

Mutations of the urban experience and employment

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ABSTRACT

This article inquires into the societal dimensions of contemporary mutations of work, in particular their disconnection from employment mechanisms through various forms of casual work and outsourcing. In other words, it asks in what way the new realities of work (and non-work) redraw the social world, the relations of force and the fields of practices that make up the texture of the city and its spaces. The circumstances of casual and intermittent labour alter the time and space of social experience, as well as the urban experience itself in the decentred circuits we can denominate “territories of precariousness”. The article proposes to investigate these new realities by following the paths and urban trajectories of the new generations. It suggests that this is a fertile entry point for describing this redefined social world: the difference between generations today has the historical peculiarity of coinciding with deep changes in the world of work and in urban dynamics. This is also a way of re-approaching the question of the meanings of work and its structuring effects on social life.

Keywords: Mutations of work; Urban reconfigurations; Generational difference; Social practices; Social experience.

Nowadays the excluding effects of present mutations in employment are not questioned, under the impact of productive restructuring in an age of technological revolution and a globalized economy. However, there is still little known about the societal configurations that have been woven into the folds of these transformations. On one side, the artefacts of the “global city” are the focus of debates among urbanists and urban economic researchers, and on the other, the “poor” and “excluded” typified as the target public of said social insertion policies. And between these, there is a whole social network that remains to be discovered. It is precisely on this ground that the pertinence to review the discussion about the meanings and workplaces in the range of the social world gains

prominence. If work does not structure the premises of social progress, if the collectives “of class” have been undone under the injunctions of precarious work, if rights and unions no longer operate as references for the majority, and if this demonstrates that the “Ford era” has already passed, this does not mean that work has ceased to be a structuring dimension of social life.

But this is also what opens the inquiry to the new social configurations that process this experience. It is not solely about the expansion of the informal market and the increase of hosts excluded from the job market. As Francisco de Oliveira (2003) demonstrates, the so-called flexibilization of the job contract means that the job “without form” is expanded in the nucleus of what was previously called the “organized market.” The basis of this process, states the author, is the leap at the height of job productivity during times of technological revolution and financialization of the economy, so that the process of appreciation skyrockets from the devices of the concrete job and ends imploding the distinctions between work period and leisure period, between employment and unemployment. It is the abstract work taken to the extreme, which captures, mobilizes, and transforms social processes and the highest skyrocketing activities in inflated value. The link between job, company, and the accumulation of wealth is broken and other management and relational diagrams are formed. Zarifian (2003) speaks of a “service economy,” which when regarding known divisions of production sectors, and that strictly speaking, makes them irrelevant, since it involves the working of material and immaterial relationships between production and consumption – advertising, brand effects, marketing actions, fidelity cards, and everything accompanying the product or service sold/consumed, so that the consumers end up participating in adding to the value although they are not registered for such. Others will take the notion of “immaterial work” for discussing activities that are not coded as work that try to attach cultural norms, fads, tastes, and standards of consumption (cf. Lazzarato, 2002) or that capture and organize the “periods of life” and not only the “periods of work” (cf. Aspe *et al.*, 1996), becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate a work period and a reproduction period.

They are background mutations. But then one must recognize that this changes the relationship between work and society, whether in the job register that skyrockets from the job devices to unfold in the various forms of precarious, intermittent, and discontinued work making the differences between formal and informal inoperatives: whether on the register of myriads of expedients of survival that mobilize the “left overs” of the job market, but operate like many other circles where globalized social wealth circulates and produces value, making the differences between employment and unemployment, work and leisure imperceptible. It is a situation that is on the verge of demanding a change in our categories, so as to construct a reference plan that aids in putting the processes into perspective, resituates problems, raises other questions and perceives other relationship diagrams in the folds of the redefinitions and separations of the “Ford world,” other force fields that circumscribe tension points, resistance or escape routes by which the pulsation of the social world can be perceived.

On the other hand, this constant market flux amid the diverse working hours of precarious work is completed by altering the references that guided social life and gave it rhythm. If it is true that the disconnection between work and company is part of the social landscape, this also means that periods of life and periods of work tend to be articulated under new forms no longer contained in relations than they previously articulated employment and home, work and family, or work and leisure (cf. Bessin, 1999). They were dualities that conducted the rhythms of social life, whose reference was the regularity and discipline imposed through the types of employment (cf. Supiot, 1994; 1999). There must be a release from these classic dualities, much like that of the formal-

informal, in order to understand the actual nerve of the social field, which would not be left to see if we remained accountable to them in both the employment analysis and the urban analysis.

