

Category as interval – the difference between essence and deconstruction*

Gabriel de Santis Feltran**

Abstract

The following article analyses micro-scenes of interaction and argues that *everyday life* plays a critical role in the objectification of categories of difference. Categories are here understood as intervals of plausible meanings—as contents always *mutually situated and constructed*—within normative ideal boundaries established by routine use. An ethnographic reflection on several empirical situations, three of them discussed here, gives rise to a broader interpretation of how the recent authoritarian reaction in Brazil is based on the categorical construction of ideals regarding *gender and state*, as well as *race, religion, family, class, sexuality* and *crime*, thus serving as a national project. The text cannot of course be expected to discuss all of these categories in detail, with its formal objective to discuss the politics of their simultaneous production in the course of contemporary social life, that is, how the *aesthetic* of their emergence in everyday life impacts on the construction of the broader political scene. This text is the partial result of a broader investigation into the everyday lives of groups that are strongly marginalised in São Paulo.

Keywords: Difference, Categories, State, Gender, Race, Class.

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** Professor of Departamento of Sociology at Universidade Federal de São Carlos (UFSCar); researcher at Centro de Estudos da Metrópole (CEM) and at Núcleo de Etnografias Urbanas do Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (CEBRAP). gabrielfeltran@gmail.com

Introduction

An 86-year-old white woman watched TV footage of São Paulo's traditional New Year's Eve road race dedicated to Saint Silvester and reflected on her past, another habit traditional at the year's close, and upon her stage of life. For Vitória, it was family gatherings like the one held that day that proved her efforts had been worth it. Widowed for several years, Vitória had just told me how much her life had improved over the years. The daughter of poor Italian immigrants¹ to have arrived in Brazil a century ago, she had grown up as one of many in the strictly Catholic environment of her foster mother's rural home. Now here she was in the living-room of her sizeable house, with her days of hunger behind her. She congratulated herself for the "standard of living" the family enjoyed. "Life is good", she repeated to me. While we spoke, images of Robert Cheruyot lingered on the TV screen for several minutes, the Kenyan athlete a strong black figure with a shaved head, his long strides carrying him into the lead.

Vitória's four daughters were also present that day. Two of them were doctors, married to a doctor and an entrepreneur, while the other two had studied engineering and dentistry and married men in the same profession, one of Japanese heritage. With two children each, their generation was one of urban nuclear families. Surrounded by all of the close members of her family, including sons and daughters-in-law and family friends, Vitória exclaimed:

Thank God life is good!
Thank God there are no niggers in my family,
nobody married a nigger, nobody's kids are niggers...
Life is good for all of us... thank God for that!²
[Personal note, São Carlos, Brazil, 31/12/2007]

¹ In Brazil's racial identity's puzzle most Italian descendents are considered to be "white", despite our knowledge that this is different in many other national and regional puzzles.

² The term Vitória used (*estar bem de vida* in Portuguese) refers to the enjoyment of a comfortable status in life, often in financial terms, therefore serving as a signifier of social class".

Her family's reaction came as something of a surprise to Vitória, with two of her granddaughters exclaiming: "*Granny, what a terrible thing to say!*". Another two turned to me, one of them apologising on behalf of her grandmother, embarrassed by her overt racism. Disapproving looks exchanged across the sofa then gave way to pronouncements of "*leave it...*", "*it's her age speaking*" and "*how embarrassing*".

Anyone to have known Vitória knows that the aesthetic of "white", "Japanese" or "black" were not all the same to her, instead carrying very different evaluative meanings in terms of marriage, family, national identity, work and religion. However, the boundary demarcating those for whom "life is good" included white and Japanese people and left black people in the shade. Categories are not words, concepts or expressions that are learnt by listening to explanations, regardless if they are "native" or not³. Categories are intervals of meaning delineated by the boundaries of what is plausible in each context ("life" could be relatively "good" for you, however, for Vitória, this category may only plausibly be applied to white and Japanese people). It is in everyday life that the relations between experiences and language produce the *use* and thus the categorical meaning, serving as practical parameters, an order for action and its matrices of valuation in the world as we experience it⁴. And it is in this experience of living, and therefore in the sequence of interactions,

³ It would be from lived experience rather than abstract explanation that categorical meanings would emerge. Inspiration for this debate stems from Rancière, 2002 and Wittgenstein, 1986 (particularly paragraphs 98-106).

⁴ "*On the one hand, it is clear that every sentence in our language is 'in order as it is'. That is to say, we are not striving after an ideal, as if our ordinary vague sentences had not yet got a quite unexceptional sense, and a perfect language awaited construction by us. On the other hand, it seems clear that where there is sense there must be perfect order. So there must be perfect order even in the vaguest sentence*". Wittgenstein, 1986, paragraph 98, p. 44)". The debate would be a lengthy one, sparked by that between Durkheim and William James, before being taken up by pragmatists and interactionists. For a new approach to the debate, see Werneck, 2012.

whether routine or disruptive as in the case at hand⁵, that meaning is produced, in light of a *continuum* of possibilities within the category boundaries.

This article reflects in depth on three situations of interaction in order to break with the immediate and sensory everyday order of understanding that offers an almost instant location and value for each interaction. Having the time to reflect on an interaction is very different to experiencing it. I argue here that the *everyday* plays a decisive role in the *objectification* of the categories of difference, consequently conceived of as analytical categories (Brah, 2006; Piscitelli, 2008)⁶. Such a reflection paves the way for a wider interpretation of the categorical assumptions of the recent authoritarian reaction in Brazil, based on the mutual construction (within the sphere of the categorical assumptions) of everyday ideas of “gender” and “state”, as well as those of “race”, “religion”, “family”, “class”, “sexuality”, “crime”, “nation” and “violence”. This article can obviously not be expected to provide an exhaustive discussion into each of the categories, with the formal aim to consider the *politics* of their simultaneous production in contemporary social life, and therefore how the *aesthetic* of their emergence in everyday life relates to the political scene.

1. Misunderstandings

As we have seen, Vitória’s words did not have the expected effect on those around her. There were no congratulations for her family’s achievement of a better standard of living, nor for her grandmother’s struggles on behalf of the women of the household. Vitória felt silent, the Kenyan athlete went on to win the race and the family gathering continued to ritualise the bonds present.

⁵ For a debate on routine as structure, see Machado da Silva, 2008. Das 2002, 2006 and 2012, performs in-depth studies on the relevance of everyday life in the construction of meaning, as do Bayat, 2013 and Blokland, Giustozzi, Schilling, 2016.

⁶ I sought to address the problem of difference, particularly in terms of the public and emic notions of “periphery” in Feltran, 2013; 2014.

Nothing was said about race, gender, family or religion. Nor politics for that matter. This article will have to do so instead, seeking to identify the meaning that the categories formulated in such a disruptive situation.

