



THE RUMORS OF ACTION: YOUNG PEOPLE AND REFLEXIVE DYNAMICS IN URBAN PERIPHERIES IN SOUTHERN BRAZIL

OS RUMORES DA AÇÃO: JOVENS E DINÂMICAS REFLEXIVAS EM PERIFERIAS URBANAS DO SUL DO BRASIL

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Abstract: The article addresses the reflexivity notion, aiming a contextualized analysis in urban peripheries from southern Brazil. Therefore, the purpose is to understand how young people develop reflexive dynamics in socially vulnerable contexts, appropriating Martuccelli's contributions as references. The research included different techniques to dialogue with youngsters in Porto Alegre/RS city, where narrative-interactive dynamics with aesthetic-identity search for social recognition were observed, with more explicit propositional inflections among student activists.

Keywords: Reflexivity; Youth; Urban periphery; Social action.

Resumo: O artigo aborda a noção de reflexividade, buscando uma análise contextualizada em periferias urbanas do Sul do Brasil. Assim, procura compreender como os jovens desenvolvem dinâmicas reflexivas em contextos de vulnerabilidade social, tomando como referências as contribuições de Danilo Martuccelli. A pesquisa fez uso de diferentes técnicas de diálogo com jovens da cidade de Porto Alegre/RS, onde foram observadas dinâmicas narrativo-interacionais e a busca estético-identitária por reconhecimento social, com inflexões proposicionais mais explícitas entre ativistas estudantis.

Palavras-chave: Reflexividade; Juventude; Periferia urbana; Ação social.

1 Introduction

Questioning oneself about existing relationships between individual action and reality, connections between perception, personal knowledge, and the constitutive characteristics of the world has been a recurrent social appeal in modernity and has, as a rule, meanings that are as pertinent as it is problematic. So does it in the social sciences, where the analysis of reflexivity is frequent and goes back to different theoretical approaches consolidated in the field, at least throughout the 20th century (Colombo 2, 2016).

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Given this, if we turn to youths from the urban peripheries of a country with high rates of social inequality (OCDE, 2018), such as Brazil, we can add histories of precarious access to work, school, urban infrastructure and, thus, to cultural apparatuses that we could suppose linked to the formation of reflexive 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 access to school practices (Setton, 2004; Martín-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). This leads us to another question concerning the potentially tense or eccentric relationship with educative-institutional references, 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 arrangements in their contexts. Authors from different approaches have discussed reflexivity as a constituent of contemporary social life (Archer, 2011; Beck; Giddens; Lash, 2012; Boltanski, 2014; Caetano, 2017) and, in this sense, we seek to interpret its diffraction in peripheralized social spaces. Inspired by Danilo Martuccelli's contributions (2005; 2014; 2023), this allows us to discuss the specificity of this reflexivity from the textures composing and the objectivation apparatuses appropriated there.

This intent is established for us, first, for a sociological reason. In the scenario drawn above, it is urgent to renew the construction of investigative interlocutions with a comprehensive tenor, focused on actors' active role in producing meanings for social actions; turned to the links created between individuality and structural elements in different social domains (Colombo; Pinheiro, 2021). Secondly, reflexive dynamics are used for educational purposes. They are interested in dialogical and equitable relationships and attentive to the gnoseological bases mobilized by young people in contexts of sociocultural diversity in socialization.

To achieve this, we propose a study with five objectives. We will briefly present (1) recurrent theoretical approaches to the notion of reflexivity, deriving (2) an



ethnographically inspired position taking, anchored in the actors' experiences of cultural inscription from different field techniques. Next, (3) we will examine briefly the configurations of structural textures in peripheral locations to discuss (4) youth appropriations concerning the enunciation apparatus that young people increasingly access. Then, we differentiate (5) the disposition of reflexivities among young student activists, as a problematization of the approach to critical-modern education. Finally, we will advance the final considerations, summarizing the possible reflexive dynamics *in situ*.

2 Reflexivities: The academic context of debates

In its ordinary uses, the word “reflect” (*re - lecture*; bend again) can designate actions like 'cogitating,' 'thinking about,' or 'reverberating.' A step further, reflexivity has been adequate to refer to the ability to fold over, bend, and think about oneself and one's actions in context. It is reasonable to consider that Western modernity highlighted such uses, normalizing interpellations by individual responsibility and subjective experiences of themselves (Melucci, 2004).