These questions would demand a more precise discussion, which is impossible to develop within the limits of this article. However, they do serve as an indication that perhaps we need to change our focus of attention. Perhaps a change in the reference game is needed to resituate work in the social world. Not so much the vertical constructs of work in known forms (and their centralized regulations), but the horizontal vectors of relationships that articulate work, the city and its spaces, other social agencies, as well as other axels around those which inequalities, controls and domination are processed and affect forms of life and the meanings of life (cf. Zarifian, 2000).

In this case one must ask how new employment realities (and leisure realities) redesign social worlds, strengthen relationships and practice fields that make up the organization of the city and its spaces¹. Still: how are the social practices and mediations redefined that conform to a social experience under another diagram of relations and another set of references? The varied circumstances of precarious and intermittent work redefine times and spaces of social experience (cf. Sennet, 2000). We could say they alter the urban experience itself, according to the outlying circles of the “territories of uncertainty” (cf. Le Marchand, 2004).

It may then be the case of appraising the splitting points of these new realities according to the practices (and their mediations) in these redefined circles of the social world. The splitting points may be learned precisely in the changes of social experience and may delve deep differences between generations. And this may be an introduction to the description of this redefined social world. After all, the difference between generations presently has the historic peculiarity of coinciding with background changes in the professional world and in urban dynamics.

Employment and city: redefined relationships

It is known that all the weight of unemployment and precarious work is carried by the youngest generation. Around its figures the strands of a social world that has been outlined on the folds of the “Ford world” in dissolution are interconnected (cf. Beaud e Pialoux, 2003). This is exactly why the new generations are those that open a rift to understanding job mutations and their meanings.

The difference of generations is, however, something that need be well understood, not to make a point by point comparison (it was this, now it’s not), always running the risk of a description in negative that concludes by saying the same thing (the Ford job), only with inverted signs. This problem is not so much the idealization of something which, at least in the Brazilian case, has no reason to be celebrated (this is the easiest criticism to make, and has been made by many), but remains imprisoned in a set of references that hinders from learning the meanings of social experience being described. And this demands an effort of social deciphering able to capture new force fields configured under another diagram of social relations and references.

For the youngest in the workforce, present circumstances in the job market do not mean the degradation of better conditions or more promising ones than at other times. They enter into an already overturned world, where precarious work and unemployment are already integral to the situation, and where they have to handle and structure the base of a completely different experience from the previous generation. On the other hand, they enter adult life in a city unimaginable to

previous generations. Point and counterpoint of a single reality, the globalized capitals overflow with very rich and modern global fortresses of up-to-date services, favoring the expansion of consumer circles of material and symbolic goods that reach the popular markets. Powerful socio-economic flows redesign urban spaces, redefine location dynamics, redistribute blockages and possibilities, create new splitting points and affect the domestic economy, provoking important changes within family dynamics in the forms of socialization, social networks and urban practices and their circles. It is also there that new and excluded jobs are found, usually intermediated by temporary work agencies, mobilizing within local urban circles, cash register operators, retail sales personnel, doormen, maids, or employees for various services.

Actually, in a large city like São Paulo (and, we can assume, in other metropolises as well), by following the trajectories and routes of the youngest in the workforce (between 20 and 30 years old, approximately), we start to reach the profile of a city that itself has significantly changed in relation to previous decades (cf. Telles and Cabanes, 2006). Or better: this is an angle at which the city defines its profile with all the ambivalence and complications that permeate the present moment.

Regarding all that is said about urban fragmentation and social duality, these globalized circles that operate as important gravitational poles for the new generations outweigh the rest. However, Saskia Sassen's (1998) suggestion will have to be taken serious, where understanding the new urban realities requires a liberation from what the author defines as "narrative of exclusion": a description of global cities – or of globalized spaces – whose only reference are the winners of the elite circles of the capital. Actually, it is worth remembering that while this equipment is spread throughout the city, equally modern temporary work also proliferates, mediated by employment agencies connected to outsourced service companies. Also through these social circles more young people find their paths, always discontinued and unstable, in the job market. They experience the city stretched between the brutality of inequality and the enchanting seduction of the modern consumer market in an ambivalent set of possibilities and barriers to access a fulfilling urban life.

