

Other Rhythms in Schools on the Outskirts of São Paulo

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ABSTRACT – Other Rhythms in Schools on the Outskirts of São Paulo. The paper discusses research carried out in public schools on the outskirts of São Paulo in order to understand the development of youth sociability. The proposal is to describe the dimensions that the youth category acquires from the students' experiences. Students engender rhythms in conflict with the rhythm of discipline. Through the new technologies and mass culture, they have taken part in other activities and have constituted specific publics formed prior to and out of the school. Thus, if the school tries to isolate itself from the outside world with gates and bars, young people with their different rhythms, mainly that of banter, introduce in the school the most different and singular worlds.

Keywords: Youth. School. Rhythms. Publics. Banter.

RESUMO – Outros Ritmos em Escolas da Periferia de São Paulo. O artigo apresenta pesquisa em escolas públicas da periferia de São Paulo a fim de entender o desenvolvimento das sociabilidades juvenis. A proposta é descrever as dimensões que a categoria juventude adquire a partir das experiências que os estudantes vivenciam. Os jovens engendram ritmos que se contrapõem ao ritmo disciplinar. Por meio das novas tecnologias e da cultura de massa, eles têm participado de outras atividades, constituindo públicos específicos, formados prévia e externamente à escola. Assim, se a escola tenta fechar-se ao mundo externo com portões e grades, os jovens com seus diferentes ritmos, principalmente o das zoeiras, introduzem no espaço escolar os mais diferentes e singulares mundos.

Palavras-chave: Juventudes. Escola. Ritmos. Públicos. Zoeira.

Introduction

Welcome to the jungle! That is how a philosophy teacher greeted me when I started my fieldwork in one of the schools I followed between 2006 and 2013 with the objective of understanding the multiple juvenile experiences established in secondary public schools of the poorer boroughs of the outskirts of São Paulo. I tried to conduct a multisituated ethnographic research (Marcus, 1995) that did not focus on a single school, which would configure a case study, but rather that was situated in different schools and from different points of view: those of the students, teachers, youngsters, residents of the outskirts etc. I therefore followed four secondary public schools in day and night shifts. Three of these schools were located in the southern district of Cidade Ademar, and the fourth school was in the district of Brasilândia, north of the city. This research strategy helped me to apprehend the multiplicities of juvenile experiences that took place at schools and that also constituted school experiences.

By juvenile experiences I refer here to the contemporary juvenile subjectivities that are established on the basis of several relationships, apart from the school one, such as class, gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, nationality, territory, religion etc. Hence the notion of experience as an important way to approach the different modes of being a youngster in the public schools of the outskirts of São Paulo, which cannot be reduced to a single perspective. Edward Thompson, in his attempt to evince the singularity of the cultural practices of individuals and groups from the working classes, highlights the notion of experience as a category that “[...] comprises the mental and emotional response, whether of an individual or of a social group, to many inter-related events or to many repetitions of the same kind of event” (Thompson, 1981, p. 15). The objective proposed is, therefore, precisely to uncover the creative responses given by the agents with which I dialogued and interacted during the research, based on different categories, such as the juvenile, the school, the place of residence etc. It is worth noting, however, that when trying to approach these multiple experiences, none of them will be taken as internally homogeneous, since we understand that each one of these experiences also congregates multiple singularities.

The notion of experience helps to understand the way youngsters relate to each other and to school, in so far as it allows us to avoid the trap of a reductionism that would induce the dichotomic framing of the observed phenomena into previously determined social roles or utilitarian individual actions. Through the observation of the social experiences of these youngsters it is possible to apprehend precisely the heterogeneity in which they are immersed, for they inhabit many and diversified worlds (Dubet, 1994). We wish to avoid at the same time an understanding of these relationships as homogeneous realities and what Bernard Lahire (2003) calls a radical empiricism that only appre-

hends fragmentations of identities and actions, without establishing any kind of relation between them. Drawing from the work of Maurice Halbwachs on collective memories, the author points to the “[...] multiple belonging of individual actors” (Lahire, 2003, p. 17) and also to the plurality of perspectives that can be mobilized by them. The point of departure and orientation to capture such diversity of experiences, and thereby avoid a fragmented perception, lies in the observation of the different manners in which the notion of youth is conceived relationally by agents in their daily lives. And, in this sense, the concept of experience allows us to apprehend also how contemporary youngsters/students interact with their elders, and can receive from them orientations which are experienced in a singular way (Ingold, 2010). Thus, the juvenile experiences can be thought of simultaneously as experimentations and as legacies that interrelate and modify each other constantly.

Apart from taking the multiple forms of understanding and of construction of the notion of youth employed by social agents on the field as a guiding line of the research, we demonstrate how the multiple experiences that we intend to approach not only start from, but should also be understood within, the limits of a rather singular experience, that of the ethnographer. It is not, therefore, a matter of observing who or how the youngsters from secondary public schools of the periphery of São Paulo are, but rather of a partial description of what I experienced with them in different moments and contexts. We start from the ethnographic experience to the production of a singular knowledge, oriented at the same time by the theory of the researcher and by the theories and practices of the interlocutors of the study. Paul Willis and Mats Trondman (2008, p. 219) describe the main objectives of the ethnographic experience:

If you like, we are interested in producing “aha” effects where evocative expression through data hits the experience, body, and emotions of the reader. These are moments where new understandings and possibilities are opened up in the space between experience and discourse, at the same time deconstructing and reshaping the taken for granted in a particular response to the shape of the social order, a response that transcends dichotomies such as public/private, social/individual. Aha effects fuse old experiences with new ones, thus opening up readers’ minds toward new horizons.