In academic debates, we can affirm that reflexivity is situated in discussions about the routinization of social practices and the socially engendered need for objectification and self-monitoring. In this sense, it is possible admit this examination on two central approaches, not rare, articulated: i) the analysis of cultural and symbolic practices that provide metapragmatic skills, with emphasis on schooling and intellectualization; and ii) the identification of situations of maladjustment inscribed in biographical paths and/or circumstances of contextual incongruity. In a non-exhaustive register, we can mention the French dispositionalist school (Bourdieu; Chamboredon; Passeron, 2002; Lahire, 2002) can be called upon here, but also Archer's research about historically recent morphogenetic transformations and individual actions touching on it (Archer, 2011).

If we turn to the political arena, we can also allude to Boltanski's problematizations (2014), who admit reflexivity as part of everyday life built under the societal imperative of justification. Not ignoring 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. Interpretive competencies would support Metapragmatics, and it could



become a concern for critical or existential questions produced in the clash between social reality (institutionally produced) and world experiences.

On the other hand, the perspectives developed by Beck, Giddens, and Lash (2012) attribute recursive structural contours to the reflexivity, as a repercussion of exacerbating typical characteristics of modernity. The infiltration of “risk” as an experience and interpretative category, 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 (scientific) knowledge into everyday activities, the establishment of new political conflicts (overflowing institutionalized politics), and the increased individualization in facing systemic issues.

Based on this framework, we can also observe recent discussions that take reflexivity as a means of qualifying research (Ademolu, 2023; Kapinga; Huizinga; Shaker, 2022; Quraishi *et al.* 2022), or as a dialogical device with a political-formative emphasis, whether in decolonial epistemic problematizations on collective action (Liwanag; Rhule, 2021; Melis Cin *et al.* 2023) or research on narrative apparatus (Motta *et al.* 2013). Other works provide pertinent problematizations of youth actions in socio-interactive contexts, with emphasis on online participation (Hokkanen, 2023), agency in the face of neighborhood changes (Butcher, 2019), or internal conversations to confront biographical discontinuities (Barrat, Appleton and Pearson. 2020).

For a consistent position from such a set, we can assume that reflexivity is pointed up in the last four decades. According to the literature above, socio-historical changes generally affect the relationship between subject and environment, notably via tensioning of reference marks of action and interpretation of reality. It also arises from interactive or formative practices of different types, which affect one's relationship with their domains of action.

Along with these approaches, we perceive the predominant assignment of propositional exams and/or proleptic justification dynamics to reflexive actions. Coping with social order, individuals manage problems and/or references, adjust ways, or resist facing the limits or uncertainties of reality.

However, as we move forward with our incursions with young people from urban peripheries in southern Brazil, a kind of re-dimensioning of the parameters is necessary. Then, we have faced the production of reflexivities in places characterized by precarious



access to cultural and symbolic capitals, high levels of violence (and restriction of speech), and historical experiences of vulnerability regarding modern social rights. However, this has not prevented, a certain informational and imagery intensification of experiences via media access (TV and Internet) and, in some cases, the politicization of everyday and identity aspects. The reflexive dynamics need a close look at the nuance between bending over (oneself) and *cogito*; and the action's senses should be observed along with the actors' effective itineraries of cultural and symbolic inscription (Martuccelli, 2023).

3 References to research: a position taking

Briefly, we admit reflexive capacities to actors in general (internal or external conversations), modulating them according to socioeconomic and cultural conditions. In this way, it is also possible to take Archer's approach (2011) and Caetano's research (2017), which assume reflexivity as an ordinary activity socially configured, can be highlighted. As analytical devices, we can take their reflexive action categorizations to operationalize their configurative dimensions and inflect them after our argumentation. Within the limits of this writing, we can indicate:

- i) Deepening – functional to meta-analytical level;
- ii) Scope – practical-sectorized to existential-general;
- iii) Referentiality – intimate-individual to eco-logical; and
- iv) Temporality – immediate to long term.

Our research turns to the understanding of diffracted dynamics in socially vulnerable contexts. On the one hand, we address urban peripheries, which are social spaces scarcely problematized in the cited literature on reflexivity, which also discusses it from finalist perspectives or under the premise of raising awareness of those in vulnerability. Without neglecting its relevance, and still within the framework of modern semantics for equity and social justice (Martuccelli, 2017), we take the notion of “social vulnerability” for situations of precarious or unequal access to socially legitimized resources as rights (health, education, work etc.), whose characterization does not cease in access to services offered by the State (Pinheiro, 2015). In other words, the challenge posed here is understanding reflexivity from the vulnerable condition, in which actors appropriate and construct cultural and symbolic artifacts.