Vitória's words would quickly be identified as racist, both in form and content⁷. The category of "nigger" [*preto* in Portuguese] that has recently been reclaimed by a significant section of the hip-hop movement for purposes of self-identification, is strongly naturalised as a marker of inferiority in the racial puzzle in which Vitória was socialised, also denoting filth, ignorance and poverty. With her words, this ancient specific racial diagram emerged that was distinct to that of the contemporary puzzle, leading to the misunderstanding in its clash with the racial framework belonging to her granddaughters. The categories Vitória employed has no defence against any of the critical elements brought about by the Black Movement to have gained ground in Brazil since the 1960s. Vitória's socialisation in race relations dates back to the early decades of the twentieth century, and, remaining as she did within the white pole, there was no need to revisit it.

If racism is explicit and voiced quickly, such as in Vitória's case, we do not however learn much about the *form* by which gender, family and religiosity is simultaneously constructed. Lateral social markers of difference in Victoria's racial discourse are also found in precise contents which are hardly noticeable at the moment of speaking. The expression "thank God" is repeated and used to evaluate Vitória's own course through life; sacrifices in life that lead to a final redemption in the Christian sense informed by God and his designs. To be on God's sacred side and far from the

⁷ Author Laura Moutinho, 2006 analyses the life stories of three poor black men in Rio de Janeiro, stating in an introductory summary that "homophobia overlaps with racism" (*op.cit.* p.112) in her characters' broader negotiation of difference. Moutinho also gives authorial clues as to how one category of difference is objectified in a more central fashion than others in the defining of situations, without implying that the other categories are not simultaneously and mutually objectified. For an excellent review of the debate on *intersectionalities*, see Piscitelli, 2008, or Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013.

“niggers” is a cause for contentment: “Life is good”. Religiosity thus has evident racial contents, and vice-versa.

The marks of gender and class are also less explicit, emerging however upon later analysis. Narrating the end of a journey, Vitória offers another three elements justifying her contentment, with all of them reflecting her construction of *gender* in light of a social mobility project based around family but also on *class*. i) “*there are no niggers in my family*”: the family was strengthened in its shunning of black people; the frame of reference possibly dates back to before the 1930s, when the national ideology of “racial democracy” emerged for construction in the decades to come; ii) her daughters’ marriages: “*nobody married a nigger*”: as the mother of four daughters born in the 1950s and 60s, when women were a minority in the Brazilian labour market, the possibilities for improving quality of life were derived from marriage. Education was undoubtedly a definitive route to finding a spouse, as universities were distant from the black social pole, which, according to Vitória’s perspective, was fated to occupy the base of the social pyramid; iii) children: “*nobody’s kids are niggers*”: reflects the fundamental hallmarks of the female role identified with marriage and reproduction and as a consequence, the distance from black people as a family ideal. The situated ideal found in the action of mobility therefore serves as a plane of references for concrete experience, and is considered here (as in classical social theory) as that in which categories of difference are theoretically and empirically located, routinised by hegemonic practices or otherwise subordinated. Their everyday construction as a coherent composite, by means of pairs of opposed values in different teleological series (different courses of action, with contents related to gender, class, race and mobility, etc) is therefore aesthetically recognisable: it is self-reifying, self-embodying (in body shapes but also in forms of social performance and orality). If Vitória’s white daughter were to have a child with a black phenotype, this would constitute a defeat in the complex family-gender-class-race-religion project that emerges from the collective experience in which Vitória was socialised.

Throughout the flux of everyday life, the construction of this intersectionality is not evident at first glance, except in terms of its sensory dimension: the politics of the composition of the social markers of difference is reflected through a set of signs and boundaries coherent to anyone who shares their meanings, effectively serving as an aesthetic of difference.

There is thus an “aesthetic” at the base of politics that has nothing to do with the “aestheticisation of politics” belonging to the “age of the masses” of which Benjamin speaks. This aesthetic should not be understood as a perverse capturing of politics by an artistic will, by the viewing of people as a work of art. Extending the analogy reveals it may be conceived of in a Kantian sense—eventually touched on by Foucault—as the system of a priori forms determining what one feels (Rancière, 2005:16).⁸

This is the aesthetic of a priori forms, opening up to make way for the interpositioning of the most diverse of contents—sexuality and madness, for example—that Jacques Rancière identifies in Michel Foucault’s “*dispositif*” (1976), in a close dialogue with the formal concept of sociology suggested by Georg Simmel (2010):

Man’s position in the world is defined by the fact he constantly finds himself between two boundaries in every dimension of his being and behaviour. This condition appears as the formal structure of our existence, filled as it always is with different contents in life’s diverse provinces, activities and destinies. We feel that the content and the value of every hour lies somewhere between a higher and a

⁸ Aesthetic and politics are considered here in terms of a concept proposed by Jacques Rancière (2005:18): “*Such forms are revealed to be tied to a certain political regime related to indeterminate identities, the delegitimisation of words’ positions, of the deregulating of the sharing of space and time. Such an aesthetic political regime befits democracy, the regime of assemblies of craftspeople, intangible written laws and the theatrical institution.*”

lower value; every thought between a wiser and a foolish value; every possession between a more extended and a more limited value; and every deed between a greater and a lesser measure of meaning, adequacy and morality. We are constantly orienting ourselves, even when we do not employ abstract concepts, to an “over us” and an “under us”, to a right or a left, to a more or less, a tighter or looser, a better or a worse. The boundary, above and below, is our means of finding direction in the infinite space of our worlds. Along with the fact that boundaries are both constant and pervasive, we are boundaries ourselves. For insofar as every content in life—every feeling, experience, deed, or thought—possesses a specific intensity, a specific hue, a specific quantity and a specific position in some order of things, each content produces a continuum in two directions, toward its two poles; participating contentedly in each of these two continua, which both collide in it and are delimited by it (Simmel, 2010:1).

Categories are difficult to study and particularly difficult to compare, because the meanings expressed invariably refer to *situated* series of interaction that are therefore always distinct from one another. The categorical systems used by each group are also theirs for a variable period of time. Catholics ritualising their beliefs on a weekly basis tend to remain Catholic for longer than Catholics who never participate in such rituals. Categories can also serve as causal elements or consequences of series of action: “gender” in one example both constructs the marriages of Vitória’s daughters and is constructed by them. In light of this reflection, I believe it is possible to affirm that categories always simultaneously constitute:

- i) a situated position in an interval of values naturalised by routine, therefore serving as a classification according to parameters of valuation supported by a situated *ideal* for a given group in a given space and time. Our lives see us *evaluating* and *valuing* all of the situations we find ourselves in, involving actions as diverse as other drivers’ manoeuvres to our children’s drawings, with the way things are said and Instagram posts

a basis for the ideal parameters in each situation (“you can’t expect any better from a 5-year-old...”), in each era (you wouldn’t have imagined it possible to rate a Skype call as “poor” 30 years ago), and in each aesthetic specific to our situated experiences (amateur photographs are evaluated differently to those taken by professionals). We both express and withhold these judgments based on categories or categorical silences. The category of “nigger” for example, occupies a position in terms of an evaluative series of races and ethnicities in different contexts, and Vitória employed it in a significant scale of values learnt by socialisation, in order to *evaluate* her life story. The problem with categories—and categorical silences—is in this sense that of value judgments (Simmel, 1900, particularly part 1).

