Title:

Rhythms of individuation: Temporality, stratification and youth trajectories at the periphery

Keywords:

Peripheries; youth; subjectivity; rhythm; individuation; Brazil.

Abstract:

The formation of subjects' temporal frames of thought and action has long been central to the study of social stratification. However, theorisation of these processes has tended to focus on highly institutionalised environments in the global North. By contrast, the peripheries of Brazilian cities constitute "heterogeneous fields" of subjectivity formation, in which state institutions act in highly uneven ways and coexist with other actors and processes. To account for these contextual differences, this article proposes we reimagine linear processes of social reproduction, characteristic of structuralist models, as processes of "individuation", whereby subjects emerge through interaction with heterogeneous pre-individual fields. As they individuate, subjects encounter diverse "rhythms", generating experiences of "eurhythmia" and "arrythmia" that influence individual decisions and shape life trajectories. To illustrate the approach, these analytical tools are applied to case studies of three young people drawn from ethnographic research conducted in the periphery of São Paulo.

1. Introduction

The question of subjects' temporal frames of thought and action has long been central to the study of social stratification under capitalism. However, analyses of this relationship, at least from the mid-twentieth century onwards, has tended to be drawn from the experiences of highly institutionalised environments. In Western Europe, and to a lesser extent North America, the state has been identified as playing a key role in stratifying different populations through the education system, the labour market and the wider assemblage of institutions and welfare supports surrounding them (Willis, 1977; Bourdieu, 1984). Even as welfare states have been eroded by decades of neoliberalism, social reproduction still tends to be understood primarily via the role of the state and the formal labour market. For example, Wacquant (2010) has described how a receding welfare state has been replaced by disciplinary state practices of "workfare" and "prisonfare", together imposing a new regime of marginality on the urban poor.

The peripheries of São Paulo today certainly bear resemblance to the conditions described by Wacquant, based on his research in cities like Chicago and Paris. However, there are crucial differences. Historically, São Paulo's peripheries emerged via a weakly regulated process of urbanisation that left them with levels of poverty and gaps in service provision far greater than those typically found in the urban global North (Caldeira, 2017). These challenges were partially mitigated by residents of these spaces through the development of informal practices of community organisation and channels of articulation to the state. In other words, since their first appearance, informal logics

of organisation have played a greater role in shaping everyday life and subjectivity in São Paulo's peripheries than in marginalised urban neighbourhoods in the global North.

Subsequent historical developments in the peripheries also depart from dominant narratives of neoliberalisation in the global North (Medina-Zárate and Uchôa de Oliveira, 2019). Since redemocratisation in the 1980s (and in this respect contrasting strongly with Wacquant's narrative), social security for low-income populations in Brazil has tended to expand over time, albeit from a very low baseline (Arretche, 2015). Meanwhile, even though Brazil's urban peripheries have been affected by processes of deindustrialisation and labour precarisation, at the same time, some new, previously inaccessible opportunities have become available to their residents. This was particularly the case during the period of Workers' Party (PT) government (2003-2016) in Brazil, when possibilities for consumption and higher education became far more widely available (Pinheiro-Machado, 2019). Over the same period local organisational ecologies were also transformed in diverse ways, in particular through the growing influence of non-state organisations such as churches, NGOs and criminal groups, with important influence over subjectivity formation (Feltran, 2020; 2011). Building on these insights (see also Kopper and Richmond, 2020), peripheries are here conceived as "heterogeneous fields" of subjectivity formation, defined by the coexistence of diverse social and organisational influences. Such a move keeps a focus on the role of the state in processes of subjectivity formation, while also drawing our attention to other actors and processes.

As will be described through the presentation of three case studies of young people in the periphery of São Paulo, individuals navigate this heterogeneous field in complex and

often highly contingent ways, developing different temporal frames in the process. In order to capture the complexity of these processes, I propose two core concepts. First, I deploy the notion of 'individuation' (Deleuze, 1994) to denote a process whereby individuality emerges through interaction with diverse contextual influences over time, developing particular desires, attachments and identities. Second, I mobilise the notion of 'rhythm' (Lefebvre, 2004), understood as an embodied mechanism that produces subjective experiences of "eurhythmia" or "arrhytmia"; that is of synchrony or asynchrony with other rhythms present in the social environment. In this way, rhythm impacts upon individual decisions and helps to shape long-term trajectories.

The article begins with a review of the literature on the relationship between social stratification and temporality, followed by a presentation of the theoretical framework adopted. The subsequent sections mobilise this approach through the presentation of the three case studies. These are all drawn from ethnographic research carried out in the district of Sapopemba in the eastern periphery of São Paulo, an area that is characteristic of the social and institutional heterogeneity of peripheries today (see Richmond, 2020). Finally, I summarise the implications of the analysis presented for how we understand processes of subjectivity formation in the peripheries of São Paulo and beyond.