On the other hand, we bear in mind that the reflexive dynamics in urban peripheries is shown to be "baroque" in everyday life, arising obliquely from diverse sources (trials faced, schooling, media programming etc.), references, and apparatus, even if the experts are those that credit it with a certain legitimacy in the late modernity (Martuccelli, 2006).

[...] Contrary to what is generally assumed, the denials provided by reality are far from having the clarity, reactivity, and immediacy usually assumed. Social life tolerates in an ordinary and simultaneous way, for more or less long periods of time, heterogeneous actions with complex success differentials (Martuccelli, 2023, p. 06)³.

In such a way, the contributions of Martuccelli (2005) on the malleability of social consistency, between diverse textures (layers of meanings) and variable coercions, have proved to be a relevant inspiration. Here, it means considering the reflective agency of individuals from the gnosiological inscription of actions to suggest how reality checks are engendered and symbolic supports are mobilized *in situ*. In other words, we have taken the contextual possibilities for acting differently (*agir autrement*) to recognize heterogenous declinations of reflexivity.

In this way, our analytical effort follows three axes. We:

- (1) identify texture arrangements evoked by the actors, with a view to what we observed as recurring filiations and social bonds the actors set in motion;
- (2) emphasize some of the objectification apparatus mobilized by young people;
- (3) contrast both to the characterization in the previous topic, mainly the dimensions indicated (Archer, 2011; Caetano, 2017).

From there, we problematize the reflexive dynamics present in youth actions in accordance with some specific and illustrative youth social participations.

3.1 On the field

Here, the result of the effort of immersion is a configuration of dialogue's temporality, between shared experiences in the field and the elaboration of some reflexive notes (Rocha; Eckert, 1998; 2008). In addition, it is an attempt to open up new possibilities for thinking about social experience, as education of attention for new perspectives concerning mutual understanding and knowledge production (Ingold, 2016).

³All the citations in this article (references or speeches) were translated by the authors.



The analysis we will present next concerns 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 comparison, 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 places. 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).

Between 2010 and 2019, our incursions into the territories attended the practices the actors ordinarily produced, carrying out ten thematic talking circles later. Thus, we intended to qualify the dialogicity for testimonies construction but also to generate possibilities to contrast the accounts. In this sense, we anchor the interlocution in a narrative device, contributing an age cohort to distinguish reflective inflections among young people.

In that period, we have also produced two collections. The first and central *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 trials faced in the experiences, and textures arrangements appropriated.⁴ It is an intentional sample whose completion was defined according to the 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 database was built by questionnaire survey with young students from different levels of education, applied in public schools based in the same locations between 2017 and 2019. The collection instrument, in addition to the items mentioned for

⁴ 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.



the interviews, detailed the consumption of audiovisual narratives,⁵ 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 do not aim for statistical extrapolations but for 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 gather information from a segment of young adolescents (or near) whose access to schooling and to information and communication technologies (ICT) 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.

Hence, the techniques used in the research path constitute an immersive heuristic arrangement, ranging from interactive approaches to contextualized surveys, which allowed us to conduct an extensive and relatively quick examination for a specific segment, returning after interviews with young students. In this sense, the procedural and scope differentiation between in-depth qualitative techniques and quantitative and descriptive studies should be interpreted here in favor of a comprehensive premise, anchored in the reflective complementarity of the research procedures.

After systematizing the information from both materials, we could consider three groups from urban peripheries: youngsters from 18 to 29 years old, attached to different social and cultural practices (construction, commerce, education, arts, etc.); young students (mostly adolescents), more directly linked to institutional cultural socialization; and older individuals, only for a cohort contrast. So, we conducted a final stage of investigation aimed at political-student activists from socially vulnerable contexts. Through five thematic debate circles held in 2021 (racism, gender disputes, struggles for territories, cultural conflicts, and clashes for the right to education), we dialogued with different actors about their agendas and militancy itineraries, comparing the conditions,

⁵We watched 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 they were interested in. In this case, the analysis was guided by the plots' characters, relational arrangements, and the episodes' recurrent narrative configuration.



arrangements, and apparatus of the reflexive dynamics they integrated⁶. Thus, we seek to outline elements of understanding the reflexivity in urban peripheries and, in addition, to signal changes when they are immersed in schooling and/or activism.

