The militancy is expressed as a craft and affective motto, which is assumed as a public task and an existential and transcendent commitment (from the utopian belief). This is because the experiences (feminist, LGBTQIA+, black, peripheral, etc.) seem to be experienced as those that do not fit or overflow the institutional arenas, with changing these being part of the dispute for the resizing of social reality.

V. Final Considerations

Our effort in this writing was oriented towards understanding the reflexivities produced in urban peripheries in Brazil. Thus, we started with incursions into socially vulnerable locations in Porto Alegre, in the country’s south. After indicating a theoretical-methodological position and problematizing the
spectrum of interpretation of reflexive dynamics, we seek to work on the analysis of what we understand to be some of the intelligibility matrices in our loci of interlocution. These were the starting point for us to highlight diffracted changes and reflective inflections among the young people with whom we dialogued.

In this sense, dialogue with young people is linked to significant changes experienced in metropolitan cities in Brazil, especially in the last four decades. The agency and ingenuity of appropriation are inflected via expanding the market of symbolic goods available to young people so that, even amid an unstable and vulnerable social consistency, it has been possible to construct identity and singularist enunciations. Reflexivity becomes part of the action, an ordinary work of the actor. However, the facticity of the real tends to be reinterpreted in a narrative-interactional modality, oblique to the institutions, integrated into a peculiar relative objectification, and willing for recognition.

We can claim that such reflexive dynamics discreetly differ from the cunning semantic agency (in jocular irony, syncretism, hybridization, and appropriation), which tends to conserve symbolic references, displacing/relocating and compensating them. In other words, juvenile narratives urge recognition of difference and uniqueness. However, it requires discerning that the statements do not always have propositional content. On the other hand, if we can observe reflexivities of a functional, practical, and immediate tendency in everyday life, it is necessary to consider that referentiality overflows individualization through interactive and reciprocal connections; temporality integrates retrospection and the affirmation of bonds in narratives and shares the future with transcendence. In articulation, the reflexive invests practical knowledge with an ethical-ecumenical and existential scope.

We perceive nuances of critical content as we enter activist networks when individuals reconfigure the network of interdependencies of their experiences and find other spaces for interaction and reflexivity. However, we observed that, even when the speeches have analytical content, they are built from a narrative base, i.e., an interpretation system whose configuration is established from the plot of the experiences. These are nuances in a game of enunciative emphases: the proposition analytically deconstructs; the narrative articulates and integrates elements in the face of the discontinuities of historicity. In both, we perceive distinct forms of objectification and perspective of reality, accentuated according to the recursion between gnoseological arrangements and consistency of supports in context.

Finally, with rumors of actions we have tried to follow an indicative purpose, to establish a way of recognizing the reflexivity of others, those that have been occupying young people in the interpretation of social reality to continue with our creation of dialogue. There is also a political purpose of identifying together ways to make words pluralize perspectives of mutual understanding, discussing “the Gods we carry in our hearts” (Boltanski, 2014, p. 148). A purpose that seems as elusive as necessary to understand the different drifts of the public space and sphere in the urban peripheries.

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