- ii) an interval itself among many others that could potentially be applied and an interval socially elected by a given group as suitable for evaluating a given situation, in its historical construction and according to the agency of its subjects; one, which, between an infinite number of other passive intervals or scales, in potentially offering pragmatic parameters for the action or daily performance, from the most intimate to the most public. Vitória chose race to place in the centre of the evaluation of her social mobility. Subjects are often used from completely distinct criteria (different categorical intervals, different series of meanings) in order to evaluate the same situation. In one example, homoaffective love may be read as the categorical scale of carnal love or of romantic love, or of that of Christian sin, or that of citizens’ rights, depending on the group and situation at hand. Categorisation therefore implies a choice on the scale of values, a choice which is made while simultaneously issuing its value judgment, which however constitutes a formal choice and not one of content. A choice of the interval of contents, therefore belonging to the classification to be employed in each situation accordingly.
- iii) a practical definition of *appropriateness* to a situation, even if it runs against categorical values. You might detest the Brazilian Workers’ Party—or gay people—with every fibre of your being, but avoid getting involved in debate on politics or homosexuality with your family. The interval to be taken as reference for action is related to what is appropriate: the relevance of preserving the family is greater than that of politics, in this particular context. However, in maintaining a silence on the Workers’ Party or on homosexuality, judgments are still produced, to be exposed at another moment.

The racism Vitória expressed therefore leads us to wider dimensions of analysis. The social mobility project that she expressed with it and through it, expanding into an aesthetic in which race also refers to family, gender, class and religion, is not hers alone. It is a categorical project objectified in a political national project in the first half of the twentieth century, while she was shaped as a subject, to have become hegemonic since then. I can identify it in my own Brazilian family, however readers of this text who do not identify with 'Brazilian whiteness' may still be able to trace the concept in their own families. It is a national project, but also disseminated by countless institutions while simultaneously constructing them: from the Brazilian Catholic Church to Kardecism, from Freemasonry to the Rotary Club, from conversations on cinema and literature in elite circles to their children's French (or Chinese) classes, from business ethics to professionalism and from Cartesian logic to strategic planning. The project has had particular impetus in São Paulo, but also in the southeastern and southern regions of Brazil as a whole and among the classes to dominate the entire national territory, perhaps extending significantly outside their boundaries. Its influence has been particularly strong among orderly-white-working-Catholic-families and politically hegemonic where modern Western rationality was consolidated, quite radically in Brazil thanks to the national initiative of importing people-subjects such as Vitória, children of Italian, Spanish and German immigrants. Such a national and international project for a white nation did not therefore disappear, but instead violently and cordially fated its "others" ("niggers", *bugres* and indigenous peoples) to a subordinate position. Now that their voices are much louder than in the past, such subordination is much less cordial.

Over half a century later, upon much sacrifice and the constructing of many boundaries of meaning, the "family's" successful project should be celebrated by the victorious: "life is good for all of us, thank God!" Victory has been secured both in terms of the social order it fought against and the state order it constructed. Racism is therefore much more than a *mere* attribute

of Vitória's personality: it is a boundary erected as plausibility for social relations within this project-nation. Racism, along with social puzzles of gender, sexuality, family and religiousness, therefore activated as *practices* with hegemonic bases extending beyond white people, are the practices of national order, state processes, and in Brazil's case, both state-idea as well as state-system, in the distinction produced by Abrams, 2006. In the Weberian sense, Vitória's situated *social action* contents, the *social relations* that give them boundaries of plausibility (the racism in the diagram mentioned) and its belonging to a *legitimate order* (that of the hegemonic class-race-nation-family-religion project at the time) are connected in the very course of the action, in the social performance, objectifying social difference markers. Meanings and parameters for the maintaining of the social order are constructed in this categorical use, only objectified on state institutions.

Vitória's granddaughters did not appreciate their grandmother's words not because racism no longer exists, but because they grew up in the 1980s and 90s, under another puzzle of race relations. The racism of the past was no longer accepted, with more modern variations instead at play. The amalgamation had been positivised to the point of forming the core of the national project, a basis for "racial democracy" that also formed my perspective of Brazil in my academic education. The Black Movement had already grown in its opposition to this project, institutionalising many of its victories; Hip Hop had made strides, forming another puzzle of race relations in the country. However, distanced from the "niggers", Vitória would not have known any of this. In her everyday life, none of this existed: the world is the size of our relationships, the set of spaces between people, as Hannah Arendt affirmed. If I have no experience of aborigines, what they think simply does not appear between us, and does not exist to me. You could not say things like what Vitória said publically, in such an environment, without social sanctions. The everyday had implemented other parameters—in other places it is still possible to affirm them—for the race relations in Vitória's family. However these parameters were not perceived in the same

everyday context to be connected to a project involving class, gender and family-religion, and the nation itself, which could go on being ritualised, continuing to serve as the basis for the (white) social order that the state must respect, incentivise and foster.

2. Assumptions and their place

For although the boundary as such is necessary, every single specific boundary can be stepped over, every fixity can be displaced, every enclosure can be burst, and every such act, of course, finds or creates a new boundary (Georg Simmel, 2010:2).

Junior is a young, straight white man buying a baked snack in a juice bar, pragmatically pretending not to have noticed the ambiguous gender expression of the black server, who is just as young as he is. He chats with his friend about other subjects, asking the server if his snack is filled with meat or with cheese. What may be observed from the interaction with the server is practical, business-like and impersonal, stripped of any objective sense of gender. Junior pays for the snack and leaves. Gender and sexuality are however constructed in the scene, becoming explicit immediately afterwards (although it could have remained implicit⁹): as he moves away from the interaction, Junior asks his friend, smiling: *would you screw a girl like her?*¹⁰

Both of them amble down the road laughing, as they consider the possibility. I can't hear the rest of the conversation.

⁹ Categorical judgments of value may therefore be constructed even if they are not immediately objectified into words and action. The life of categories is processed at every moment in the flux of experience, albeit silently (Das, 1999). In theoretically suggesting a reflection very similar to that of the present text, even reflecting on aesthetics and intersectional politics, Lowenkron (2015) notes how federal police treated a trans woman with respect while working, rendering her a target for jokes and insults outside of the professional interaction.

¹⁰ Notes on a scene observed in January 2017 in São Carlos, São Paulo state, Brazil.