4 Peripheral textures, bases for understanding

Recalling the discussion established elsewhere (Pinheiro, 2020a) is pertinent to ground the analyses of reflexive dynamics in urban peripheries, especially since adults and older people experiences, in this case, born between 1945 and 1975. We have built an approximation to the notion of 'hyper-agency', as Martuccelli (2010) states regarding 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 supports and ontological security in maintaining close ties. It is important to emphasize this because it will be through this condition that we will understand textures' production and/or mobilization *in situ*.

Our incursions indicate that the condition is embodied particularly in economic and cultural precariousness, the insufficiency of public services, and the chronic experiences of violence. Our interlocutors, connected to the growth of Brazilian metropolitan peripheries in the 1960s-70s, bring different experiences of individual accountability already in childhood, of dropping out of school to help 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. 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.

On the other hand, we can design the existence of a predominant "economic regime of reality", as discussed by Martuccelli (2014), i.e. a structural regime built under the aegis of the Science and its systemic interpretation about the objective and factual characteristics of reality, emphasizing the economic mechanics as sense of limits to social

⁶ In all cases, the ethical procedures provided for in CNS Resolutions 466/12 and 510/16 – Brazil have been considered in dialogic consent processes and by signing informed consent forms by young people or legal guardians. In addition, the signed consent of the educational institutions involved was obtained, in accordance with the approval of the research project by the Ethics Committees of the researcher's university and the Municipal Education Secretariat.



actions. In those contexts, the individual independency injunction is maybe the most evident sign in this sense, associated to family necessities and labor duty in the testimonies. So, the interlocutions indicated the need to emphasize the interpretation of derivative textures mobilized in arenas of sociability, cultural performances, and narrative consumption. Without any intention of exhaustive inventory, we propose analyzing appropriations in three arrangements still current in urban peripheries: *popular religiosity*; *black culture*; and *mass media narratives*. 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 signs and meanings evoked in each case, nor study in more details such dispositions. We only taking recurrent configurations for pointing out specific dynamics.

Experiences of popular religiosity

[...] That time was still when we were going to [association] meetings to get a house. Then, I don't know why, they shut it off. Before, they used to do a lot of parties and birthdays and things like that at the residents' association [...] And, one day, I still lived in the back of my sister's house and Gilvan [husband] said to me: "Eva, they are invading the association building. Are we going to invade too?". So, I said: "no, we are not going to invade anything; Let's wait. 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."

I prayed, I put it in God's hand and the other day, Gilvan looked and said: "Eva, the other side is empty!". I said: "so, we're going to move there!".

Then, I was cleaning and washing everything; at this, the association's president, Beto, arrived. He arrived and said: "who is there?". I said, "It's me, Beto." So, he said: "Oh, Eva, thank God! This place here was reserved for you." [Eva, 56 years old, Evangelical, *Restinga*, 2015]

Although religious diversity in Brazil today is mainly Christian,⁷ contextualized immersion indicates the need to allude to popular religiosity. By problematizing it, Torre (2012) characterizes the social production of an "in-between means," i.e., of a practice capable of hybridizing references 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 pass through institutional scopes and transit through different symbolic-esoteric references.

In the quotation above, our interlocutor seeks justifications for a family trial in the itinerary. A position that tactically appropriates the codes of its religious community, and even has moral support from others. Here, we can evoke Weber's arguments (1982) about

⁷ 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).



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 mystical assemblages, mobilizing esoteric invisible beings for earthly action. One could operate with sagacity and pragmatism in everyday life but used to regard 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. It could 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 on Getúlio [Avenue]. Then, *Gato Preto*, who was always with me (I taught him), 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!”. *Gato*, also from a religious family, looked at me near the berimbau: “so?”. I said: “go on, beat him! Ogun? Give me a break...”. *Gato* beat him, which made Ogun run through Getúlio and he lost his horse in the process [laughs]. [Bolívar, 55 years old, *Bom Jesus*, 2015].

Turning to the inclinations of black culture, the rhythm (set to music) would be a plot for experiencing time and, in traditional African culture, capable of articulation with other semantic and performative networks (dance, religion, objects, etc.). In fact, when samba was born the lyrics of this musical genre would have a proverbial character, which was close to the oral tales, the apologues that guided 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, one must remember that performance places the body as the main enunciation and resistance device, from which life would be celebrated through movement, corporal painting, and the evocation of ancestors. The



world's "enchantment" would be maintained based on corporeality in interaction with the natural and the supernatural (in the affection of teas, herbs, stones, guides, etc.).