This is the point that projects new generations in the neuralgic center of this social world being formed. They are young people that are entering the professional world at a moment when a reduction of jobs and the uncertainty of work occur simultaneously, while there is an expansion and diversification of urban life circles.

But this leads to another set of questions. In this redefined social world, work experience (and leisure experience) is intertwined, or is even confused, we dare say, with the experience of the city itself. Consequently, such is the case of questioning one's self based on references through which the experience of inequalities is being processed, combined with experiencing barriers to possibilities of life at a time when performance and success is celebrated as the measure (in fact, inexpressible) of individual independence².

If this is so, it will then be important to escape the rifts permeating the contemporary debate, between the urban economy and the artefacts of the "global city" on one side, and "social exclusion" and the territories of poverty on the other. The relationships between city and employment are seen here. They are relationships that can no longer be considered in terms of the 1980's debate, but for this reason, need to be further elaborated if they wish to escape an impoverished view of the social world reduced to its supposed dualities.

Clearly, one does not wish to oppose the "city of walls" – recalling the expression coined by Teresa Caldeira (2000) – a supposed (and false) democratizing of a "new consumer society." It is another

issue. What we suggest here is another way to describe this social world. For this one must resituate the place of large equipment for consumption in a world crossed by the globalized circles of capital, and accept them for what they are in the movement of capital appreciation. Since in these globalized times, according to the accelerated movements against territorial determination of capital, social wealth mobilizes “urban artefacts” (cf. Harvey, 1996) and manages the city’s spaces, globalized pieces cut out from the urban world, articulating rhythms of consumption and ways of life with production and capital flows (cf. Veltz, 1996). Meanwhile, widespread financial defaulting increases. Anyone who circulates through the poorer peripheral neighborhoods is bound to find the paraphernalia of modern and post-modern consumption, and is bound to find the poor inhabitant of these extremely impoverished places exhibiting, with the bill of an ever-postponed debt, the low-income versions (or not so low income versions) of credit cards that have also reached these parts: the financing of low-income merchandise. And such are the “monetary subjects without market,” to use the expression coined by Kurz (1992), or the “indebted man,” this figure of the “control society,” as stated by Deleuze (1992), which has been substituting the “confined man” from the disciplinary society described by Foucault.

It is indeed true, states Deleuze (1992, p. 224), that capitalism increasingly maintains the extreme misery of the majority, peoples and populations “too poor for the debt, too numerous for the confinement: the control will not only have to confront the dissipation of frontiers, but also the explosion of the ghettos and *favelas*.” But, using the philosopher’s language, the “urban flows” liberated by the subtraction of employment devices circulate and find other agencies and points of crystallization, from which this promising and expansive market represented by the trafficking of drugs and networks of organized crime is evident, who are in fact those globalized and connected to the nonterritorial circles of financial capital. There is nothing more eloquent than the portrait described by Alba Zaluar (1996, p. 55) of a boy involved in the drug trafficking in Rio de Janeiro: “with an AR-15 or an UZI, considered symbols of his virility and a source of great local power, a hat inspired in the North-American black movement, listening to Rio Funk music, sniffing cocaine produced in Colombia, aching for a pair of the newest model of Nike tennis shoes and a brand new car.” This does not explain, says Zaluar, and with reason, from the levels of minimum wage or from unemployment: “to understand how the illicit and the illegal are rooted in the informal sector to command an army of unemployed and social minors is fundamental,’ even because all this places material and monetary wealth in movement in the circulation of merchandise of the capitalist world.

Between the misery of the destitute and the dazzling brilliance of this post-modern capitalism, between the continually postponed future (such as debt, left for the following day) and also the very post-modern immediate present of the trafficking youth, in which all this is conjugated in the verse-and-reverse of contemporary capitalism, there is a whole network of crossing and interwoven lines, and they form a *socius* that will have to be better studied. And the actual experience of the new generations and their circles are the exposed nerve of present complications that give us clues to attempt another description of the social world.

Urban Characters and their Routes

We will follow the routes of these new generations under this perspective. They are situations outlined by the trajectory circles of their characters. We will call them urban characters. In their reference contexts, these trajectories operate as prisms through which the urban world is shaped in

its different modulations. These characters make urban practices and multicentered social vectors around which the social world has delineated perceptible (cf. Telles, 2006).