2.   Social stratification and temporality

Capitalism and social reproduction in Western sociology

The relationship between social stratification and temporal frames – individuals' perceptions of time and the timescales over which they plan and act – was a foundational concern in Western sociology. For Marx, the capitalist mode of production

shaped the temporal horizons of different classes via its "alienating" effects and the inherent antagonism it provoked between capitalists and workers (Osborne, 2008). One of the key battlegrounds of class struggle was the working day, which determined the amount of time that workers would contribute to capitalists' profits. However, this was also a struggle over working-class subjectivity itself and the possibility of escaping temporal horizons imposed by capitalist relations of production. Weber (2002), by contrast, reversed the causal relationship between the economic and subjective realms, arguing that the "Protestant ethic" that had emerged from the Reformation, characterised by "inner-worldly asceticism", had laid the cultural and ethical foundations for the emergence of capitalism itself.

Social psychologists in the post-War era examined the relationship between class stratification and temporal horizons, identifying a tendency among middle classes to "defer gratification" compared to a "present time orientation" among the working classes (Schneider and Lysgaard, 1953). While not controversial in themselves, such observations became the basis for heated polemics over subsequent decades. In outlining his 'culture of poverty' thesis, for example, Oscar Lewis controversially argued that the lower classes exhibited "a strong present time orientation with relatively little disposition to defer gratification and plan for the future, and a high tolerance for psychological pathology of all kinds" (Lewis, 1966, p. 23). He ultimately attributed such "psychological pathology" to structural factors, but also argued the culture of poverty would tend to "perpetuate itself" and could be transmitted across generations (Lewis, 1966, p. 21). In his polemic against the US Great Society reforms, Banfield (1970) went further, making the "time horizon" the *cause* of supposedly pathological behaviour and claiming it was incentivised by the welfare state:

Thus, the traits that constitute what is called lower-class culture or life style are consequences of the extreme present-orientation of that class. The lower class person lives from moment to moment, he is either unable or unwilling to take account of the future or to control his impulses. Improvidence and irresponsibility are direct consequences of this failure to take the future into account. (Banfield 1970, p. 54)

Banfield's moralistic diatribe stands in stark contrast to structuralist accounts of social reproduction that achieved a high degree of sophistication in Western Europe during the 1970s, when welfare systems reached their greatest extent (eg. Bourdieu, 1984; Willis, 1977). These models attributed classed differences in temporal horizons to structures of socialisation linking the family, the education system and the world of work. These structures meant that working-class children were literally trained by their parents and teachers for a life of repetitive manual labour, with a side-effect being that they also learned to take advantage of fleeting opportunities for self-indulgence. In other words, "time orientation" was understood as adaptive to social reality, rather than "pathological". As Bourdieu put it:

It has to be pointed out that the propensity to subordinate present desires to future desires depends on the extent to which this sacrifice is 'reasonable', that is, on the likelihood, in any case, of obtaining future satisfactions superior to those sacrificed. […] The hedonism which seizes day by day the rare satisfactions ('good times') of the immediate present is the only philosophy

> conceivable to those who 'have no future' and, in any case, little
>
> to expect from the future. (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 180–183)

Wacquant's (2010) aforementioned analysis of "advanced marginality" can be understood as a continuation of structuralist approaches to social stratification in the neoliberal era. Where the education system, labour market and welfare state were once decisive in regulating the lives and temporal frames of action of the working classes, today punitive state institutions, in the shape of workfare and prisonfare, play an increasingly central role.

Brazilian experiences and approaches

When Bourdieu developed his analyses of social reproduction, the conditions of Brazil's working classes were very different to those of Western Europe, being characterised by extreme poverty, an almost total absence of welfare and public services, and widespread informality in housing, work and social organisation. Nonetheless, as Brazil experienced rapid economic growth during the 1970s, ethnographers like Durham (1980) observed how low-paid but abundant industrial work, often supplemented by informal economic activities, permitted a part of the peripheral population to develop longer timeframes of action. Supported by extended kinship networks, many *"famílias operárias"* (laboring families) could gradually save money, buy land informally, autoconstruct homes and raise children that, they hoped, would one day live more comfortably than they did. As Feltran (2011, p. 58) points out:

> A portion – limited, but not insignificant – of labouring families
>
> were able to offer their children greater stability to develop a
>
> project of upward mobility, thanks to the longevity of the

providers' employment, the security of this work and owning their own homes.