In the quotation, the anecdote can illustrate what we say above and expresses popular humor (in this case, the jocular mockery), an artifice that does not seem minor to us. On different occasions, we noticed in the field the delight in sharing a joke or a game, even in the precarious condition or the interposition of adversity, as if they were there in an enunciative game that denotes reality limits, indicating the ethics to play: the adverse happens, and one must move on. In addition to pointing with moral judgments and action limits, supporting shared codes of conduct, it is possible to observe that the example condenses a certain displacement: our interlocutor told a confrontation experience, including different symbolic references which the character drift circumstantially, and the narrative ends up valuing the bond's malleability and the personal agency.

However, black culture agents also took part in institutionalized arenas and formal disputes. It is possible to mention the incursions into the capitalist cultural market, which condensed black musicians' tactics in search of recognition as well as the systematization and authorial individualization of compositions gestated, often, in collective circuits (Jost, 2015). We can evocate the critical rescue of black ethnic knowledge (capoeira included), objectifying them to codify their pedagogies beyond (and in line with) body, oral, and narrative expressiveness (Lucena and Trigueiro, 2018). Or, then, remembering the severe criticism from the black movement on the interpretive logic of miscegenation, seeking to establish racial conflict as an explanatory factor for Brazilian history and social reality (Santiago Júnior, 2012).⁸

Mass media narrative appropriations

[...] It depends 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, *Mãe de Santo, 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', but then I thought like this... (everyone knows at home, but they got angry when I told them): "guys, God is not that nice thing you think. He says like: "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]

⁸ 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 Nascimento, Muniz Sodré, Oliveira Silveira, among others, active critics from the 1970s onward (Santiago Júnior, 2012).



Concerning the narrative appropriations, 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, as the quotation above indicates. The soap opera would be the most prominent example, mixing plots that remind us of old feuilletons, composing current themes and technologies, and evoking known formats for industrialized uses (Martín-Barbero, 1992)⁹. 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.

The most heteronomous of the configurations problematized, media narratives require a work of appropriation by individuals, that is, the derivation of mediations in sociable relations into the meaning of everyday life. In this sense, we understand that the configuration of a certain common 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 (Schlack; Araujo, 2022). 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. In this sense, the media takes part in the production of the social ties into the domestic space, via dramatization and spectacularization (Canclini, 2019).

In the contexts analyzed, we could argue that the reflexivity has a functional depth and practical scope in most cases (Caetano, 2017) with contingent projections. However, taken the texture arrangements we briefly discussed above, there are other aspects to point out. We highlight the agentic premises that constitutes them and the valuation of reciprocity ties. Furthermore, social reality expands by having esoteric

⁹ According to the Secretariat of Communication of the Presidency (SECOM, 2016), soap operas are until the most watched on Brazilian TVs.



beings in the actors' narratives. With this, we think it is necessary to underline the specific elasticity of social reality limits, perform from the assemblages produced by individuals from and beyond what institutionality supposed to social order ("[...] the action is a bet", would say Martuccelli, 2014, p. 20).

There is a historical practice in configuring enunciation devices from corporal-musical performances and from everyday moral and oral justifications through which homologies and bricolage are arranged. Agency is combined with a cognitive inclination toward appropriation and adjustment in the face of reality checks, without losing the transcendence as a background assistance, itself tacitly malleable. In other words, referentiality is also anchored in reciprocal ties and values, and temporality or, especially, hopes are tranquilized by transcendent justice in long term.

But we wouldn't consider the configuration analyzed above as reflexive actions exactly, and the contrast with objectification and narration apparatus used by youngsters can help us to better explain.

5 From the rumors, reflexivity: young people and diffracted inflections

Sorj and Martuccelli (2008) point out significant social changes in Latin American reality in the last four decades. 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 democratization, at least regarding expectations of equality relations.

Remembering Melucci (2001), here, the 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 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 also use digital technologies to reproduce musical and artistic artifacts and, later, take part in expanded narrative apparatus (in social networks, in the publication of videos, in the composition of lyrics, and poetry among peers).