Junior undoubtedly became aware of a *disagreement* with his gender and sexual norm and his categorical ideal marked out by the binary of male-female. The server's *aesthetic* confuses his desire: the typically masculine haircut and tattoos linked with a feminine tone of voice and hands, as well as the sizeable breasts underneath the shirt, combine to form a question. This question and the gender destabilising undoubtedly serves as a *political* moment, in the sense described by Jacques Rancière:

Misunderstandings do not only involve words. Generally speaking, they also concern the situation of those speaking. (...) An extreme misunderstanding is one in which X cannot see the common object proposed by Y because X doesn't understand that the sounds issued by Y form words and agencies of words similar to X's. As we will see, such an extreme situation is essentially one of politics (Rancière, 2005:3).

There is no way of doing politics without destabilising the categories objectified. The author does, however, warn that situations like these of categorical destabilisation do not come to a predictable end, and are furthermore no guarantee of political virtue. It is not about imagining that, once a priori destabilised (politicised), the boundaries of gender identity or of the category of "woman" would pave the way for the emancipation of the man-woman binary. Such a moment would obviously open up the boundary of what is thinkable on gender, and this is politics. Neither Rancière nor Simmel see evolution, teleology or redemption to be necessarily coupled with such an opening. It instead involves the insertion of a wedge giving rise to a series of investigations (Dewey, 1927, 1938; Menezes, 2015), which for their part contain the (ultimately violent) conflicts involving the contents that would—ideally—fit in this formal interval, that of the category. The aesthetic destabilisation adds a normative question to the interaction which was previously implausible: what *should* gender *be like*? This is a normative question that appears as an "emic" question to ethnography.

As Rancière maintains, this destabilisation produces a sequence of arguments concerning aesthetics (whether spoken or not) on their appropriateness. We are always therefore in a political interval: on the one hand, the *form* of this dispute indicates if we are closer to the democratic pole (a site of dialogism, argumentation, more open categorical intervals, more mobile boundaries, the indefining of conceptual limits, the opening up of boundaries and hybridisms), or the authoritarian (ultimately totalitarian) pole, in which the world's meanings are relatively more fixed, assumed and dogmatically offered a priori. In the micro-scene touched upon here, it is not hard to notice the modern hegemonic position on this scale or in this topological network of positions and code-territories (Perlongher, 2008).

The destabilising of Junior's desire produces a reaction that has nothing to do with indeterminate assumptions. Junior does not question the boundaries of the category of "woman"; he already *assumes* the elements essential to the order that he knows of: the server *is* a woman. And he also of course assumes that he and his male friend, as men, can define the position destined to her in the order of things, with that order being the heteronormative order of desire, within the hegemonic social order. The notion of order—specifically in the Weberian sense, referring to the legitimacy and parameters for social relations and actions—is of such interest to me because it is in its very production that the state reason emerges. Ordering processes in this text are also processes defining the game of forces, and even the potential use of violence, marking the state operation. Ordering is also state building.

Junior's question thus represents a call to the hegemonic order of gender and sexuality. It is within the context of sexuality that he and his friend learnt about gender: worthy of being a desirable woman, the server would form part of the sector of women whose femininity conforms to heterosexual desire; unworthy of such a position, the server is another figure downgraded in the classifying order of the sexes. 'She' will never be a peer among men, as long as these assumptions and boundaries of the category of "woman" are upheld. And the

indeterminate area should be tackled (Douglas, 1976). The question therefore serves a selective purpose: that of offering the chance for classifying the server in the order of naturalised, heteronormative and hegemonic desire, or downgrading 'her' from this order. It does not, however, question the order itself, which is objectified in the question and reinstates itself, upon quick disturbance. The hetero ideal is updated (the normativity, the a priori "what should be") not just for women but for all "family women", according to the perspective of the masculine order which utters the question, and furthermore, that of all men, who should only desire women.

As works in progress themselves, the two men discuss whether or not a man should "screw" a "girl like that", and therefore of that "type". In order to avoid future disturbances, a location must be created to frame the girls for their existence to be *read*: as they multiply in everyday life, a strategy for dealing with them must be developed. The debate on the edges of the state is based on the problem of legibility (Das; Poole, 2004; Das, 2006). Junior's direct question constructs a *type* of gender and sexuality while simultaneously seeking to frame this type within the wider heteronormative order. It produces criteria of legibility in a gendered social order which also harnesses this everyday mechanism to inform state processes¹¹ (Vianna, 2005). Junior's

¹¹ The 's' in "state" is written in lowercase in order to reinforce the differentiation sought here in contrast to the more common use of "State" *merely* representing a set or public institutions or ideological apparatuses. The notion is Weberian as we refer to an objectified state: *a human community that successfully imposes a legitimate monopoly of forces on a particular territory* (Weber, 1967). State is, however, also an agent, and like all agents, it is produced during and as a result of its actions. The theory that substantiates this objective and ordered definition of state in Weber is a theory of action. Abrams, 2006 warned us of the difficulty imposed by the study of the state, precisely because it implies studying under the perspective of the Simmelian theory of objectification (state as idea, state as system). Vianna (2014) and Souza Lima (2002) have demonstrated how it is more productive to understand what are known as *state processes* in motion, observing its will to be progressive and its instances of reification. Das & Poole (2004) have demonstrated that there is no state centre and that operations of legitimisation and constructing legibility are fundamental to its validation in legal terms.

question therefore reinforces the state claim for the legibility of the social, and the predictability in terms of future possible disturbances. It is therefore preventive. It is also undoubtedly a *reaction* to the categorical destabilising provoked by an emancipatory movement from decades ago which has since become more aesthetically radicalised—formed by the various LGBT and feminist movements—whose assumptions, particularly on gender equality or the implosion of gender, are not only not shared hegemonically, but also do not represent a growing trend in Brazil nowadays. Furthermore, such assumptions are now read as an affront to the format of the social order. Walter Benjamin warned us of the risks of reading history like an evolution or a teleology. Nothing could be clearer in the country's present climate. In surpassing boundaries and destabilising them, they are called upon to be rebuilt, just like in Simmel's epigraph.

3. Categorical order and violence

Hello? / Dad? / Hi, love... / There's someone here wants to speak to you and... / Who wants to speak to me? / Clayton wants to speak to you. / Who's Clayton, do I know him? / He's a friend of mine. / Now you've got me worried... what's happened? You can tell me... / I bought a test at the pharmacy and went to Carla's gynaecologist, and I'm pregnant, and well, Clayton's the father. / You're joking... / I'm not, it's true... / It's a... / It's not, Dad... / Does your mother know about this? / No, nobody does... / But what the hell? You're pregnant? / It's not my fault! / How is it not your fault? It's your life! And do I know your little friend? / He's the office boy here, he works with us! / Holy shit! The office boy?