Although neglected by the state, then, Brazil's Fordist production model, informal home ownership and household organisation allowed part of the peripheral working-class population to develop "projects of upward mobility" that operated over extended timeframes.

Since the 1990s, Brazil's urban peripheries have transformed in diverse and contradictory ways, with important implications for these "projects". As noted previously, welfare and services have expanded at the same time as labour market has become increasingly precarious and employment trajectories more diverse.

In this context, Souza (2009; 2012) proposes a division of Brazil's popular classes into two broad groups: the "*batalhadores*" (strugglers) and the "*ralé*" (rabble). The "strugglers" are the "laboring families" of the post-Fordist economy. They are characterised by tightknit family structures that facilitate individual entry into a precarised labour market by pooling resources and inculcating an ability to endure long working hours and carefully manage household finances. The "rabble", meanwhile, are a subproletariat who, despite marginal improvements during the PT era, continue to experience conditions of severe social and economic vulnerability. This population typically possesses no savings and survives through an unstable mix of casual work, state benefits, and illicit activities. Unlike the organised strugglers, the families of the rabble are typically "unstructured", impeding the maintenance of a reliable income stream and the intergenerational transmission of habits of discipline and future orientation. Souza thus describes the rabble as living in a "eternal today" (Souza, 2009, p. 43).[i]

Broadly, Souza's analysis appears to be an adaptation of Bourdieu's structuralist model to Brazil's social reality. However, as Feltran (2020) makes clear, not all aspects of social difference that are relevant to the formation of subjectivity and temporal horizons are reducible to such a binary distinction, or even to "structural" factors at all. Firstly, he describes how individuals who might broadly fit the profiles of "strugglers" or "rabble" often coexist and interact with one another in the same neighbourhoods and even the same families. Meanwhile, this coexistence occurs within a heterogenous organisational context containing diverse actors: from state educational, welfare and youth offender institutions, to NGOs, churches, and organised crime.

Feltran (2020) thus conceives the peripheries today as characterised by the tense, negotiated and often conflictual, coexistence of "normative regimes" overseen by different actors, each with its own values, organisational hierarchies and codes for the management of everyday life. Individual subjects live on the "tense boundaries" of these different orders, making choices and developing tactics for circulating between them and managing the different opportunities and risks that they represent. Given the complexity and fluidity that Feltran describes, I propose that further, "extra-structural" concepts are needed to conceptualise the formation of subjects' temporal horizons in such contexts.

3. Outlines of an analytical framework: From social reproduction to rhythms of individuation

This section briefly presents two distinct, but complementary concepts that will be further developed in the subsequent case studies: "individuation" and "rhythm". For Deleuze (1994), representation subordinates difference to identity by formulating

categories based on resemblances. Instead, he proposes a model whereby the regularities we observe in the social world are understood as the products of individuation. This occurs as concrete entities emerge within a pre-individual field, analogous to the morphogenetic process by which biological organisms take particular forms. Although repetition can be observed in processes of individuation, the heterogeneity of the pre-individual field and the nonlinearity of these processes ensure that outcomes always vary. Meanwhile, via "counter-effectuation", the field itself may be transformed by already individuated entities and the relationships between them.

This demonstrates that difference not only exists prior to, but also *arises from* repetition. As such, Deleuze's model represents a "radicalisation" (rather than abandonment) of structuralism (Williams, 2005). The regular outcomes we observe in the social world are the result of processes of individuation occurring under conditions that constrain individuals, but which can also accommodate significant variation and are liable to change over time. By implication, this approach rejects the notion of a linear process of "social reproduction" shaped exclusively by "structural" differences and the institutions of family, school and work. Instead, further influences and mechanisms must also be identified to account for singular trajectories of individuation. These might include, for example, emergent affects and desires that produce affinities between individuals beyond those over-determined by their structural position. It would also include the values, beliefs and practices of specific organisational actors. Although these actors operate within constraints (not least the need to reproduce themselves within a capitalist economy), they are seen as playing a productive and innovative role in generating particular patterns of subjectivity, rather than simply reflecting structural pressures.

A second concept proposed here is "rhythm", as outlined by Lefebvre (2004). Lefebvre echoes Deleuze in denying the existence of "absolute repetition", similarly observing the way in which difference emerges within repetitive sequences (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 7). This can be observed in the simultaneous coexistence of and distinction between the "cyclical time" of social organisation and the "linear time" of historical change, which occurs within and through cyclical repetitions (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 30). Lefebvre also proposes that the speed and regularity of rhythms are not absolute, and can only be understood relative to one another and to the existence of some kind of common measure or beat (Lefebvre, 2004, pp. 10–11). For example, the life-course rhythms of different social or religious groups can be measured against the different rates at which they pass through common milestones.