The authors thus emphasize the importance of recognizing the role of theory as a precursor, means and result of this study and of the ethnographic writing. However, they also alert to the fact that this theory must be a useful theory, related to ethnographic evidence. Theory cannot be self-sufficient; it cannot be a theory for itself, because the ethnographic experience must be capable also of destabilizing the theories with which the ethnographer came to the field, and not just of

using field observations to validate them. That is why Willis and Trondman say they have no interest in a big theory, but rather in one that is capable of being informed and destabilized by the field data, which do not emerge as a theory by itself.

The objective in this article is to present through my ethnographic experience in secondary schools of the outskirts of São Paulo a reflection about how juvenile and student experiences interlace in the school daily life. These diversified experiences are engendered in multiple times and spaces that configure, or sometimes disfigure, the school institutions I visited. Thus, the aim is one of presenting the multiple rhythms observed and experienced at school. I follow in this proposal the perspective of Henri Lefebvre (2004) to think the urban rhythms, the flows and displacements, from an analysis of the relation between body and space, of an apprehension of the sensible city. The rhythms, according to this conception, involve simultaneously time, space and certain energy expenditure. In his *Rhythmanalysis*, Lefebvre, inspired by Bachelard¹ (1988), proposes a particular method of apprehending the dynamics of a city with the objective of simultaneously listening to it as a whole and affording more localized readings about specific territories – streets, squares, commercial spaces, meeting places – with the purpose of capturing the pulse of the city, its rhythms and flows, as well as routine movements and those that break away from routine. Lefebvre presents the study of rhythms as a new field of knowledge. To observe, listen and feel the school from this perspective will involve capturing the cyclic and linear rhythms experienced therein, but which are often also reverberations of rhythms alien to the school space. In order to apprehend such rhythms, says the author, we have at the same time to be within and without them. In other words, we have to produce certain distancing that allows us to perceive and be surprised by rhythms hitherto naturalized, whilst also being capable of experiencing them. Thus, the dimension of the ethnographic experience appears as a privileged form of experimenting and listening to the different, harmonic and dissonant, rhythms that are produced in the school daily life.

The School Experience and the Disciplinary Rhythm

An intense din of mixed children and teenage voices and shouting, interrupted here and there by other shouts of *Guys, pay attention! Be quiet!* or by a more excited student having his/her name called out loud. The racket can be heard a few blocks away. One knows that one is getting close to a school. Distinguishing what the students talk about is almost impossible, given the profusion of voices, shouts and laughter. The fact is that the school has in its daily life a characteristic sonority that often decreases in intensity – although not disappearing altogether – when classes effectively start, and increases considerably in volume when students are free to chat outside class time. The walls, the bars,

gates and locks, common enough in public schools of periphery boroughs of São Paulo, stop students from leaving the school physically, but do little to stop the noise generated from their multiple overlapping conversations. On the other hand, these resources of closure to the external world have failed to impede the entrance of rhythms and public alien to the school.

The sonority that calls the attention of someone outside the school is only a small sample of the rhythms that students impose upon the daily life in the schools I observed. The main one is the rhythm of bantering. If I was received in a less than amicable fashion by the teachers, and even seen as someone who would disrupt their work, on the part of the students, despite also demonstrating some degree of initial distrust during the first visits to the institutions I followed, the reception was more stress-free, through what they themselves defined as bantering. In one of the schools, I began to conduct the fieldwork precisely at a moment in which students were protesting against the suspension of the internal soccer championship matches that occurred on Fridays, and also against the firing of a doorman who had great affinity with students. Amidst the explosions that generated panic among teachers, the arrival of someone older and bearded soon granted me the nickname of Bin Laden. Students started to mock me, blaming me for the bombs. Later, in another school, already aware of the effects my appearance might generate, I shaved my beard before starting the research. A futile effort, as it turned out. At this other school I was nicknamed Zidane because of my bald head that reminded them of the French soccer player.

The interest for observing the schools was due to the objectives of the research I developed: to follow different juvenile practices with the aim of describing the different modes of being young among the popular classes in the periphery boroughs of São Paulo. Schools represent the ideal space to undertake such task because, apart from being a device present in the most different boroughs of the city, it is often the main place of meeting for the younger population. This allowed me to take these places as prime vantage points. However, whilst at first sight they offered this advantage, during the fieldwork great difficulties were also revealed. The main ones issued from the fact that my main research interest, juvenile sensibilities, was exactly what was pointed out as the main problem in the schools I observed. Everything related to juvenile cultural practices was seen as threatening or destabilizing of the disciplinary order. In this sense, it was fundamental to adopt a non-school perspective in order to understand the school daily life (Sposito, 2003).