There are experiences that unfold in a region situated on the southern periphery of the city of São Paulo, and that began to expand in the 1970's, according to the flows of industrial employment. In this region, which was the industrial center of the "Ford city," signs of productive reconversion are distinct, as are the new compositions of urban spaces of the 1990's, under the impact of the very near and wealthy quarter of the city's globalized modernization. Here the flows of wealth and poverty are in constant relationship, intertwining in the equipment of consumption traversing the region and in this mixture of legal and illegal, regular and irregular, licit and illicit as characterize the employment circles that starting from the modern, avante-garde economic pole, such jobs are spread throughout networks of subcontracted and precarious work. The turning of time is ciphered in life's inflection and circumstances for those arriving in São Paulo in the 1970's or early 80's, who followed a course through manufacturing jobs. They arrived at the then distant and desolate periphery of the city, achieved the "dream of homeownership" by building their own homes, managing on their own with clandestine lots and became involved in the social struggles of the time. Otherwise, they precariously installed themselves in what 20 years later would be transformed into a large favela, and as a counterpoint of the period of social movements, a place in which the old clientelism of war becomes present and operates in the various folds of many illegalities composing the social world.

For these families, the difference of periods coincides with the difference of generations and above all, the young characters of these stories may inform us of something about the social vectors and lines of force that move the gravitational poles of the previous generation (between work and local urban improvements), and redefine social fields. The ambivalent profiles of globalized modernity are delineated by following the paths of the youngest workers: a social experience configured at the thresholds and in the passages between distinct worlds, between the impoverished peripheral universe and the shopping malls, prestigious places of consumption and leisure (undeniable urban references for this generation), between the low-income jobs of modern outsourcing and the precarious work of the circles that connect the flows of modeled wealth in urban spaces. These are the thresholds and passages (and barriers) that need to be well understood and well situated, since here are where the network of relationships (and tensions) are established, and as a rule escapes the examples of social exclusion or urban segregation.

The routes of the second or third generation allow us to perceive the connections between work and urban experience. The references ordering the first generation social experiences of the "Ford job era" are no longer valid. The mediations of regulated work, worker's rights and unions that gave rhythm to the periods of life and articulated them with the political periods of the city are no longer valid. Despite this, the work, albeit precarious and discontinued, uncertain and resulting in an even less certain future, continues to be a powerful connection with the social world. It is another work experience, another urban experience. It was another diagram of references and relations that redefine the management of life and other forms of life, and in which and by which it is possible to understand the nerves of this redefined social field.

Maurício and Nair, young entrepreneurs; in the dazzling circles of globalized services

Twenty-year-old Maurício and 17-year-old Nair³ comprise the third generation of a family of factory workers. Immigrant from Paraná state, the patriarch Genésio arrived in São Paulo in 1978 at the age of 45 with his wife and six children. Some days later he moved into a more than precarious dwelling in an occupied region, which in time transformed into a large *favela*. His is a family of metallurgy factory workers. Presently retired, Genésio was hired a few days after his arrival, and held the same job for nineteen years. As for the five oldest children, in a short time they were also employed in some of the large factories in the region. Later, in the 1980's, they came to work in the smaller factories built nearby the *favela*, and there they would remain all these years with extremely low salaries, but a stability that the new generations would not experience.

The youths, Maurício and Nair are trying their luck in the dazzling circles of globalized services. Maurício began working in 1999. He was then 16 years old and was hired, through the references of a family friend, as an office boy at the aquatic park, The Waves. Six months later the park went bankrupt and closed. In its place the hypermarket, Extra, was built, and next to it, one of the largest and most sophisticated exercise gyms, the very exclusive Unysis was also built. After this, he worked as an office boy in an employment agency, where he progressed to administrative assistant. However, the workload decreased and the company fell into financial difficulty. He was unemployed for two years, constantly looking for work without success. As he walked through the shopping malls, he would see the famous brands and think: "I wanted to work with the public, that's what I like, and I said to myself: 'I would do well.'" He was interviewed at Ellus, a well-known jeans brand, but the competition was very stiff – "everyone wanting to get hired, people that work, people in college, there were even models, you know?" He sent out resumés everywhere he went without success. Then an opportunity appeared when a neighbor presented him to the press manager of a promotor's office for cultural events. The company is situated in the wealthy neighborhood of Morumbi, on Giovanni Gronchi Avenue. His job is to answer the phones, manage the datebooks, and schedule interviews. This job puts Maurício into a world that would be unimaginable to his parents. Every once in a while, he attends the events organized, for example, at Olympia, a popular and prestigious show hall. Maurício travels through the "noble social circle" of the city: shopping malls, bars and meeting points in the downtown area, or the popular, crowded neighborhoods of Moema, Vila Nova Conceição, Pinheiros and Vila Madalena. He says he began to socialize in upper circles while working at the employment agency: he made friends, started to frequent other circles, met many people and every once in a while managed to enter a night club or show for free through "people he knew" on the inside. "I have friends all over São Paulo," says Maurício.