As this implies, different organisational actors can, to a significant degree, shape the social rhythms of their participants. "Dressage", or training through repetition, is one key mechanism through which occurs (Lefebvre, 2004, pp. 38–45). This might occur via the imposition of particular routines, as in schooling or military training, or through normative practices and rituals. Such routines may be internalised by a subject (and body) and thereafter reproduced largely independently. However they may also potentially be unlearned, either if the individual subject or their surrounding context changes in some way that weakens the influence of the rhythm.

Lefebvre offers two valuable concepts for conceiving the ways in which different rhythms interact, and how they affect transitions between different social spheres or life stages. 'Eurhythmia' is the condition of different rhythms being in synchrony with one another, allowing for relatively smooth transitions, whereas 'arrhythmia' signals

that rhythms are out of sync, generating experiences of discomfort and pushing subjects to choose between competing rhythms or adjust to new ones (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 16).

In what follows, the concepts of individuation, eurhythmia and arrhythmia will be mobilised to analyse three cases of young people's trajectories in the periphery of São Paulo. The cases all come from the district of Sapopemba in the city's East Zone, an area that epitomises the social and organisational heterogeneity of the peripheries (see Richmond, 2020). Fieldwork was conducted in 2016-2017 and included interviews with a total of 39 residents of different ages and backgrounds, additional interviews with a variety of key informants (including teachers, NGO workers, religious figures, health professionals and police), and participant observation in local NGOs. While the following discussion focuses on three individual cases, these were selected on the basis that they reflected broader findings of the research.

4. Rhythms of individuation: Three cases from the periphery of São Paulo

4.1 Brendha: Working out what you want to do

Brendha is a 22-year-old web developer from Sapopemba. She is short, with dark skin, long black wavy hair, and braces. She speaks in an assertive voice and responds to my questions with quick, clear and coherent answers. Brendha grew up in Sapopemba and lives in an apartment with her mother and grandmother. Her mother had moved to São Paulo with her family from the Northeast of Brazil when she was 12. Several other family members live nearby, including Brendha's father, who separated from her mother when she was a child. Brendha has two adult half-brothers and one young half-brother on her father's side, as well as two adult cousins, who she says are like siblings to her.

Brendha studied at a local school where she formed a group of friends whom she remains close to today, despite the fact that today she spends most of her time at work in the centre of São Paulo. Upon finishing school at 17, Brendha applied for an internship at an IT company and, to her surprise, got it. She also began a degree alongside her internship, which she completed in the middle of 2015, becoming the first member of her family to graduate from university. Since then she has worked in a paid role with another web development company. Brendha enjoys her work but hopes to take another qualification in web systems, which interests her more and would offer further opportunities for career progression.

On the face of it, Brendha is very much a child of the "PT era". She studied at a private university, funded by a means-tested grant programme for low-income students called *ProUni*. Without the existence of this state programme, Brendha's story could not have unfolded as it did. Under the previous system, her options would have been struggling through a private university (of which there were fewer), probably without financial support, or the near-impossible task of getting into an elite public university. However, while the PT's higher education policies may go a long way to explaining the proliferation of stories like Brendha's in the peripheries, it does not explain why Brendha was one of those who was willing and able to take advantage of them.

To answer this question, we may look to forms of stratification that were already present within the popular classes prior to the PT era. Feltran's (2011) discussion of the "projects" of laboring families would seem to fit Brendha's case. Her parents were stably employed and became homeowners. Even though they separated, she continued to have a supportive family environment reminiscent of Souza's (2012) "strugglers".

However, it is not clear that such a subjectivity among older generations is inevitably helpful for the young in a world of expanded higher education and white-collar employment. Indeed, a mindset of making small investments over a very long period can be counter-productive to those who need to take advantage of more transient opportunities and navigate a more diverse landscape of career possibilities. Furthermore, parents who have pursued such long-term projects are likely to lack specific knowledge regarding their children's studies and the practical matter of how to approach the flexibilised job market.

As Brendha describes it, her family were supportive of her in a general sense, but did not play a central role in her developing the attitudes and behaviours that would help her to progress educationally and professionally. Rather than encouraging her studies, Brendha's parents largely left her to her own devices:

> I have nothing to complain about with my mum, but she was never a person who would tell me "Look, you need to study, you need to do this". […] I would arrive home and she didn't ask how school had been, she didn't ask if I had some work to do. […] With school, I never had someone who would say to me, "go there and do that".