Another difficulty to observe the cultural practices of youngsters at schools lies in the fact that in this context youngsters become also students. This means that, at the same time, specific actions are conducted that would not occur outside the school context, and that, based on certain assumptions that teachers and school administrators have about what the ideal pupil would be like, all juvenile elements alien to

the school environment and/or that draw youngsters away from the expected actions of the student are frowned upon. José Gimeno Sacristán (2005) points out precisely this little-explored aspect of the social construction of the figure of the student, an invention produced by adults. In this manner, even if much has been discussed about how age categories, such as youth, adolescence or childhood, are related to sociohistorical constructions, little reflection has taken place about how much the notion of a pupil is also conceived. Since the wide dissemination of schooling there would be, according to Sacristán, an almost immediate and naturalized association between the situations of a pupil and of a child. Categories such as child, youngster and pupil would have been constructed mutually and partially. If notions such as those of childhood and youth cannot be understood homogeneously, for they involve different experiences, the same holds for the situation of a pupil, which would be experienced in multiple ways. What a pupil is, therefore, transcends the typical ideal role of being seated at a desk, observing disciplinary rules, paying attention to what an adult says.

The school can be conceived as “[...] a singular cultural invention characterized by its recognizable physical appearance, a form of utilizing space and time” (Sacristán, 2005, p. 139), that had its global implementation generalized and little varied. According to Sacristán, the large-scale diffusion would be important evidence of its success as a *cultural discovery*, and also of its strong tendency to preserve its structures even under different contexts. I consider, therefore, this small variability of a large part of the spatial and disciplinary mechanisms of the school institution in the analysis of my own experiences and of those I observed in the different schools, highlighting its invariant traits, but also trying to bring out some of the more peculiar characteristics of each one of the institutions I visited. I effectively observed rather common issues among these four periphery public schools of São Paulo.

Nevertheless, we must note that it is also possible to recognize certain elements of difference in the school configurations. One of these elements is related to territory, to social class, and to the social identification of the school: public and free, or private and paid. Despite having followed mainly schools in the poorer areas of the outskirts of São Paulo, I could also be in contact with two private schools. In one of them – in a middle-class area of the eastern part of the city – as a teacher, and in another – in a more central borough of upper-middle-class – through contacts with teachers from the institution. In the poorer schools it was common that practices perceived as indiscipline and/or confrontation to the school order were understood from the viewpoint of stigmatization and criminalization. *This school is full of criminals*, was one of the statements I heard from a teacher. At another school, I heard that the main problem was the fact that 90% of its pupils lived in the nearby favela. In private schools, on the other hand, although the understand-

ing of what constituted indiscipline and confrontation to school order were similar, their students were not classified as delinquents and/or criminals; at most, they were seen as problematic or as a nuisance, as I heard from some teachers. The results of the disciplinary organization are not the same in the two contexts. At a public school in which students exploded firework bombs² inside the school building, police was called to search them for explosives. In an upper-middle-class private school in São Paulo, as reported by a teacher, students put computers on fire and a door was ripped apart, but in no manner such acts were brought to public attention or police called in.

William Chambliss (1973), in a research about two gangs of youngsters in a North American school, the *Saints* and the *Roughnecks* in the 1970s, already demonstrated how the assessment made of each one of these groups was different based on the predominant social class of its members. The *Saints*, from more privileged social segments, seen as belonging to good families, apart from having good grades, had their acts of transgression seen only as isolated cases or as minor incidents natural for their age. The *Roughnecks*, on the other hand, did not have the same reputation and social respect since they belonged to lower social layers. They had poor academic performance and were always seen as suspect, independently of what they did. This happened even when the *Saints* actually conducted a larger number of illegal activities. In other words, the label of delinquent applied only to the social group already previously marginalized on account of its worse-off socio-economic situation. It thereby proved the thesis by Howard Becker (2008, p. 25) that there is no such thing as an essentially deviant behavior, because it is socially created.

The degree to which an act will be treated as deviant depends also on who commits the act and who feels he has been harmed by it. Rules tend to be applied more to some persons than others. Studies on juvenile delinquency make the point clearly. Boys from middle-class areas do not get as far in the legal process when they are apprehended as do boys from slum areas.

The acts seen as deviant or transgressing in the two school contexts, both in that of the private schools attended by youngsters with better economic conditions, and in that of the public schools attended by the poorer pupils, are frowned upon and always generate great discomfort among teachers. However, the way disciplinary devices are mobilized works only in one of the cases through labelling and stigmatization, which can often turn into criminalization.

Michel Foucault (1987), when discussing the issue of discipline, presents school as a learning, supervising, hierarchizing and rewarding machine. And this machine is defined chiefly by the control of flows. Foucault presents the different flows that the school organizes: the lines and circulations of pupils throughout the different spaces of the

school, the age and series classes, the evaluations students receive after tasks and exams, the contents almost always organized in order of growing difficulty. The disciplinary power of the school can, therefore, be defined as the power to create and control different flows that take place in time and in space. Thus, if we go back to the discussion by Lefebvre (2004), it is possible to say that discipline imposes itself through specific rhythms that regulate the daily life. Rhythms are composed of cyclic and linear repetitions that influence each other in complementarity and/or in opposition. According to this perspective, we might say that the school produces and tries to impose its own rhythm to the flows that occur in its space and to the forms of utilizing time. By seeking to produce homogeneity, according to Foucault (1987), the school also produces individuals in line side-by-side, seeing and being seen by their masters. With the school, the initiatic time of the rites of passage is overridden by the disciplinary time characterized by multiple, linear and evolutive series.