Furthermore, among teenagers and young adults, there are those who most widely enjoy access to schooling extended to high school (albeit intermittent or truncated) and,



even, 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; Thin, 2001) and the feasibility of social moratorium, albeit unstable.¹⁰

5.1 Reflexive dynamics: enunciation apparatuses for everyday textures

Here, we resort to the arrangements already presented, adding the uses of apparatus that objectify them in some way. Firstly, as for the inflections in *popular religiosity*, considering the arguments in the literature, we can refer to the “theology of prosperity” example whose reciprocity ties establish a precise segmentation between believers and lay people and emphasize the individual search for worldly success (Montes, 1998), or even ponder the interaction of religions with other reflexive bases (environmental, feminist discourses etc.).¹¹ The regulation of faith changes. Among young people, we can notice a marked shift between a secularized conscience and religious belonging or a certain flexibility in the bond to dogmas that internally pluralizes institutionalized spaces (Carranza; Sofiati, 2018; Silveira; Sofiati, 2017).

However, when we dialogue with individuals apart from strict religious affiliations, the aphorisms of “common sense” seems 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 an African matrix). He told us “God is one” and recommended that we attend a faith community 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 fair; he took away a gift from me but put me on another path.”

The nuances are subtle. The allusion to the transcendent remains, but everyday life is occupied by the instrumental knowledges of work and schooling. Using non-empirical entities as reliable referents in the face of the imponderable retains, in short, a

¹⁰ The growing valuing of schooling is also linked to the reconfiguration of the Brazilian job market, at least since the mid-1990s, which expanded qualification requirements (Arretche, 2015).

¹¹ Examples of analyses that emphasize appropriations, resignifications, and negotiations can be found in the research of Guedes (2013), Roese (2018), and Pereira (2018).



more delimited place for the esoteric. The transcendent remains omnipresent but displaced to intimate explanations and terminal subterfuges so that one sees less a rupture than a differential gradation in the positions of youngsters concerning this symbolic support for elaborating the reality checks.

If the changes in popular religiosity can be associated with a relatively diffracted disenchantment process, the inflections in the *appropriation of media narratives* provide more significant evidence about the reflexive dynamics. When conducting our descriptive survey with students, we invited them to indicate the means most used. 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%).

Turning specifically to the consumption of narratives, we found an increase in citations for the series' audience in a positive correlation with schooling.¹² The most accentuated oscillation occurred among those who attended higher education, including internet access for 'studies' (52%), consumption of 'series' (42%)¹³ 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.'

Considerable dispersion was observed when consulted about preferred conversation topics. Nevertheless, 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, analysis of the configuration of audiovisual narratives and the testimonies of young students may 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.

¹² Chi-square test, alpha 0.05.

¹³ In contrast, the percentage of citations for those who attended elementary school was around 30%.



[...] Soap opera represents what we go through daily, 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. [Lúcia, talking circle with high school students at night – Lomba do Pinheiro – Aug/2019]

[...] I really like watching superheroes series. They have a fantasy part, but they have their dramas, the human element. 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, he is a lawyer and has a great sense of justice [...] Then, I think this 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, we identify that the former refers to everyday life and close moral conflicts; while in the latter, the elements of fiction or fantasy story are reported, the scripts would include more innovations and diversifications. The characters in the series are also linked 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 there are appeals of recognition with a reflexive and singularist content in the youth preferences: 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 iniquitous. Peculiar weaknesses often 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; processes occur regarding unraveling oneself in a reflexive progression in facing adversities.

There are other elements to consider in the agency of texture arrangements and apparatus to understand the reflexive dynamics among young people. Youth practices analyzed in youth sociology research, especially from the mid-1990s onwards, indicate the creation of informal socialization arenas in which 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). Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) 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 lead the use of the internet and the narrativization of themselves. However, they also experience the reverse of the deinstitutionalization of their subsistence alternatives (Martín-Barbero, 2017).¹⁴

Prominent examples of those mentioned above can be found in youthful *inclinations of black culture*, such as Funk, Slam or Hip-Hop actions. 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 Osumare (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 (Osumare, 2007).

Hip Hop actors use tactics in communicational arenas, using the “secondary orality” that ICTs provide and, above all, the popularization of video production allows. Our interlocutors spoke about employing images (first VHS tapes, then videos on virtual 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 types of knowledge, which converted into insertions as social educators in their localities (Pinheiro 1, 2020).

In this process, we understand a significant inflection regarding the reflexivity dynamics and the hybridized permanence of black texture 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, with relative organization and sequence of performances, and later as an object of handling. Thus, 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.