It is probable that the young man exaggerates and that there is a bit of fiction in all of this. But the fact is that he is already aiming for other places and from other places. He dreams of entering a "college of communication" and finding his place in these dazzling circles of modern services in the "global city." He believes he has talent for this. It is probable that this golden dream does not go very far and that the youth is soon faced with the more than exclusive rules of the modern, avant-garde globalized circles. But fate has already shaped another set of references and other prisms through which the city presents itself; different from his parents' generation, who valued exactly this type of "world at hand" that the *favela* offers them – the close family and close jobs. For Maurício, in the *favela* everything is far and the periphery has nothing, only dangerous places, as well as being very ugly: "There is nothing here, there's not even an agreeable landscape to look at."

Nair, 17 years old, cousin to Maurício, started working at a very early age and her trajectory says something about the new employment circles in the region. In 1995, at 11 years old, she worked in a small outsourced company that put toys together for McDonald's. Several girls from her neighborhood worked there. The business owner was a family acquaintance and they worked out of the garage of a house on a street near to Giovanni Gronchi Avenue, a connection point between the paupered region where she lives and the very wealthy neighborhood of Morumbi. The McDonald's franchise is at the avenue's initial junction next to the hypermarket Carrefour. In 1998, she worked six months in a company that puts promotional advertising pens together: it was an election year and there was a lot of work available. Then, while she was unemployed, she decided to start a business reselling clothes with her mother. In 2001, when she was 17 years old, she managed to find employment through the reference of a friend as an attendant at the exercise gym, Companhia Atlética, at Morumbi Shopping Mall: a place where the rich and famous seek "health and fitness." For her, she has finally had a lucky break. It is from there that Nair hopes to climb the corporate ladder and arrange other more promising jobs in the stores of this glowing circuit of high-income consumption. Nair also thinks about her future: she wants to learn English, take a nursing course, and save some money in this profession to be able to make her dream of studying physiotherapy at university come true. While waiting for good luck, Nair accompanies her cousin, Maurício, circulating around the city, through shopping malls and bars in the neighborhoods of Vila Madalena, Pinheiros and Moema, in São Paulo.

The two cousins aim for other horizons. Maurício makes an effort to improve his life: he completed high school and wants to continue his studies. He never wavered in searching for employment and tries his utmost to find a better job. In conclusion, Maurício is an entrepreneur, like his cousin, Nair. This is how they see themselves. And for both of them this is the sieve that makes the difference comparing to their childhood friends and neighbors. "There are other people like me," says Maurício, "people who strive to change their lives." But he evaluates, "The majority stays where they are, become complacent, they don't want to think about anything, they don't attempt [to improve] their lives." This is a complicated rift, we well know. As we also know that the entrepreneur *ethos* of mercantile individualism is well ciphered there. But it is in this code that he formulates the hopes to build an acceptable life. It is at this rift that the nerve (one of them) is exposed to the world. The problem is not living in the *favela*. They are different worlds, but the dominion of the two codes is not excluding, and they traverse between the two with agility.

Maurício and his cousin, Nair, are characters that clarify something about the way that the fold between the worlds is made, between the material quality of the city and its social circles and the nature of the connections (and connectors) that operate this game of accesses and barriers. It is there, in the folds of social life that the drama is enacted. This is why the routes of these young characters help us to compose the condition of present complications: the world of services and its modern circles, a true gravitational field (references, possibilities and also barriers) in a scenario of diminishing jobs and precarious work. And still: the violence of every day and the "crooked paths" of life that are capturing many of his neighbors (as in all places) in the circles of drug trafficking and violent criminality. All this creates a set of coordinates that help to delineate a social cartography, following the lines of force that traverse the social world and its points of rupture, passages and ambivalences.