The organization of a serial space was one of the great technical mutations of elementary education. It made it possible to supersede the traditional system (a pupil working for a few minutes with the master, while the rest of the heterogeneous group remained idle and unattended). By assigning individual places it made possible the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all. It organized a new economy of the time of apprenticeship (Foucault, 1987, p. 126).

However, and despite this more general imposition of a school disciplinary power, it is possible to observe different rhythms in its application. Jacques Donzelot (1980), when discussing the State social policies and the place of family in the West, demonstrates how already in the 19th century this differentiated understanding of the way of taking care of children and adolescents based on the dimension of social class was being configured in France. According to Donzelot, whereas to the child of bourgeois birth a protected liberation is guaranteed, effected by what was called a sanitary boundary that the bourgeois family draws around it, allowing some room for discreetly controlled development, to the poor child or that of a working-class birth would be reserved the pedagogic proposal of supervised freedom. In the latter case, the preoccupation would rest on excessive freedom or on child abandonment, and therefore the pedagogic technique applied would be to limit this freedom, conducting the child to spaces of higher vigilance such as the school. When the school fails in its control, the police or correctional institutions for youngsters appear as possible alternative resources. The schools dedicated to the education of low-income youngsters in São Paulo demonstrated to me as their main objective precisely the limitation of the youngsters' and children's freedom, so that they would not practice acts seen as delinquent or threatening to the social order.

One of the measures employed to avoid pupils coming and going constantly from classrooms without the authorization of their teachers was installing sturdy locks and iron bars that opened with rudimentary keys that worked for all doors and were kept by teachers who lectured inside locked classrooms. Sacristán (2005) reinforces the perception of the isolation of the classroom by affirming that the smallness of social life within it can hardly be found even in a prison cell, and that if the norms that regulate the classroom daily life were applied in our homes we would live in *an unbearable environment*. To a large extent, with its locks, the teachers of the schools I visited make such spaces even smaller, effectively approximating the environment of a prison in their ways of dealing with the flows and rhythms of students in time and space. Peter McLaren (1991, p. 43), in a study conducted in schools for students of Portuguese descent in Canada, described the school as a space for the culture of pain: "Pain, whether existential or physical, is intimately connected to the pedagogic encounter".

Rhythms of Youth

Schools have multiple temporalities intrinsically associated to the ways of being a child and/or youngster in contemporary Western society. Indeed, school experience is often seen as an important memory marker of that stage in life. Within the perspective already pointed out here of conducting a multisituated research, apart from observing in loco the school daily life, I also followed interactions carried out in social networks within the virtual communities of the schools. In them, the presence of ex-pupils looking for old colleagues was very common. They always commented that those were the best years of their lives and/or that the school times brought them good memories of the time of their youth. During the study I also talked with many people for whom memories of childhood and youth were referenced by the school series they were in at the time. That is, in order to know in what year or at what age a given episode happened, they used as an auxiliary resource the memory that it had occurred when they were at a specific series of basic education.

Many authors highlight the importance of school in the configuration of age categories such as childhood and youth such as they are conceived nowadays (Coleman, 1961; Ariès, 1978). However, a contrary movement is established in which youngsters impose their particular rhythms to the school daily life, modifying them and frustrating expectations surrounding the social role of the orderly pupil. As pointed out by Juarez Dayrell (2007) – when he questions whether the school still makes the youth; in other words, if it is still responsible for the conformation or socialization of what he calls the contemporary juvenile condition – the school loses its strength as a definer of the modes of being young. Schooling is an important element for the social and discursive

construction of youth, but it is not restricted to it, as put by Green and Bigum (1998), and its participation in this process is waning. The new rhythms that invade the school are dictated to a large extent by other elements such as the new technologies and mass culture.

In the schools I investigated, cell phones playing loud music were very common. As much as the school management and teachers tried to fight it, youngsters always found a way of inserting their phones and all their resources into the school context. There were constantly frustrated attempts to ban the presence of these devices in the classroom through norms of behavior that could not be enforced. As summed up in the discourse of a teacher to pupils about the rule of restricting cell phones: "It's not that you cannot have the telephone with you in the classroom; you just can't use it all the time to listen to music and disrupt the class. I myself keep my cell phone on, because my 10-year-old daughter is home alone and she may have to call me in an emergency" (Fieldwork Notebook Record, 2007). At a different moment, a teacher was feeling sick in the teachers' common room during break time because of a surge in blood pressure. The reason: a female student refused to take off her earphones and switch off the device she was using to listen to music, defying the teacher's orders. His colleagues offered to take him to the doctor, but the offer was refused by the teacher saying: "I just need to get out of here immediately. This school environment makes you sick." (Fieldwork Notebook Record, 2007).