The above dialogue introduces a “prank” aired on the Rádio Jovem Pan programme *Pânico* at the beginning of 2007.¹² From

¹² Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgJdeavBa8g>, accessed on 01/03/2017. The scene of the interaction lasts a little over seven minutes, and is fully transcribed here.

the radio station's studios, the young woman calls her father, accompanied by an actor playing Clayton (a common name in Brazil's peripheries, but not among its elites).

Dad! Do you want to speak to him? / *It's hardly a question of 'speaking', love... you're going to have to take responsibility for looking after the baby... listen, love... and as for that playboy? What are you going to do with this guy you just told me about? Are you going to get married?* / In... [Clayton takes over:] / Hello? Nice to meet you, this is Clayton. [his way of speaking imitating a young man from the periphery makes the father sigh, both laughing and scolding him]. / *Well, let's hear it, my friend! What do you have to tell me?*

The sketch begins to gather pace. The father of the pregnant girl must interact with the guy to have got her pregnant, and that he knows to be an office boy (one of the least valued positions in a company). A man's role of ordering a world going off track is thrown on his lap. The relationship shifts to one between men. The scene unfurls, as may be noted, according to all of the stereotypical values (idealised yet still hegemonic) of what constitutes a "family", under the same white, middle-class urban nuclear model of father-mother-children. It therefore deals with the same frame of references that we have just glimpsed in the female perspective of Vitória's words. However, "family" is now envisaged from a strictly masculine point of view, and as is well known, this features the man as protector and as provider, especially in economic terms, according to the means available to him.

The comic aspect of the episode lies in Clayton's radical unsuitability for the model, which is gradually revealed to the girl's father. Running against the virtues expected by the model, and therefore breaking with the situation's desired normativity, the stereotype called upon by the actor provokes reactions which are highly instructive to our debate. Clayton's participation enfolds as thus:

Well, at least I'm accepting responsibility for this shit right here... / *[father interrupts] This shit?! You're nothing more than a playboy, son... and here you are referring to it..., the baby... as shit?* / Of course not, sir... / *Look, here's how it is: I don't want you in my daughter's life! I don't want you...* / Calm down, bro... / *Bro? Bro, my ass! Watch your mouth!* / OK bro, sorry, sir... let me just give my humble opinion... / *Your humble opinion? [teasing]... you fuck my daughter up, son, get her pregnant, and you come offering me your "humble opinion?". Tell me one thing, son, are you going to marry my daughter?*

The father questions the categories employed by Clayton one by one, in sequence. Shit? Bro? Humble opinion? The sequence reveals the implausibility of the marriage in seconds. The “family” is outside the plausible circumscription for *a guy like* Clayton. It also must be noted that the act of “screwing” a woman—the sexual act—is again at the centre of the problem of the definition of gender, family and order. In encroaching on the father’s territory—as if there is a woman, there is a male territory in which she circulates—and “screwing” his daughter, Clayton challenges the father’s authority, and therefore the order in that *territory* (Perlongher, 2008). He is therefore encouraged to confront him, or, more appropriately, enact his subordination and accept the paternal imposition, even if ritually. What is transcribed above is merely the beginning of this male confrontation, of the dominant forces over the female in question, but mostly, over the possibilities of taking responsibility for the maintenance of the hegemonic family order, which also means social and state order. As the girl is going to become a mother, a family will be born with a child, and, as we are told on a daily basis, “family is the basis of everything”.

Further underlying the narrative is a debate on the daughter’s dignity, violated by Clayton’s virility.¹³ Only marriage

¹³ Laura Moutinho resumes the debate on the “Mediterranean model” of “honour and shame” in which, “*while men enjoy wide sexual permissiveness, women are controlled by a rigid sexual set of morals, whose righteousness serves as the*

can restore this dignity, demonstrating that she is “a woman worth marrying” and not just some “slut”.¹⁴ Clayton must therefore “assume ownership” of the man’s daughter, asking her father for permission to marry her, proving that he will be able to sustain her. Her agency is completely irrelevant according to this male perspective. Clayton then responds as to whether or not he will marry her, spurring a ritual (comic for listeners and maddening for the girl’s father):

I don’t know... I don’t know if I can. That’s why I wanted to talk to you / *You don’t know if you can... well you were certainly able to something else very well!* / Listen, you can’t talk to me like that! / *Like hell you don’t think you can! How is it that you can get her pregnant and yet you can’t look after her?* [*angrily*] *Can you look after a family? Can you pay rent?* / Calm down, bro! / *Can you look after a family? Can you look after my daughter?* / You’re crazy... / *But one thing you can do is make a baby! You bum!* / Can you just calm down, bro? / *Calm down? My daughter gets pregnant from some office...* [they start shouting over each other, until Clayton says: - I have a job, bro!] / *How much do you make?* /

The situation of confrontation gains more precise contours. With marriage implausible, the girl’s father turns to insults and the clarifying of Clayton’s subordination. At least each of their positions should be made explicit. The insults alternate with the connotation that makes the passive inferior (Misse, 2007), in the classic opposition between “worker” and “bum”. With the father representing the worker, and white male order, Clayton is on the other side of the boundary, outside order, even though he shares

custodian of male honour: shame falls on women and it is the male control that maintains family honour” (Moutinho, 2006:100).

¹⁴ Simmel discusses this division among women in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century by means of a study on prostitution, proclaiming: “as long as marriage exists, so will prostitution” (Simmel, 2006:10).

the male codes in the norm. The question about how much Clayton earns objectifies the observation.

I make 250 [the minimum monthly wage at the time was R\$350.00]/ *Are you fucking kidding me? 250 real? [he imitates Clayton's intonation and says 'real' in the singular on purpose, emulating what would be this way of speaking].*
/ No, that's not all, on Saturdays I help a bro of mine out, he has a copy shop... I make another fifty there / *Listen to me while I'm talking to you, you need to go and get a life! Put my daughter on, let me speak to her, I don't want to speak to you anymore, you're trash!*

The figures merely confirm what was already known. The girl's father doesn't want to continue with the conversation, there's no more to be said. The signs of urban poverty in São Paulo are harnessed by the actor to form the stereotype desired for the framework: Clayton is not only an *office boy*, but also helps out at a copy shop, speaking like a youth from the periphery of São Paulo in the 2000s. His "work" is not enough for him to be a "worker": he needs to "get a life". There is nothing left to say. "I don't want to speak to you anymore, you're trash!" However the insistence in the dialogue renders the focus on gender even more explicit, in the maintenance of respect for this order:

You're not a real man! A real man wouldn't do this to another man's daughter! / I am a man and I'm a hard worker and I want you to listen to me, sir! / What you have achieved in life, you bum? Now that you earn 250 reals a month, you bum! / I don't make 250, man! I make 350! / Do you know how much it costs to keep a family, you son of a bitch?! Get my daughter on the line, I don't want to talk to you anymore, you piece of shit! You're trash! You're a piece of shit! Get my daughter on! Trash! You can go to hell! Put my daughter on, I want to speak to her! / [he calls her] Love...