Jorge, the precarious employee: in the closed circuit of temporary work agencies

The routes of these youths enchanted by the dazzling circles of the “global city” have to be confronted with others, with those traveling in circles that feed on the wealth of the global city, without being able to break the iron circle of temporary work agencies. This is the story of Jorge, 31 years old, the youngest son the patriarch, Genésio, and uncle to the young entrepreneurs as well.

This youth has a totally different story from that of his older brothers and sisters. He began his adult life in an already overturned world, and does not find alternatives to precarious work and is unemployed for prolonged periods. It is impossible to reproduce the stable trajectory of the work of his brothers and sisters. But he has also lived the change in times from the other side, that of violence, which in a few years decimated almost all of his childhood and adolescent friends. Meanwhile this also ended a very energetic musical group that he led together with friends, replete with CDs and records bought in famous galleries in downtown São Paulo, a meeting point of youths interested in rap and hip hop. As he tells it, some were killed, others are in hiding. He also “proved the statistics wrong,” to quote a line of the lyrics of the Brazilian rap group, Racionais MCs, who are an important reference in the city’s periphery and certainly a point of identification for Jorge, as they are for many others (cf. Khel, 2000). Unlike his entrepreneur niece and nephew, the dazzling lights of globalized services are not a part of his plans, and he also does not dream of living in other neighborhoods. It is there, in the periphery (he uses the term himself, “it’s all periphery”), where he builds meaningful connections for his life. As he states, “periphery is really that...that Racionais song says it all.”

Jorge has an erratic occupational history, and is unable to establish himself in jobs and continues year after year between periods of precarious work and unemployment. The only trace of continuity in his occupational history is the intermediation of temporary work agencies, and the only trace in common with his older brothers and sisters is that he frequents what could be called the local market. But if for those the radius of employment was largely marked by the social networks where information and job opportunities circulated, in Jorge’s case times are different and entering the job market is done in part by the intermediation of agencies. They negotiate and decide the location of the employees, and the scales of distance and proximity are one of the criteria. Many times Maurício saw his chance of employment vanish for not living near the prospective company.

It is true that some penetrate the system and manage employment. But then they enter a closed circuit that is very difficult to break into. This is what happened with Marcelo, 22 years old, who lives in the next neighborhood over. He has finished high school, completed a computer course and another course simply called “commercial techniques.” He managed to get hired as a cash register operator at Carrefour, as a temporary position. He did very well and was hired permanently. But, he contemplates, cash register operator is not the future and has no future for anyone. At best, you go from the register to restocking the shelves. Marcelo expects more from life. However, he says, once in a supermarket, always in a supermarket – “if you put supermarket experience on your resumé, American Express, Xerox, any firm is not going to call you, the interviewer will look at you and say, the guy is supermarket material, he’ll work in the supermarket.” He left this job and tried other ways into the job market: appealed to friends and acquaintances, sent out resúmes to every place he could think of, without success. After a while, he was called to work at the hypermarket, Extra. “I quit fooling myself,” says Marcelo, “there’s no other way, either this or unemployment.” When we met with him, in 2001, he had been promoted to restocking the shelves.

Arnaldo, the motorcycle courier: on the threshold of legality

If temporary work agencies seem to circumscribe a strict perimeter of the social experience, in the routes of a motorcycle courier, other facets of this urban world, other profiles are developed in the territories where these young men circulate. The fact is that in this region spread to the margins of the globalized quarter, the motorcycle couriers compose the urban landscape and make the points of combustion of this network of relationships visible, woven in “dangerous connections” of these flows of wealth and poverty that are constantly related and intertwined. One can find them in bands circulating through the streets and avenues traversing the region. They navigate on the waves of outsourced services spreading everywhere and meet the demand of the dazzling circles of globalized wealth. As a young motorcycle courier states, “whoever has a motorcycle has the knife and the cheese in his hands.” With a motorcycle, he says, there are more opportunities (opportunities?) to be called by an employment agency or an outsourcing company to supply their demands in the region. And, while good luck does not appear, they do what they can, even if it is an odd job or other such as a pizza delivery.