Different tensions appeared in this opposition between the entering of juvenile elements, particularly mass culture and new technologies at school, but, in fact, apart from the discomfort that the marks of juvenile cultures produce when entering the school environment, one of the reasons for this mismatch lies precisely in the dimension of the temporalities that overlap therein. Saying that the school is an important marker of one's youth implies recognizing that the juvenile situation also leaves its marks in the school dynamics. I return here to the discussion by Lefebvre (2004) on rhythmanalysis to say that these markers are fundamentally constructed by the rhythms these youngsters engender in the school daily life. If the rhythm is defined by a relationship between time, space and certain expenditure of energy, we can think about how juvenile cultural practices create new cadences that destabilize or overlap the disciplinary rhythm, producing countless dissonances.

Dayrell (2007) calls attention to the different temporalities and spatialities that low-income youngsters mobilize in the public school and to the importance of observing them so as to understand the contemporary juvenile condition and its relation to schooling. The interaction of these multiple temporalities and spatialities – time and space on the street, at home and at school, but also free time and the cultural delocalizing that the new media and technologies afford, for example

– established by juvenile cultural practices in the context of schools heavily surrounded by walls, bars, gates and locks. Generally speaking, a peculiar dispute can be observed in the daily lives of educational institutions between the institutional time that seeks to be established in a rigid and flexible form in the school space, and the informal and flexible times and spaces set forth by the youngsters. This is what McLaren (1991) characterized as the *streetcorner state* that is recreated within the school walls. Paulo Carrano and Mônica Peregrino (2003, p. 19-20) also emphasize the importance and the paradoxes of time in the schooling of youngsters from the popular segments of society.

It is the rigid time of classes that follow without intervals or 'free time', that do not finish before or after the bell that alerts for the next period; it is the time controlled by successive breaktimes alternated by series and that, under certain circumstances, occur in shifts so as to allow a better control of the pupils; it is the short eating time, taking place in ever tighter periods and refectories that cater for an always increasing number of pupils; it is the time of the incessant work of teachers, restricted to the classrooms, since the time controlled by the school of precarious physical structure cannot allow much circulation; it is the brief time of the school shifts that reduce the number of hours spent at school, so that they can accept more pupils; the subjectively 'long' time of classes devoid of resources and equipment; the controlled time that bars every possibility of free use of the time by the actors of the school.

When describing the youngsters that belonged to what he called English counter-school cultures, Paul Willis (1991), in a research carried out during the 1970s, highlights the importance in this other context of what he defines as *killing time at school*. Among the English students that oppose the rules of the school institution, one of the objectives was to reach through their actions the freedom from institutional time to create their own temporality based on the experience of the present and in the time spent enjoying themselves with their friends. Through activities that opposed the seriousness of school order, these students established informal cultural practices with the objective of having a good laugh and conquering space in the school, so as to avoid what would be the main function of that place: to put students to work.

Lefebvre (2004), in his own way, also deals with the rhythmic dimension of the educative practice, but based on what he called the science of training, which would articulate different dimensions such as duration, rigor, punishment and reward. We can say, therefore, seeing education from the point of view of how contemporary schooling is carried out, that Lefebvre's understanding of training or instruction carries strong similarities with Foucault's disciplinary discussion. The disciplinary order of these institutions is processed on the basis of the rhythm of instruction or training. In other words, disciplinary order

implies the imposition of a given rhythm that is based fundamentally on the control of the bodies. Lefebvre, in his turn, presents the body as fundamental in the experimenting and apprehension of rhythms. According to him, the body would act as a mediator between social and biological rhythms, working as a kind of metronome.

If the body is the fundamental element upon which discipline acts, which seeks through it and in it to impose certain rhythm to the school daily life, it is also through it that youngsters/students give a different rhythm to the school dynamics, putting in check the disciplinary order. From the refusal to be quiet to circulating around the classroom, students are all the time opposing the school's attempts to control their bodies. In the classroom, it was rather common to abolish the disposition of student desks in lines, a marker of disciplinary hierarchies, with the students regarded as the best ones positioned at the front, for example. Indeed, what I observed was clusters of desks in different points of the classroom space, demonstrating the wish to sit closer to friends, so that the better rhythm of their threatening conversations could flow, which often hampered or frustrated altogether any attempt by the teacher to be heard during a more expository class.

However, I could experience, from my physical presence in the classroom, the main way in which youngsters, particularly boys, made use of the body and of different corporealities that were found in the school environment to produce their main destabilizing action of the institutional disciplinary rhythm: bantering. When being object of bantering, when receiving nicknames because of my beard or my bald head, I could note that concomitantly to the disciplinary rhythm of the institution that required from me credentials to enter and a very well outlined justification for my research, there was the rhythm of the relationships students established among themselves. In this case, the personal demeanor, the physical appearance, and especially marks that presented any element of difference or of breaking with the expected pattern were components put in action as forms of establishing interactions, ludic or playful, through their caricaturizing. I was not made object of bantering simply because I was an outsider, but because that was the most common way among youngsters to relate to each other and to the school. Of course, many markers that identified me as different from them potentialized the bantering targeted at me, from the already mentioned physical features to my age. By taking lessons alongside them, I was often pointed at in a jocular way to the students who didn't know me as the oldest pupil at school.