What did Vitória achieve in life? What has Clayton? The trajectory of social conquests forms the values objectified in the subjects. Vitória was able to “rise up in life”, building her family. The girl’s father asks: “what have you achieved in life”? He therefore affirms that he hasn’t achieved what he should have in order to be a “man”. Outside this boundary, he is a “piece of shit”, “trash”, a “bum” and a “son of a bitch”. “Real men don’t do this to other men’s daughters”, or in other words, to other men. The order is between men, after all.

[The daughter calls for calm:] Calm down! [Clayton pretends to start crying in the background. By this point, the dialogue is highly stereotyped, but the girl’s father does not notice the staging, taken in by the seriousness of the situation.] Dad? / [hearing her voice, he changes his tone, assuming the lexicon used to speak to women in this key] *Darling, for the love of God,... you can't get with a guy like that...* / Dad, he wants to speak to you! / *You can't just go around having sex like that, love...* / You can't speak to Clayton like that, Dad! / *Huh?* / If you can listen to me you can listen to him! You're more stressed out than we are!! / *Ah, and I'm not allowed to be stressed out? You call me up and announce you're pregnant, that the father is an office boy who makes 250 reals a month!* / [Clayton comes back on the line] Calm down love, stay here... / *Tell him to go to hell! Darling!*

The categories shift when father and daughter speak. An order (categorical system) exists between men. Within family, and mainly when “speaking to women”, manners must be remembered. “Getting with a man”, “having sex” and “the love of God” are activated; but not Clayton’s love. The plausibility of the father’s agitated state is reinstated, given his family position. To all of those listening to the programme, his anger is fully justifiable. Speaking to his daughter and resuming his role as father, he calms down a little, which allows Clayton to resume speaking:

Calm down bro, let me just say my piece, sir... / Fuck this “bro” shit! You’re an animal! Fuck you, bro! Who are you to talk to me like that? Bro?! Shit?! Fuck you! You’re going to have to learn how to talk before you speak to me! / Excuse me them, sir.../ What? / All I need is an opportunity... I want a proper job, all you have to do is help us out in the beginning, OK?

The actor thus skillfully constructs the public categorical framework for the debate on young men from Brazilian peripheries. On the one hand, the “family” a priori states—*holy shit, office boy, darling?*, and confirms each sign of the narrative that proceeds, as though such young men are in fact “bums”. It is explicit for them, objective! On the other hand, the “defenders of “human rights” would relate the “issue” concerning these young men to the “lack of opportunities” and the “social problem”, as in the stereotypical Brazilian view of human rights as bum’s rights. Clayton therefore appears not just as the ideal type of office boy as a young man from the periphery, but also as someone who embodies the public discourse that “sustains such bums”. The father therefore uses irony and once again inserts gender and sexuality into the centre of the construction of order:

OK, why don’t you just have my ass too? Will you screw me too? I’ll give you a job, I’ll give you everything you want... I’ll give you 80% of what I earn each month, how about that? Help you out! What has my daughter got involved in? What did I do wrong? / It’s not help... it’s just whatever you have, OK? Even if it’s just R\$50 in the beginning... I already have a kid, OK? / Another one? / Yeah... / With a different mother? / Yes... but calm down for God’s sake, listen to me...

The expression “kid with another mother” refers to the boundary of the “family” category again. Everything seems to make more sense. “What did I do wrong?” is an unequivocal indicator that the subject is not individual but belonging to a

family, in this order which is white, hard-working, family-oriented, male, heteronormative, public and hegemonic, and therefore state.

[nervous laughter] You have a kid with another woman, do you? Let me tell you something, son... you need to disappear fast! You're asking me for money?! / Whatever you can! Even if it's only R\$50, R\$100, it's only the beginning... / Ah and you already want this money, do you? / I need help at the moment, sir, do you understand? / Ah you want it now? My daughter tells me she took the test just today and you're already crawling to me for money? / For the love of God! / You want money? OK, let's calm down here... I'm a pretty calm guy too, my daughter will tell you, come round to my house and I'll give you money...

This is the first moment in which the force of the verbal insults threatens to escalate into physical violence.. Clayton is told to “disappear”, as the girl’s father devises a scene of physical confrontation with him. I am particularly interested in this passage, which leads on to others with a similar meaning and the same script for interaction: with the order threatened, the conflict fails to be resolved within the discursive framework and insults are called upon in order to produce securely defined boundaries. With such a technique also failing, violence is naturally justified.

Listen, here's what I'm going to do: I've got somewhere to be, I'm going to the Corinthians match, and then... / Ah, don't tell me, Corinthians?! Yeah... / Great, man... then you must be a good guy! Now I'm in awe...!

Football is not of insignificant relevance among men inserted in hegemonic masculinity across various social strata, countries and spheres of belonging, and the dominant representation of Corinthians supporters in Brazil is that of those who live in the country’s favelas, the most socially subordinated of all. The actor playing Clayton is radicalised at the moment of this revelation, in order to push the girl’s father to his limit, employing the “bro”

[*mano* in Portuguese] used in São Paulo’s favelas in an even more exaggerated fashion:

Listen, I’m no loser, you jerk! I don’t want anything from you. I’ll work it out. I’ll go down the copy shop, I’ve got my mate there, Marcão, and Binoco, he works at the pizzeria, so I can do the deliveries for him too... / *Do you know how much rent costs?* / Well, where do you think I live, bro? In a house, right bro? / *Oh yeah, where do you live bro?* [undoubtedly assuming he lives in a favela] / I crash at my auntie’s...I do the dishes for her... / *Ah, you crash there, do you? Go to hell! Stop fucking with me! Get my daughter back on the line, I have nothing to say to you. Get lost, you piece of shit! You can go to hell! You... you crash at your auntie’s, you don’t even have a home, and then you go and get another man’s daughter pregnant? You irresponsible piece of trash, you’re a cretin and an idiot! God will punish you!* / I’ve had enough! / *You have nowhere! You’re not coming anywhere near my home, or near my daughter!*

We know from Max Weber that state immanence lies in the monopoly’s claiming of the use of force in a given territory. All legitimate orders ultimately constitute violence. This is no different in the order of white men, who have state violence in their favour (according to official data, the Military Police of São Paulo alone kills an average of two people—two Claytons—per day in São Paulo state)¹⁵. God “will punish you”—is a trusted norm—for those who violate this order. It is particularly radical to note that the girl’s father threatens Clayton and in doing so, projects danger onto him: “you’re not coming anywhere near my home, or my daughter!” Any similarity to the state repression of the peripheries inherent in the projection that they constitute violent threats to order would not have been a coincidence. Such cases, where everything is more than evident, constitute war. After the battle,