This is the story of 22-year-old Arnaldo, who has completed high school. He is the son of an ex-metallurgy worker, who in the agitated 1980’s was on the front lines of the factory worker mobilizations and equally involved himself in a very active and organized housing movement in the neighborhood where they lived until recently with his family. Arnaldo tried to follow the example of his father and take on an industrial job. The times have changed, and from one job to another, he tries to make a living by using his motorcycle: he is a motorcycle courier. There was a time that Arnaldo believed a motorcycle would certainly open doors to the job market. It did not work out very well. In 1998, he began to work as a motorcycle courier in an outsourced company that worked for the São Paulo water company, Sabesp: delivering service cut-off warning notices for past due water bills – he says, “you go to the person’s house, the person has three months worth of bills past due and you go there to deliver the cut-off notice – the person has a week to pay, and if they don’t, someone else will go there, turn off the water and seal the water register.” He stayed only one year and left in 1999 because it was very dangerous. Besides not being registered in his work document, it also did not offer any promising alternatives. The description given by Arnaldo is precise: without an official register in his work document, the only “guarantee” is a kind of insurance with a parts store, “[...] if the motorcycle breaks, you go there, get the part you need and pay it back the next month [...] there is no register in the work document, and if you have an accident, then you are out of luck.”

Besides the risk of traffic accidents, the greater danger is in the actual nature of the service. He had to circulate in regions where people did not pay their water bills, or in the poorest neighborhoods on city’s outskirts. And many times, on this route, the motorcyclist returns from work on foot, without the motorcycle:

[...] it was very dangerous... I worked with the motorcycle, would often go to the periphery... I have a neighbor that works there, and they already stole his motorcycle [...] I have two co-workers that worked there, and both of them lost their bikes too... it’s mostly in the periphery, favelas, near Capão, it’s all dangerous area... Parque Santo Antônio, Jangadeiro, Capão, Jacira... the worst place was Jacira... this guy stole my motorcycle there in Jacira.

Any perspectives for the future? None, says Arnaldo, and says firmly: it's work for those who can't get anything else in life, "the majority are guys that have already passed through the police, can't get another job, and then they have to resort to this. They are guys who have already been in jail...it gives no future, it doesn't give anything, I don't think so."

The route of a motorcycle courier is more than eloquent description of how job experience unfolds and opens in the multiple facets of urban experience. It is as if this trajectory were also following the line of intensity that crosses the various social worlds that are overlapped and compose the urban reality: the public urban sanitation company, the new forms of management and outsourcing practices, the debtors in times of "tarifary truth" imposed by the triumphant logic of the market, the poverty of the periphery, including the legion of those caught by the "curse of destiny," who cannot manage to find employment at all. All this is mixed with the energies mobilized by this object of desire – the motorcycle – and that are also composed of important references in the daily sociability of youths in this region.

But the stories that circulate are also very confusing, so confusing that they seem to give plausibility to the rumors and suspicions that the motorcycle courier companies (as are the public transport mini-vans) are today "an investment front" for dirty money. And, as it seems, these companies are proliferating in this region situated on the fringe of the "global city."

The story of 20-year-old Fernanda, Arnaldo's neighbor, said something about this. Her brother risked opening a motorcycle courier company. It was not successful and in a short time he was drowning in debt. But the girl helped her brother and "gained experience," she said. Later, luck led her to a real estate office in the Business Center, portal of the "global city," globalized enclave encrusted in the neighborhood, indicating the limits of the two contrasting worlds. She was a secretary, and her job was to deal with the motorcycle courier company. She did so well that a successful motorcycle courier called her to help open his own company in Itapecerica da Serra, a municipality within the Greater São Paulo area, outlying the southern periphery of the city and not far from this region. The young man worked in a company that "was spoken well of, I knew the majority of employees, they would report directly to me...and I said 'ok.'" From that point on ensued a succession of unkept promises, ineffectuated payments, bill collector calls for late debt payment, while the money disappeared through unexplained channels (unexplainable, perhaps). It is a very confusing story. Fernanda says the project was not modest: set up the operational part in São Paulo with motorcycle couriers, public transport mini-vans and buses. And in Itapecerica, the plan was to set up tourist packages for schools. The young man talked about promoting excursions to Barretos, in inland city of São Paulo. Fernanda soon organized the material and asked her brother to provide the graphic material needed for advertisement – posters, business cards, and envelopes with letterhead. In the meantime, all of Fernanda's family was involved in the business. Her mother was hired to clean the office; her brother was hired as a secretary, and she also had a neighborhood friend helping in the office. No one received any payment, including the more than 20 motorcycle couriers.