Among the students, the nicknames by which they were playfully called by their friends also made use of bodily characteristics. Often, as it happened to me, associating them to certain celebrities of the media, because of specific traits that would be similar. In my case, a soccer player and an international terrorist were the references put in action.

In the majority of cases the nickname aimed at ridiculing the other, so it rarely alluded to celebrities considered as glamorous or beautiful. Additionally, many times features such as having a dark colored skin or an Afro style haircut were reason enough for a more malicious nickname of racist inspiration. Racist and homophobic swearing was also rather common in the relationships students established among themselves. In both cases there were contexts in which such swearing and/or bantering that referred to those attributes occurred in a conflicting form and other situations in which they happened amicably, being treated as mere jokes. The bantering that made use of race attributes and that was considered by them as friendly, not being understood as offensive or racist, happened among friends. Once, when following a game of cards that took place inside the classroom, I heard a boy yelling at his partner after losing the game: *You black!* And the answer came immediately: *And you're fucking white, aren't you?* Everybody laughed and that was it. In another context, however, when a boy had an argument with a black girl during a history class, he made many racist comments about her. In the case of homophobic bantering, they were only seen as jokes when exchanged among youngsters that were not considered as homosexual. With those identified as homosexual, we found from provocative indirect comments on the issue of sexual orientation to openly offensive remarks of disapproval and confrontation, as when they were called names or were the object of caricature imitations.

In other words, the bantering also possessed differentiated rhythms according to those who took part in it either as protagonists or as targets. In the case of a bantering between two friends, for example, the result was almost always that of reinforcing reciprocally their bond of friendship. Bantering could, however, be used to provoke someone with whom one had no initial affinity. The response to bantering, even when amicable, can spark more aggressive discussions and even fighting. Bantering has an ambiguous character, and is always at the tenuous border between joke and confrontation. A youngster can take offence at a bantering and swear at his friends, but they may not understand it as a confrontation, and can provoke him even more, or they can understand the friend's reaction as disrespectful and start a fight. The same can happen in bantering with teachers through jokes, nicknames and various kinds of playing. In some moments, the intention is to get closer to the teacher; in others is to challenge him/her or even to set up a conflict. One of the most common forms of bantering with teachers happened when students made strange sounds, from cartoons, for example, out loud with their cell phones, causing their colleagues in the classroom to laugh. Nicknames given to the teacher, in their turn, were frequently shouted when he entered or left the room.

The issue of the chaffing and jocularly that mark the bantering among youngsters is observed in many other juvenile contexts, but particularly at school. Paulo Nogueira (2006), in a research conducted in

fundamental education schools³ in the city of Belo Horizonte, also noticed the bantering as an important element of interaction between the students, and as a form used to interrupt or to question the atmosphere of the class. In other words, the bantering would break away from the serious, silent, linear and rigid rhythm expected of a classroom. As when there is an adult/teacher putting lessons on the blackboard, his/her back to the class, and suddenly a cell phone rings, and a student answers almost shouting: *Hi mom, I'm here at the sociology lesson*. Turning around, the teacher sees the student talking to his own hand to the general laugh of his colleagues. Peter McLaren (1991) demonstrates how, through humor, those he called the clowns of the class ridicule the cultural codes of the classroom, and through bantering attack and/or highlight the weaker points of their colleagues and teachers. This bantering can become a collective intervention in the rhythm of the class, when it leads the whole class or most of it to open laughter.

Other Publics

Teachers told me many times how complicated the relationship established within the classroom was. They saw it as a power struggle, in which teachers were losing strength. "All of them together are very powerful, they create a powerful collective force" (Fieldwork Notebook Record, 2006), told me a teacher called Almir. Edison, a teacher from a private school, analyzed that students always wanted to test or measure forces against the teacher. Sergio Haddad (2009) from the NGO *Ação Educativa*, says, when commenting on the many difficulties and pressures the teacher experiences nowadays, that this profession is one of the few in which one has to be every day face-to-face, in confrontation with a group of 30 to 40 people. We must, therefore, reflect here upon the implications of this confrontation between an individual, on the one hand, mainly responsible for talking or proposing discussions, and a collectivity on the other, whose action expected by that individual would fundamentally be one of listening and/or following orientations. Gabriel Tarde (2005), in a text from the beginning of the 20th century on the notions of public and of opinion, states that the lack of attention of a group increases with the number of individuals in it. Tarde cites the testimony of a university lecturer about an audience of students being always more attentive and respectful when less numerous. The larger the numbers, the smaller the respect and listening, with the conversations between individuals becoming more frequent and intense in rhythm.

Apart from that, according to Gabriel Tarde, with the invention of the press a different collectivity emerges, one whose individuals would be physically separated, but kept cohesive through the sharing of opinions, even when away from each other. This is the public that, due to the reasons discussed, differs from the crowd. Tarde says that it is possible to belong to many publics at the same time, but only to one crowd.

“In this sense, the public could be defined as a virtual crowd” (Tarde, 2005, p. 15). Students in a classroom can be defined as a rather peculiar type of presence public, since, despite being constituted by individuals who, at least in principle, would not have much in common apart from age and school series, its members eventually constitute affinities that emerge through the common experiences to which they are forced to submit. We might say that the forms in which students interact and develop ludic and playful relationships in their daily lives constitute the actions that this specific public effects at school.