Instead, Brendha attributes her development of a career-oriented mindset to the tightknit peer-group she formed at school. She remembers that at a certain point she had begun to realise that the attitudes of her friends towards the future were different to her own. Whereas she had never really thought about what her life would be like

after school, others were already developing longer-term ambitions and preparing to pursue them. This was not a mindset that anyone in her family possessed:

> They [my family] inspire me in a way, yeah. They inspire me to follow my own path, like, you know, my career. But in terms of my aims, it was more my friends. Because they all had a dream. Everyone wanted… would say, "ah I want to do such and such". I said, "It's only me here who doesn't have a dream!" I said, "am I going to do the same as all my family did…finish school and just stop there?" No, they didn't do that, they opened my eyes and said, "no, you need to do this, this and this, and pursue something." And it was because of them really that I grew.

Brendha talks in particular about one friend, Maurício, who strongly influenced her attitudes towards work and the future. She describes his influence as helping her to recalibrate her everyday rhythms and thus approach her education and career in a more strategic way. Her family's influence led her to treat school as a regular but bounded activity, to be seen out to its natural conclusion before moving into the labour market. By contrast, Maurício encouraged her imagine a future path that she could already start to prepare for:

> One time he spoke to me about that and he said, "where do you want to get to?" and I said, "I want to go far", just that I didn't have any idea what I wanted to do. I wasn't interested. For me it was… I would do my exams, submit my work and for me that was fine. I started to get more interested in studying in the second

year [of high school], right at the end, and that was when we had

that conversation. So from then on I started to see my studies in

a different way… you know, with a different attitude… of wanting

to create my future. […] So after that second year I started… […]

There was still enough time, I'm going to get my head down and

study… and it's no coincidence that when we finished school one

month passed and I was already at university.

The recalibration of Brendha's temporal frames challenges structuralist models in two important ways. Firstly, it adds important nuance to the discussion of intergenerational influence and recent economic transformations. Souza suggests that the *habitus* of the "struggler" is compatible with neoliberalism because it inculcates discipline and patient, repetitive investment in long-term life projects. However, this is more a recipe for maintaining one's position in a precarised labour market than for upward social mobility. To achieve the latter, subjects must begin to plan for future activities by quickly assimilating new information and developing diverse skills, rather than disciplined repetition alone. In other words, it entails a change of rhythm over the educational process that begins to incorporate the requirements of higher education and future career into practical planning in the present.

Secondly, it may not be the family or the school that plays the primary role in such recalibrations. Indeed, "strugglers" may be ill equipped to play such a role, at least in any active sense, leading to the possibility of intergenerational "arrhythmia". Instead, contagious affect travelling horizontally within peer groups can also be crucial. This reintroduces a significant degree of contingency in processes of individuation, because

while it is influenced by family background it is not determined by it. In this way, different rhythms, reaching forwards towards a range of post-school futures, can emerge within the seemingly repetitive world of secondary education.

4.2 Guilherme: Sleeping in the exam hall

If the case of Brendha points towards the contingent ways in which paths to upward mobility can open up in the peripheries, Guilherme's shows how Brazil's extreme social inequality still tends to foreclose such possibilities. Guilherme is a 28-year-old creative agent who represents two well-known performing artists. He also runs a local arts collective and is involved in LGBT activism. He lives with his partner in a rented apartment in Sapopemba. He is tall with light brown skin and straight hair gelled to the side. Guilherme is very personable and opens up immediately, talking about his youth in pained terms. He grew up in Grajaú, a low-income district in São Paulo's southern periphery. He and his four siblings were raised by his parents, who had moved to São Paulo from the Northeast at a young age. However, his father left home when he was twelve and they did not subsequently maintain a relationship.

When he was growing up, Guilherme felt doubly alienated from his surroundings. Firstly, he was a "nerd", who always got good grades at school and had different interests to his classmates. Secondly, he felt like an outcast because of his "effeminate" mannerisms. As a child he attended a small local Evangelical church with his family, where he liked to sing and read, but over time he came to feel that what he was taught at the church was "hypocritical" and did not fit with the life that he wanted to lead. This discomfort imbued Guilherme with a strong desire to leave Grajaú and find places where he could "be himself". So he sought out new connections with others who shared his interests and

learned to circulate confidently around the city. He spend much of his adolescence going to meet friends in distant places, like São Paulo's most famous park, Parque Ibirapuera, and one of its most popular Bohemian nightlife spots, Rua Augusta. His friends were mainly other LGBT youth from various parts of the city, including other poor peripheries but also middle-class neighbourhoods.[ii]

If Guilherme's discomfort drove him to discover other places and people, his dissatisfaction with his present also made him look to the future. In his words, he wanted to be successful and "prove people wrong". As a result, from an early age he started to cultivate the habits of future planning that Brendha had only developed much later. He had little doubt that when he finished school he would continue his studies:

> I finished school… I was always very objective in life, I was always
> striving for things, so I always came up with goals and tried to
> fulfil them, so I would feel like I was in the place I wanted to be...
> So I always said, "I'm going to finish school and go to university".