¹⁵ [<http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2016/03/policia-matou-duas-pessoas-por-dia-nos-2-primeiros-meses-de-2016-em-sp.html>] – accessed on 31 mar. 2016].

the territory (of class-gender-race-religion) belongs to the victor: “you’re not coming anywhere near my home, or my daughter!” The only thing left for Clayton to do is to mock the order, selecting another. The world is full of possibilities:

Here’s how it is: I’m not going to call you again, if you want to speak to me, I’ll be at the Dogão do Betão, look me up there and we’ll talk! / *And we both know what I would do there, don’t we? Go to hell! Go fuck yourself!* / I’m going to get on with my life and you can get on with yours, you jerk! / *That’s enough you piece of shit! You’re scum! Disappear! Get out of here! Put my daughter back on!* / Well you know where to find me! You want a hot dog, I’ll see you there! / *Fuck that, you idiot! You’re trash, how could my daughter get involved with trash like you!* / I deserve a.../ *You’re nothing but a piece of shit!* [the girl intervenes: Dad?–but her father keeps talking]: *you’re a loser! People like you would be better off dead! Darling, I’m sorry, but I didn’t bring you up for this!* [at this point, background applause becomes audible and the girl says: Dad, it’s a joke! Dad, I love you! You’re on *Pânico!* Her father hangs up. The girl says: he’ll never speak to me again... laughter]

As seen in the previous situation, it is ultimately not just Clayton himself that has to “go fuck himself”, “disappear” and “go to hell”. What is also being questioned is his social type, whose morals are easily read–marking another emergence of the question of legibility–by the signs expressed in the way he speaks, his job and his salary, his stance against “society”, his uncontrolled virility, which invades the “family’s” carefully sheltered everyday life. It is therefore Clayton’s aesthetic (which has nothing to do with visuals, which is evident in this case, but which undoubtedly informs a mental image–nobody imagines Clayton as a white man with blue eyes) informing his legibility to the “family man”: he knows who he is talking to. Police “suspicion” and that possessed by private security services operate in a similar fashion in Brazil. Experience dictates that “trash like you” is “a waste of space”. As our national and state histories know very well (Pacheco de Oliveira, 2014;

Gomide Freitas, 2014), the war waged by white men and its legitimate violence is and has always been based on an aesthetic concept (as a combination of very different elements, from very different categories) demarcating the enemy's social spaces.

Final reflections

Vitória's racism is upfront, as is the misogyny in Junior's utterance and the elitism in the "family man's" words. What is not as evident, however, is the edifice of gender and the heteronormativity that Vitória constructs while pronouncing her racism; or the state immanence inherent to Junior's question. Constructions of race, gender and sexuality (also state) are also not evident, inherent to the classist, hegemonic masculine and monetised discourse embodied by the "family man". Even less noticeable in an everyday context is the fact that his words suggest (in the ability to turn to the police forces) that legitimate violence should be available to tackle this kind of marginal social type, stereotyped in its race-class-performance as non-human because what Clayton represents is "trash", "shit", a "son of a bitch" and an "animal". Such a type is even anti-human, because it destroys men's homes.¹⁶ "Real men don't do this to other men's daughters". Even less evident is the claiming of the legitimate monopoly of contents and values able to fill the categorical interval of "woman", or that of "family", "order" or "state", in each of the everyday situations described.

Even if not notable, these evaluative contents are also objectified in each of these situations, therefore impacting on the production of order and categorical structuring. If required, as in Clayton's case, subliminal calls to order are easily translated into an explicit harnessing of violence against those who threaten the categorical boundaries, as well as the enemies of gender, class, race, family and religion, and the law itself (Moutinho, 2004),

¹⁶ For an excellent debate on the human statute as community-based and political, see Arendt (1951) or Cavell (2006).

experienced as a social norm. The production of outlaws or criminality is nowadays undoubtedly one of the most powerful contemporary drivers of radical distinction (Hirata, 2010; Feltran, 2014; Mattos, 2016), at the core of the warlike mechanism that impinges on the modern-day “democratic” political forms and the “racism of the Brazilian state” (Foucault, 1997; Rui; Feltran, 2015).

It may always be argued that other young, heterosexual men, other middle-class fathers and other white grandmothers would say different things when exposed to similar situations, and that the scenes described here were cherry picked, with no scientific representation for the “opinions” related here. And this is undoubtedly true. What is much more important, however, is the fact that the *interval of categorical contents* demonstrated by the scenes, the *ideals for action* and the *formal boundaries* of the categories, noted by the performance of the protagonists, lend plausibility to many other scenes of every interaction in modern-day São Paulo or Brazil as a whole. The intervals of plausible contents revealed in each scene give cause to the hegemonic categories in the Gramscian sense, that lie within assumptions in the “constitutive nexus between culture and politics” (Dagnino, 1994) that allows us to consider how the national community is imagined (Anderson, 1991). We are therefore not only dealing with a way of thinking pertaining to the elites in São Paulo, but also about the very composition of the bases of public debate in contemporary Brazil.

Representatives of these contents have become relatively well-situated in the worlds of economics and state administration over recent decades, however their presence is now more explicit in schools, universities, condominium committee meetings, in the courts and in the legal system, in churches and religious associations, in the police forces and their Whatsapp groups, in white families (and their Whatsapp groups), in hospitals and their corporative initiatives, in class associations and their Facebook pages, always marked by a religious, family-oriented and elite aesthetic. God, the white family and the heteronormative police order are returning to governments and the public scene, set to

occupy hegemonic positions potentially for quite some time because they have more than enough public legitimacy—that is religious, hard-working and orderly—in everyday life. Via this hegemony, many poor black families also share similar things in their Whatsapp groups.

The tension at the boundaries of these premises remains, however. As Gramsci also pointed out, the hegemony is produced via doses of active consent and coercion, with the active construction of the consensus using all of the apparatuses available, and when these fail, violence. If such a degree of violence is required to produce the contemporary state order of gender-class-race-sexuality-religion-family-nation (Brazil registered over 60 thousand homicides in 2015), it is a sign of a lack of a categorical consensus. Violence must be called upon, and it resides at the limit of authoritarianism.¹⁷ The formally democratic experience in recent decades in Brazil has come to spark an authoritarian reaction, as has happened in the past.