Nevertheless, we must add that in the same classroom, based on the lack of need of face-to-face interaction among the members of this collectivity, there are individuals belonging to different publics. In this case, taking into account also what we might call the intensification, diversification and strengthening of these publics by the emergence of new information and communication technologies such as the Internet, the social networks and the smartphones, we might say that the publics nowadays, apart from multiplying faster and faster, develop the potential of stimulating effective or off-line encounters, and even of becoming a *de facto* crowd. There is an increase in the publics that were formed through the Internet and that managed to establish face-to-face contact and even to articulate social movements. In Brazil, there have been important examples of publics formed through the dissemination of information and opinions in the social networks, on the Internet and in the press that were transformed into crowds, as more recently in the manifestations against the increase in transportation costs that soon became protests against the FIFA World Cup, against the government and Brazilian politics in 2013.

In a classroom, there are publics for different musical genres: funk, rap, rock, samba, among others. The same youngster can belong at the same time to many publics; he/she may enjoy rock, cartoons, some TV comedy show, soccer and root for a specific team. In other words, the same individual can bring with herself the participation in different spaces with different temporalities and even opinions, intensities, adhesions and rhythms. All these forms of participation in publics in which they share information and feelings of belonging have brought more and more consequences not only to the constitution of contemporary juvenile subjectivities, but also to students' subjectivities and, consequently, to the rhythms of school daily life.

In our fieldwork, one group stood out that enjoyed a rhythm that constantly destabilized the dynamics of the class when playing music out loud in the back of the classroom: the so-called *carioca funk*. To add to the horror of most teachers, its heavy beat was accompanied by lyrics that often refer to criminality and sex. Juarez Dayrell (2005), in a research about the rap and the funk among youngsters in Belo Horizonte, emphasizes precisely the importance of music as a search for collective

belonging. Carles Feixa (2006) also points to the dimension of music as an element of aggregation of youngsters in what he called juvenile cultures. Feixa points out also what might be considered as another forming element of specific publics, directly linked to musical genre: the style.

Faced with this scenario, the battle, lost beforehand by the schools I visited, was one of trying to face, undo, or destabilize these previously formed publics. As already exposed, apart from the music, youngsters in a classroom can be part of many other publics, such as the aficionados of a given sport, members of some religious group, players of videogames, or even of those who support a given political opinion. At school, they may or may not find others who share the same tastes and preferences in those various areas, who belong thereby to the same public. In every case, we must reflect about how the notions of taste, preference and style mobilize consumption as an important mark in the formation of a public. The dimension of consuming certain items of mass culture or even certain technological equipment, such as smartphones of one brand or another or perhaps designer clothing and shoes, articulates a rather particular social group. Pierre Bourdieu (1983) defines lifestyle as distinctive forms of situating oneself in the social space marked by symbolic re-translations of objective differences generated by taste or preferences for a “[...] given category of objects or practices classified and classifying” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 83). According to Gabriel Tarde (2005), the public is also characterized by a group of people possessing similar tastes and lifestyles. Thus, buying the same products or dressing in a certain way creates social links and supposes certain affinities among people.

In the case of bantering and constant teasing, in which students can be protagonists or merely the audience that contributes with laughing, the public of TV comedy shows was to some extent reconstituted in the classroom. A considerable part of jokes made in schools were directly inspired in sketches from successful comedy shows at the time: the *Pânico na TV* and *Hermes e Renato* shows. In the case of the former, many jokes that imitated it carried physical elements as a strong component of the scenes they reproduced in the school space. I observed pupils circulating in the classroom with volumes in their trousers, simulating speaking at the cell phone, and thereby trying to reproduce a comedy sketch named *homem berinjala* (eggplant man), or labelling female colleagues as pretty or ugly, also inspired by the same program, taking as a criterion the texture of their hair and color of their skin, for example. Many of the scenes performed by the students, those that obtained more resonance, presented ways of categorizing the others, especially those considered to be out of pattern, in a playful and ridiculing way. In this program, *Pânico na TV*, for example, sketches ridiculing subordinated people, such as Blacks, poor and women are common. As already demonstrated, an important device of mocking those who were

somehow outside the standards was through the caricature built into nicknames.

Apart from that, meeting in the classroom with other individuals who are the public of a same event, activity or musical style implies being with those with whom one has some degree of affinity previously built outside the school space. This makes the school become also a place for being up-to-date with one's interests built outside it through conversation, "[...] the most powerful agent of imitation, propagation of feelings, ideas and modes of action" (Tarde, 2005, p. 77). Conversation, defines Tarde, is a dialogue in which one speaks for the pleasure of speaking, for the fruition of the talk itself, without any kind of immediate objective. It would be a fundamental element to establish sociability relations. In the case of these schools, conversation is the main instrument of the many juvenile sociabilities established therein. Georg Simmel (2006) defines sociability as a form of sociation marked by the pleasure of being together or socialized, a process in which sociation is taken as an end in itself. According to him, sociability is an autonomous or ludic form of sociation, whose full realization follows from relations that take place fundamentally among equals, without social hierarchizing. Thus, conversation configures a rhythmic element that destabilizes the expected, or wished for, silent attention to the teacher facing the class, promoting the interactions among youngsters. In the more animated moments, many conversations flow simultaneously inside the classroom, creating the characteristic sonority of schools.