In charting his future path, Guilherme looked to the institution that he thought best reflected his ambitions, the prestigious University of São Paulo (USP). Although he had been exposed to the worlds of middle-class friends for whom such a path was plausible, it was not a natural choice for someone from his background and his ambition was tempered by a suspicion that he might not belong there. Nonetheless, he decided to go and sit the entrance exam. His experience delivered a huge blow to these plans:

> I finished school when I was 18… "I want to go to university", but
> I didn't consider going to USP […but…] I still went there to do the
> entrance exam. No lie, I looked at that exam, at all that stuff, and

> I gave up. And I couldn't leave the exam for at least two hours. I slept for two hours. I swear to God! I took one look at that thing and thought, "man I'm not even going to waste my time doing that". So I had a nap. When two hours were up I handed in the exam paper and left, because I didn't know any of that stuff. I didn't know… I hadn't been prepared for that. And that's my experience of USP. And I forgot USP.

Unlike Brendha, Guilherme's desire to attend university was already firmly established early on in his secondary education. Nonetheless, his first encounter with a higher education institution revealed a stark difference of rhythms between the public and private schooling systems. Even a high-achieving student from a public school in the periphery undergoes "dressage" at a pace that is completely out-of-sync with the demands of Brazil's elite universities. This is not a question of motivation, or of an ability to plan an upward trajectory, after all Guilherme possessed both. Indeed, they were what had pushed him to go and sit the exam in the first place. It was literally a question of the content of his education to date. Whereas elite private schools are synchronised – in a state of eurhythmia – with the public university system, the encounter between a public school student and elite higher education reveals a severe state of arrhythmia.

Guilherme ultimately recovered from this blow to his ambitions. He was able to enroll and eventually graduate with a degree in communication, funded by a *ProUni* grant, and later completed attained a further qualification in drama at a public university. Although he is still driven by indignation about the challenges faced by LGBT people and the poor, he has found affective connections that he feels allow him to "be himself". He believes

he is on the path to achieving his ambitions. However, his experience at USP remains a painful memory. It was the moment when he brutally discovered the limits that even the most precocious residents of the periphery are seldom able to overcome.

4.3 Washington: Trying to keep the beat

In contrast to Brendha and Guilherme, Washington's story occurs in a context of conflicting rhythms that can impose psychological strain and difficult choices on subjects. Washington is 17 and lives with his mother and younger sister in a small, self-constructed house in a poor and physically precarious part of Sapopemba. He is black and skinny, his demeanour is shy, but friendly, and the more we speak the more forthcoming he becomes. He had a difficult upbringing. His father beat his mother when he was younger, and is no longer present. Washington's older brother, meanwhile, is currently serving a long prison sentence for committing a violent crime. Given this context, Washington would be a likely candidate for following the path of many young men – dropping out of school, becoming involved in crime, and ending up in prison or worse. However, this has not occurred in his case.

Washington is very critical of the local school he attends in Sapopemba. He describes disorder and physical neglect – poor facilities, disorganised classrooms, "broken glass". He says his teachers are underprepared and often fail to show up for lessons. As a result, he and the other students find it difficult to stay motivated. Many of his former schoolmates dropped out aged 14 or 15 and started stealing or selling drugs. Laughing, Washington tells me that, aside from the allure of these activities, an additional factor was that they didn't like "waking up early". By contrast, he has continued to attend school and still hopes to graduate. When I ask about his own attitude towards his lessons

he distinguishes between his art and maths classes, which he enjoys, and the others, which he only attends "because he has to". He likes to draw, especially graffiti and manga, and keeps a folder of his artwork. He speaks fondly of his maths teacher, who he says "knows everything". By contrast, Washington does not consider himself "intelligent":

> *Washington*: In my class there are lots of intelligent people. So I sit in the corner, I sit with the guys. but I pay attention. I pay attention, but afterwards I forget. […] I stay there in the corner, and if they [the teacher] ask, I don't know the answer. If they don't ask, it's fine. I don't think I'm that intelligent. […]
>
> *Matthew*: The other kids in the corner, they…
>
> *Washington*: No, I'm more intelligent than them.
>
> *Matthew*: They don't even pay attention?
>
> *Washington*: No. They do, they do a bit, but they have their phones, those things. It's distracting.