I spent some years writing on the modes of the social and political subjectification of the “worker” (Feltran, 2007), and the “gangster/thief” (Feltran 2010, 2011, 2013), as well as the “consumer/entrepreneur” (Feltran, 2014) in São Paulo’s

¹⁷ “The adjective ‘authoritarian’ and the noun ‘authoritarianism’ are specifically employed in three contexts: the structure of political systems, the psychological devices related to power and political ideologies. In the typology of political systems, regimes privileging governmental authority are known as authoritarian, diminishing the consensus in a relatively radical fashion, concentrating political power in the hands of a single person or in a single body and placing representative institutions in second place. (...) In a psychological sense, an authoritarian personality is used to refer to a personality type formed by various characteristic traits centred on the coupling of two strictly linked attitudes: on the one hand, a concerned obedience towards superiors, sometimes including favours and adulation for all those retaining strength and power; and on the other hand, an arrogant and condescending treatment of hierarchical inferiors and anyone who does not have power and authority. (...) Authoritarian ideologies are therefore ideologies that negate equality among men in a relatively decisive manner, focusing on the hierarchical principle as well as arguing in favour of authoritarian regimes and often exalting some of the components of the authoritarian personality as virtues” (Bobbio; Matteucci; Pasquino, 1998:94).

peripheries. The argument underpinning these works is that all of these cases feature a brand of subjectification shaped in the framework of a fundamental conflict—political, violent and monetised—in light of the boundaries of the plausibility of the order of the imagined community (the city, the public world, the nation). In light of this idealised order and in the conceptual sphere, and despite various attempts to enter it, the peripheries I studied find themselves in disparate places such as those belonging to Clayton, the Kenyan athlete and the server, in places all considered to be outside the norm. From the perspective of this hegemonic community, they are explicitly referred to as opposites of the desired forms of family, work, class, gender, race and sexuality that are normal, correct and natural. This objectified and hegemonic normativity is manifested on a daily basis in the search for political legitimacy and state order.

Means for overcoming this boundary have been sought. The opportunity offered by the insertion of the “worker” did not find community redemption; the party most explicit in its support for this project abandoned it after a while and has just been thrown outside political institutionality. The raising of the minimum monthly wage and the powerful monetisation of everyday life also failed to produce subjects apt for a guaranteed stable space in the division of community plots. The “new C class” did not flourish, defending itself as far as it can against the increase in unemployment and the cost of living. The ideas of criminal “revolution” inherent to the viewpoint of the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* criminal faction are now outgrowing it, with no expectation of the construction of a national community in its narrative. Perhaps this is why evangelical churches and the presence of police forces in politics—that explicitly represent the project for national order—are experiencing such a boom. The constitutive tension found in any boundary is still simultaneously present, producing countless everyday syntheses, in directions which are certainly not unequivocal. The radicalisation of identities and places of speech is undoubtedly a constitutive part of this tension.

Unlike my previous output, this article has not sought to situate the analytical point of view in the margins of the social and the state. I have inverted here what I attempted to do some years ago, taking however the same *relationship* of otherness as an object. If I sought in my previous output to translate my discoveries—the markedly political modes of thinking and acting in marginalised worlds—to the sectors which, were not seen, not even by my own eyes before studying them, now the task has been mirrored. The perspective reconstructed here, as has been seen, is that of the family, racial, social, class, sexuality and gender group that I was brought up in. As is perhaps implicit in my way of considering these issues—because it is in the way these frameworks most directly operate—it is the white, Christian family project belonging to Vitória, Junior and the “family man” studied in the state of São Paulo, that constitutes my own social trajectory and shaping as a person. Carrying these frameworks does not however imply their infinite reproduction, precisely because there are many teleological series of social action operating in each situation and obeying distinct regimes of everyday objectification. Vitória’s “Brazilian white” may not be my “Brazilian white”, for example, with these in turn surely not the same as German “white” or “white” in the United States. The multiplicity also does not necessarily lead to the possibility for absolute emancipation in light of these frameworks; they are once again objectified in each rapid, everyday or routine interaction, with people and subjects I don’t know well. I will remain as white as Vitória.

Nobody white is ever just white when we have gained experience from weeks, months or years spent by their side. For our peers in particular, we are always more than what we appear at first glance. In the great majority of rapid interactions in the social world, however, and particularly when there is a significant otherness, a categorical boundary comes into play, often reducing us to our race, gender or class, or the aesthetic of their routinised, essentialised and objectified associations. It would be easier for a business man to forget the name of the woman who serves the tea and coffee, black and poor as she is (because in everyday Brazilian

life she is a routine type without a name), than the name of the company's CEO. This woman looks at the white men in meetings and believes them to be as close socially as she is distanced from them, while they distinguish between themselves and ignore her presence. The woman, meanwhile, is probably more likely to know the names of her female co-workers than the men she serves. The boundary which is more radically significant is that separating them, aesthetically and politically (Feltran, 2007). Within the categorical boundaries, both individuals and a community may be recognised. Peering behind the boundary, we will make out categorised, conceptual, abstract social types. They are white, "cool", "playboys", "successful" and "rich". "They" are not like "me".

We are always inside and outside these categories in everyday life, whether we like it or not. This is why strategic essentialism works, and why it is not redemptive, in the struggle among movements of differences. This is why racial democracy works, and has limits, in the struggle between hegemonic groups. Both function in specific situations, are limited in other situated scenes, depending on the categorical boundaries in play and the performance of the actors facing them. As Butler stated, performativity (which is both aesthetic and political) plays a decisive role in the objectification of these boundaries. Sometimes, depending on how we behave, we situate ourselves on one side for a matter of years, with this experience potentially changing in a single day.

The everyday tendency towards categorical objectification by means of routine is thus eventually challenged by the time saturating routines, by the contingency that ignores them. The daily exposure to misunderstandings and conflicts calls for an order, while simultaneously spurring research into other possible and plausible orders. Institutions, movements, families and people reproduce their cycles for generations, becoming different in each cycle. Favelas are and are not the new *senzalas*, depending on the sequence of actions deemed to be relevant for analysis. The perception of "advances" and "setbacks" on the political scene

specifically concerns this shift within the legitimate order of categories, objectified by routine use, which also carries its worm. The recent authoritarian reaction in Brazil, effected by the radical objectification of the hegemonic categorical boundaries of difference and by the demand, violent, if necessary, that they remain in place, fixing them, is radical enough to request effective reaction. The essentialist radicalisation of sectors of minority groups in the public and conceptual scene—like that which opposes the *Primeiro Comando do Capital* on the one hand, and the police and evangelical Christians on the other, for example—is the most noticeable and strongest effect, although there are many other effects to be understood. We know that it is in everyday life, however, that the practices of its groups often locate it within the same categorical limits. The public conflict that tends to become strengthened in Brazil therefore has unpredictable consequences. At least we know that understanding the world is not merely a question of gender or of sexuality than of race, however. The struggle between the classes is not the only thing driving history.

In a theoretical scenario in which the categorical “emancipation” (of class, gender and race) has definitively lost its universal validity, the politics of categories seems to become polarised between the *aesthetic* limits of essentialisation and of deconstruction, both to the right and to the left. To bring a specific interpretation from Georg Simmel’s latest works to this debate, I believe it is possible to turn to a situational analysis of categories that contemplates essence *and* deconstruction, but more particularly the *continuum* of the places between them, challenged by time, as positions that are a priori equally valid in the everyday, practical structuring of difference.

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