Final Considerations

During the fieldwork I talked to a teacher called Clarice about the challenges the school presented to her. She told me that the biggest issue at school was that pupils did not attend it to study, but only to meet each other, to be with friends. That is, the school would be seen much more as a space of entertainment. "It's exactly what you are studying. They come here for the sociability" (Fieldwork Notebook Record, 2007), she concluded. This teacher's testimony made me think about how much the juvenile dimension is one of the main issues for schooling nowadays, mainly for the modality of Secondary Education in Brazil, whose students are in their majority between 15 and 18 years old. It was also common to listen to reports from teachers saying that it was much easier and/or comfortable to teach the younger children, or the older students who took a 'suppletive'⁴ (shortened substitute) course. A teacher commented with me that he no longer wanted to teach the current generation of students.

Simultaneously, from my insertion in the classroom with pupils from public secondary schools of the outskirts of São Paulo, and from a brief experience as a teacher at a private school of Fundamental and Secondary Education, I could experience, based on ethnography, how

much the dimension of ages and/or generations proved to be a fundamental aspect to the development of the research, not only because that was my object of study, but also because this issue affected profoundly my insertion in the fieldwork. At schools, my role as a researcher was at many times questioned and/or found strange. To teachers, I was an outsider who was there to observe or perhaps patrol their work. I was not a teacher like them, but rather someone who, according to two different teachers from two different schools, meddled with the class dynamics, because I diverted the pupils' attention to myself, or because my presence, I was told, disrupted the class. On the other hand, among pupils I was seen either as a teacher or as an intern, someone who was studying to be a teacher, since already an adult. However, they found my constant presence next to them strange. After all, if I was a teacher I could not stay with them, but at the same time they made a point of marking me as someone older who, therefore, could not be a pupil. They teased me constantly because of my ambiguous situation.

At some moments, I took part in games alongside the pupils. Once, for example, I was invited to play soccer with them in the school's main court during breaktime. I accepted the invitation, and my presence in the game drew a lot of attention from pupils from the other classes that did not know me. I heard many of them asking if I was a pupil or a teacher: *But how come a teacher if he's playing ball?* I noticed then that, apart from not being usual for teachers to play, they seldom, if ever, took part in the ludic dynamics students establish in the school daily life. However, even if teachers wish to enter in dialogue with the students' jokes and bantering, this interaction turns out to be often quite difficult and fruitless. One of the teachers took part more effectively in the students' bantering and teasing, but that, despite bringing him a bit closer to the students, did not imply that teaching his classes was any easier. A difficulty revealed by him when he told me that he could not teach them actual lessons, and that he took part in the games because he thought that if he challenged them his situation as a teacher would become untenable.

Next to the students, I often wondered what exactly the reason for such small interaction with teachers was. It seemed to me that there was only prejudice on the part of teachers regarding those low-income youngsters. However, when I had to take on the role of teacher, even if only for a brief period of time at a private school, I learned how difficult it was to present myself to the classroom as a teacher who does not impose many rules and is open to dialogue. Students not only despised me for that, but began to challenge me constantly and refused to carry out the tasks I asked of them. I then understood that the juvenile socialities I wanted to observe at school were much more fundamental to understand contemporary school than to think about juvenile cultural practices in themselves. The social role of a teacher, and the age gap imprinted in my actions marks and rhythms different from the dynamics

and actions of those youngsters who, above all, participated as a public of many other cultural practices and activities unknown to me or with which I had little affinity. As rightfully noted by François Dubet (1997), students are not naturally disposed to play the role of a pupil and, with that, imprint several forms of resistance to the action of the teacher. Besides, if conversations and sociability relations are effected fundamentally between equals, they could not include me in their specific relations, since there was much difference and distance between us.

My situation as an adult explained my entrance into fieldwork and my own experience of research, but also allowed me to understand that two fundamental dimensions of the relations established in school daily life pass simultaneously through the dimension of the recognition or otherwise of authority and experience in whomever is in the place of the teacher. On the other hand, there is also an important dimension; that of the multiple alterities that are put in action in the relations processed therein. From the alterities pointed out by the bantering as a form of mocking and/or repudiating differences, affirming hegemonic patterns that, in their majority, are learned from the big media, to the fundamental alterity of the school institution: that of age and/or generation. Through the latter, we notice the encounter between the experience of the adult/teacher and the experimentations of the youngster/student, an encounter that has become more and more conflict ridden. The most difficult lesson to be learnt in school today is perhaps precisely that: how to put in dialogue those two levels of experience that possess different rhythms.

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Endnotes

- 1 Bachelard, in his turn, is inspired by Lucio Alberto Pinheiro dos Santos.
- 2 Generally purchased in firework shops, and very common in celebrations of New Year and June festivities.
- 3 Students between 12 and 14 years old.
- 4 A modality of education targeted at youngsters and adults that would be outside the age considered as standard to attend school.

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