Washington's continued attendance of school seems tenuous and even paradoxical. He continues to attend, but questions its value and even his own ability to absorb what is taught. He wakes up early every morning and goes in, but does not participate proactively in most lessons. An important aspect of this seems to be his feeling that the obvious alternative – that which had been taken up by some of his old friends – was worse. Washington describes a particular event that seemed to represent a key turning point, and which encapsulates this tension:

> *Washington*: There was one day when the guys went out to mug people, and they called me to go with them. But I said I wouldn't go. And after that day I stopped talking to them.
>
> *Matthew*: And you never thought about going with them?
>
> *Washington*: No, you're crazy man! I'm not risking my life. […] It's a clueless ["*sem noção*"] life, isn't it. Like, you're gonna go out, mug someone who's worked all day.

Washington's account of this significant event contains several notable aspects. He says he always suspected this was a path he didn't want to take, based on his perception of it being a dangerous and reckless way of life, perhaps due to his family's own painful history with violence and crime. He also places his response firmly within the normative universe of the upstanding "*trabalhador*" (worker), contrasting the figure who has "worked all day" with the callous thief. This is clearly a moral category, but is one that has significance for Washington. For those who live close to the "tense boundary" (Feltran, 2011) between those publicly defined as "workers" and "criminals", and who possess affective attachments on both sides of the divide, a moral commitment to the ideal of the worker can act as a compass helps the individual to avoid drifting towards the other side simply through inertia.

This implies that in the absence of distinct structural positions among the poor, the maintenance of a moral distinction between "workers" and "criminals" occurs on an idealist plain. However, it may also be that embodied affects and rhythms, and the spatial and temporal dislocations they can produce, are also implicated in these distinctions. Washington's motivations for staying in school may be bound up with moral

considerations, but his decision to persist with school also rests on the practical effects of everyday rhythms.

Traditional approaches based around the notion of "deviance" (Merton, 1968) understood criminal actors as anomic individuals operating completely outside the norms of mainstream society. In reality, however, criminal markets have spatio-temporal and organisational dynamics that are deeply intertwined with the legal markets and institutions (Misse, 2007). Drug dealing and armed robbery, for example, are heavily structured around the economic and social rhythms of the working week. Meanwhile, in São Paulo young people who show an aptitude for such "frontline" criminal work can eventually rise up in the world of organised crime (Feltran, 2020). At the individual level, this means that the everyday rhythms of those who become heavily involved in criminal activities are distinct from those structured primarily around legal ones. Commitment to school or full-time work may be difficult to combine with a "frontline" criminal career. At the risk of putting it in over-simplified terms, an ability to "wake up early" and motivated for school, depends significantly on what time you go to bed and what else you are dedicating your energies to. Washington's precarious grip on the rhythm of school, then, is partially a result of his refusal to submit to the rhythm of the criminal world that competes with it.

However, in accounting for Washington's resilience, we must also take another crucial factor into account. Like his art and maths classes, but unlike the rest of his experience of school, Washington's enthusiasm is fired up by other extra-curricular activities in which he regularly participates.[iii] Washington goes every day to an NGO, where he participates in a wide range of courses, like drumming, capoeira, and Spanish. Not only

does the NGO provide courses that genuinely motivate him, he has also formed new affective connections with other young people and the instructors. As the NGO is located in a different part of Sapopemba, Washington spends much of his time away from his neighbourhood, only returning at night when his courses have finished. His rhythm built around the NGO thus helps him to preserve a temporal and spatial distance from his old friends, who mainly hang around the local streets.

Washington's attendance of the NGO also appears to have infused him with a set of normative objectives that are distinct from those of his old friends and the "guys" who he sits with in the corner of the classroom. He says he would like to go to university to study electrical engineering, as he's always been interested in understanding how electrical appliances work. Another idea he considers is joining the military. Whether either of these will be possible given his poor grades and largely negative relationship with his school remains to be seen. His temporal frames with regard to his future education and work do not appear to be in a state of eurythmia with his current rhythms of study. Nonetheless, Washington clearly possesses a crucial skill for dealing with his immediate circumstances: of being able to conjugate his rhythms with others that help him to maintain a relatively safe distance from the dangers of the world of crime.

5. Conclusion: Rhythms of individuation at the periphery

This article has presented a partial and exploratory account of how temporal frames are formed and shape youth trajectories in the peripheries of São Paulo. Its starting point are the valuable insights of structuralist models of social reproduction, which identify horizons of thought and action as being inculcated via tightly integrated structures, linking the family, the education system and the world of work, that prepare subjects

for particular, classed roles in society. While undoubtedly a great improvement on stigmatising accounts that attribute the temporal horizons of poor, racialised groups to psychological pathologies, such approaches also have their own limitations. In particular, they struggle to account for variations between structurally similar individuals, nonlinearity in processes of subjectivity formation, and the important role of seemingly "non-structural" and extra-economic factors in shaping these. This is especially so when applied to the heterogeneous, unevenly institutionalised fields of the peripheries.