¹⁴In 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 (Corseuil, Franca and Poloponsky, 2016), so they very directly perceive the intensification of rhythms, flexibilization of rights, and precariousness of activities (Corrochano, 2016).



Taking the set of young people from our collection of interviews, we observe an increased cultural consumption compared to the ascendants and the condition of *poiesis* producers in interactive arenas. In other words, the expanded and diversified consumption of artifacts from the cultural industry (soap operas, movies, series, etc.)¹⁵, 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 reflexive inclinations.

[...] During this time that I dealt [drugs], I wanted to work, but I could not. But there was always something that I really liked to do, listen, hear, write, sing, which is Funk, the music. I want 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. I have a YouTube channel with almost 700 subscribers; I have a song with 2,000 views, which tells a little about me. Its name is 'To get where I got.'

[...]

Look at this other one here: "At half past four in the morning, there goes Dona Maria, a hard worker, two women in one, and she didn't even need Mr. Zé..." It's a naked and raw reality: Dona Maria, a name super common, going to work four o'clock in the morning to support her family; she's a woman who didn't even need "Mr. Zé", you know? A woman like my mother and grandmother, who raised me without my father, you know? These are songs that touch us intimately, which report and portray things that I've been through, that my family goes through.

[Gabriel, 20 years old, Funk MC, Cruzeiro, 2019]

Above, we have an illustrative case of what we address here: narratives related to the convivial *locus*, resulting in a look at oneself. An interpretative configuration of the personal experience permeated by moral judgments is established, including contextual factors; a retrospective look at the trials and networks of reciprocity, and the allusion to strategies and expectations of recognition. In this sense, it is necessary to realize that it is not just about communicating individual projections. This constitutes an interactive and hyperesthetic network (primarily online) dimensioned by a set of views and likes, also regulated by economic interests of advertising and commercialization.

Thus, such practices embody reflexive dynamics not only regarding the possible identification with mainstream characters and performances, but because young people produce sociability, narratives and expressive artifacts in reappropriation communities,

¹⁵ 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 contribute not only to expanding the framework of narratives to consume and share but to singularizing consumption.



to use Lash's (2012) terms. Further, a public set of exchanges is established on interactive bases of externalization. Reflexivity tends to a narrative rather than a propositional course, with the account being an up-to-date expedient to anchor the "pulsation of time," affirm ties and relate to the adverse: sometimes, the communication of an identity-difference that advocates affirmation; in others, the explanation of the path, with the hidden expectation of singularization, recognition and referentiality to the other.

5.2 Youth, political action and reflexivity

[...] I define myself as a black woman on the move! I don't want to be reduced to this or that.

[...] 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; I see the sense of not being alone. 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]

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 networks existing in the neighborhood, finding support for performance and recognition. On the other hand, what distinguishes the activist practice 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 political 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 black ancestry as the basis of their productions. They often used the notion of "system": sometimes, this word alluded to the exploitation experienced as if it indicated the dominant agents without locating them; other times, it was incarnated in more specific figures, such as the "boss" or the illicit drug trafficking market. Still, at other times, the performances mentioned God, the support of family members, and peace messages without losing their denunciatory verve. Once again, we 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 (us and them; exploited and exploiters). On the one hand, we approach here a particular socialization



process, crossed by belongings and actions in political-cultural arenas. On the other hand, we noticed that the marks of engaged politicalness were mixed with the textures and the agency presented before.

The testimonies contained metaphoric connections between itineraries and historiography, figured in the narrative as “resistance” (the life of “a survivor” – evoking the figure of young people, primarily black in urban peripheries in Brazil) and “overcoming,” which they would have constructed thanks to the symbolic and interactional support of the arts. According to our interpretation, for these activists, engagement is built up in agonistic performances collectively shared in situations of contextual inconsistency.

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; Rhule, 2021, p. 01), we can suggest nuances to the reflexive dynamics among activists. In other words, it is necessary to recover here the consequences of the schooling process, with a view to the inflections of the reflexive dynamics. In this sense, it is not just a question of recognizing the incorporation of cultural capital 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 existence and affections are significant vectors of action.

We must 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), we need 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 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.