In order to "radicalise" the structuralist imaginary (Williams, 2005), I propose "individuation" (Deleuze, 1994) and "rhythm" (Lefebvre, 2004) as useful analytical tools. The notion of Individuation encourages a shift from an imaginary of social *re*production, defined by resemblances and operating along lines of direct intergenerational transmission, to one in which individual subjects *emerge* through interaction with heterogeneous, pre-individual fields. Although this approach need not entail abandoning the central categories of structuralist analysis, it adds additional factors they tend to overlook, like horizontal flows of affective connections and the influence of subjectivity shaping organisations like NGOs, churches or criminal groups. 'Rhythm', meanwhile, is a mechanism that helps to account for the ease with which individuals circulate between different spheres of social life (eg. home, school, peer groups, church) and transition between different stages of the life course (eg. school, university, work). Rhythm has both "embodied" properties, in the sense that routines are naturalised in the body itself, and also "imagined" ones, in the sense that projected futures help to shape how routines are formed in the present. The concepts of "eurythmia" – synchrony between rhythms – and "arrhythmia" – asynchrony that causes discomfort – help to

conceive how these transitions occur. Poor alignment between rhythms or between present routines and hopes for the future provoke difficult choices, and even crises, eventually producing either a recalibration of rhythms or changes in expectations and altering processes of individuation.

As the case studies have shown, São Paulo's peripheries are a particularly rich context for exploring such processes. Because they are highly heterogeneous and unevenly institutionalised, individuals may be exposed to radically different influences depending on their specific location, circumstances and connections. Although class differences certainly exist – as captured in very broad terms by Souza's (2009, 2012) distinction between "strugglers" and the "rabble" – these often do not correspond neatly to the schools, workplaces, state institutions and non-state organisations with which individuals interact in their everyday lives. Analysing youth trajectories in such environments is therefore a more complex task than structuralist categories imply.

The current socio-institutional landscape of peripheries is the product of long-term transformations to work, the state, and civil society. In some respects these resemble processes of neoliberalisation in the global North, such as the precarisation of labour relations and increasing use of means-testing to determine access to different public policies. But in others it is quite distinct, such as in the general expansion of the welfare state under the PT governments and the continued importance of non-state actors in structuring social life and subjectivities. The latter, encompassing organisations as diverse as NGOs, churches and criminal groups, coexist closely in space but promote radically different values and codes of behaviour (Feltran, 2020). They tend to act like gravitational fields, pulling different parts of the population into their respective orbits,

affects and rhythms. While some of these rhythms are relatively compatible (eg. school and NGOs), others are less so (eg. school and gangs), though individuals may maintain some contact with different spheres simultaneously.

There are certainly patterns in terms of which individuals gravitate towards these different poles of attraction. Those more closely resembling Souza's (2012) "strugglers" are far more likely to be able take advantage of higher education programmes, while those from poorer families more precariously integrated into the labour market are more often drawn into the world of crime. However, these outcomes are probabilistic, rather than deterministic. The drama of São Paulo's urban peripheries today is that, far more than a generation ago, individual trajectories are uncertain, nonlinear, and subject to changes of speed or direction depending on the influences that subjects encounter along the way. For this reason, they provide a rich laboratory for observing and theorising processes of individuation. Indeed, they may also offer insights into such processes in more highly institutionalised contexts: allowing us to see these not as simple "reproductions", but as similarly uncertain processes that simply occur within more efficiently homogenised environments.

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[i] Though his language is somewhat reminiscent of Lewis' culture of poverty, Souza justifies this by saying: "It is this social class that in this book we call the structural 'rabble', not to 'offend' those who are already suffering and humiliated, but to, provocatively, call attention to our greatest social and political conflict: social and political abandonment, 'consented to by our entire society', of a whole class of 'precarised' individuals who have been reproduced as such for generations" (Souza, 2009, p. 21).

[ii] Guilherme explained that in his youth there were few local spaces in the peripheries themselves where young LGBT people could congregate, but that this has subsequently changed. His own collective sought to provide such a space in Sapopemba and he knew of many others in other neighbourhoods. Similar observations about the growth of LGBT spaces in peripheries are made by Reis (2017).

[iii] Like many Brazilian public schools, Washington's has a "*meio período*", or half-day, structure that alternates two groups of students who attend lessons either in the morning or afternoon. This leaves them with the other half of the day to fill with other activities.