However, if the beginning of activism occurred in student and university groups in particular, concerns were raised in opposition to these educational spaces, criticized for their hetero-normativity, whiteness, and/or *machismo*. The recommended readings in the institutions were criticized for their “lack of reality” when contrasted with our interlocutors’ experiences. Universities were seen not only as spaces to access intellectualized knowledge but as places of affection in the tensioning of knowledge and



encounter with new possible experiences. In short, political (and sociable) interactions in the academic sphere constituted a significant support for immersion in increasingly propositional reflexive bases through the construction of youth 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!". This type of feeling goes through reflexive dynamics, delineating historicity and conditions to discuss projections, solidary references, and structural interpretative notions, resorting to the narrative tenor to express what had been lived together and sustain the bond between singularities and the common.

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 experiences, the result of intense immersion in the activism network. They talk about knowledge from one or more activist belongings, under the wish to reconfigure life in common. The militancy is expressed as a *metier* and an affective motto, which is assumed as a public task and an existential commitment. The experiences (feminist, LGBTQIA+, black, peripheral, etc.) seem to be lived as ones from those who do not fit or overflow the institutional arenas, with changing these being part of the dispute for resizing social reality.

6 Final considerations

Our effort in this paper was to understand the reflexive dynamics produced by young people in the urban peripheries of Porto Alegre/RS, southern Brazil. Thus, after examining aspects of sociological approaches to contemporary reflexivity, highlighting the proleptic, finalistic, and propositional tendency of the research courses, we indicate a theoretical-methodological position for the malleability of social consistency and the possibility of heterogeneous actions (Martuccelli, 2023). Socially vulnerable contexts have been problematized in this sense, so that the textures and objectification apparatus mobilized by actors could support us in understanding the diffraction of reflexivity *in situ*.

In this way, we analyze interactions with three configurations of structural textures in popular contexts, namely: experiences of religiosity; inclinations of black culture; and appropriations of media narratives. In short, we underline the agency premises and the assessment of the reciprocal ties that constitute them, the spatiotemporal expansion of reality with the participation of the transcendent and the assemblages produced by individuals from and beyond hegemonic institutionality. So, we refer to historical



practices in the configuration of enunciation devices based on corporal-musical performances and daily moral and oral justifications through which homologies and bricolages are organized.

These configurations have been appropriated by our young interlocutors and made visible through objectifying apparatus, such as the consumption of audiovisual narratives, interactivity in virtual social networks, or artistic production. In fact, interaction with textures has been changed by the expansion of the market of symbolic goods and the enunciation devices available to young people, so that, even amid an unstable and vulnerable social consistency, they have managed to act on identity and singularist meanings. Reflexivity becomes the actor's daily work, but in a narrative-interactive modality (like "tell to"), oblique to institutions and integrated into a diffuse aesthetic mesh.

Such condition requires discerning that reflexive dynamics do not always privilege propositional or proleptic paths. Furthermore, although in everyday life we can observe reflexivities with a functional, practical and immediate tendency, it is necessary to consider that the referentiality for the dynamics considered goes beyond individualization through interactive and reciprocal connections. Temporality in them also evokes retrospection and the affirmation of ties in the narrative and can reassure the hereafter by sharing it with transcendence.

We perceive nuances of critical tenor as we get into activist cosocialization, but as individuals reconfigure the network of interdependencies of their experiences and find other spaces of interaction and self-inflection. In other words, the conversion to modern institutional justifications that educational and student spaces represent did not occur without the support of those who share similar itineraries. Even when the discourses had propositional content and analysis of structural ambition, they were built from a narrative base that evoked existentiality. These are nuances in a set of enunciative emphases: the proposition analytically deconstructs; the narrative (re)articulates and integrates elements in the face of the discontinuities of historicity.

At the same time, in this journey, we seek to broaden the spectrum of interpretation of reflexivities and establish new dialogical-educational bases. In what we hope can be a theoretical-methodological contribution to the field of studies, we work on the contextualized interpretation of the young experiences of cultural inscription, looking at reflexive agency in/from spaces of vulnerability and, also, in reference to the specificity of the Latin American scenarios of individuation (Martuccelli, 2010). So, we do not



address exactly the reflexive contents, but the gnoseological supports of their production. From this point, we have also tried to follow a political-educational purpose, that of establishing a way of recognizing the reflexivity that youth actions entail; as researchers-educators, to take on the trial of identifying ways of pluralizing perspectives of mutual understanding, debating about “[...] the Gods we carry in our hearts” (Boltanski, 2014, p. 148). Purposes, in short, that seem to us as elusive as necessary to understand the different drifts of the common in the metropolises.

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