The young woman has finished high school and is very hard working. Besides this, she has a very articulate family; she lives in a neighborhood with a very close community, all very organized, active, and solidary. In a phrase: she is a young woman with vast social capital. After all, it was how she managed to find the job that few are able to find in the Business Center of São Paulo. Despite her age, the occupational history of Fernanda is notable, a reasonable succession of employment, all of which were obtained through her network of relationships where information and "good recommendations" circulate. But it is also a notably instable and vulnerable history,

always on the frontier between formal and informal market – several inconsistencies, successive dismissals, late salaries, and disrespected rights. In conclusion, nothing to find odd: networks and social capital do not cease to repeat circumstances of impoverished circles of an equally impoverished region and that activate precarious work in the precarious job market with the pardon of tautology. But the hard-working Fernanda was near to escaping the workings of uncertainty when, mobilizing her social capital, managed the promising job at the Business Center, the same social capital that the young man from the motorcycle courier company set in motion for his fraudulent business. In a short time, the only thing that this accumulated social capital had resulted in was the accumulation of many debts (late telephone and water bills due to a salary that was never paid) and disrespected commitments (her brother used his own name to acquire the printing of posters, and the bill was left to pay some day). In addition there were many frights, the worst when a furious “client” appeared at the office to collect “his share”, brandishing a gun in hand, inappropriate language and threats to destroy the office. But by this time, the young man of the motorcycles had already vanished with the expropriated dividends of the social capital, and no one knew where to find him.

Fernanda and the motorcycle courier, Arnaldo, live in a neighborhood that could be included in the many exemplary cases of social capital and active social networks. But as stated by Bruno Latour (2000), if the subject is the networks, it is necessary to consider that they are “more or less extensive, and more or less connected,” and they also involve “good connections” and “bad connections.” Meaning: the whole problem is in knowing and understanding the way in which the connections operate, since always situated and always territorial; they are created in the composition and conjugation between circumstances, facts, things, and actors. It is in these junctions and connections of social life that the pulse of the urban world is perceived. And it is exactly this that work (and job experience) allows us to learn.

Geraldo, the security guard: in the circles of privatized security, in which all the lines are crossed

Geraldo, 27 years old, is the security guard in a five star hotel on Luiz Carlos Berrini Avenue, the globalized heart of the city, an irradiating center of so-called modern outsourcing of the latest generation. Neighbor to the patriarch, Genésio, and his extensive family, Geraldo is also the son of a metallurgy factory worker whose history passes through one of the large industries that previously bespeckled the region. Dismissed in the late-1980’s, from then on his work for a living is a bit obscure, between the mesh of political clientelism and so-called illicit business. In this way he was able to manage a good part of the local urban improvements and it is through these means that he exerts power and influence over the issues and litigations that occupy and aggravate the inhabitants.

If the father allowed himself to be involved in the local life of the *favela*, between obscure jobs for survival and the knit of local clientelism to the old style, Geraldo knows how to pass between this world and the modern circles of the “globalized world” well. He began working at the age of 19. He worked as a waiter at a flat in Moema, where he stayed only three months. Then he worked for a year in one of the small factories close to the *favela*. Through the help of a friend, he managed to find work as a fiscalization agent in stores and circulated through some of the important department stores and shopping malls in the city. But it was unsteady work and Geraldo was unable to find the right niche. The great turnover in his live happened when he took a security course in 1997. He

changed levels: began working in the field of privatized security. Despite being a very unstable line of work (it is subject to all the insecurities and irregularities of subcontracted work), Geraldo is finding a chance to escape the every day “whirlwind” of many of his neighbors. And the job puts him within the dazzling circles of modern services.

As we can find in other places, the job of security guard is today seen as very promising. As a young man from a nearby neighborhood with similar conditions of poverty and violence said, it is the “correct job that has a guaranteed market.” Sivaldo, 28 years old, also took a security course accredited and regulated by the Federal Police. He has already worked in some of the most important Brazilian bank agencies and in stores in the most sophisticated shopping malls of the wealthy and globalized southeast quarter of the city. He now works in a company that gives service to bingo houses and night clubs. Sivaldo was unable to explain the statute of this company well, for him the manner in which the services are contracted and compensated is not very clear. Very probably the company composes this extensive and expansive universe, if not with clandestine services, with those that traverse the unclear frontiers of legality, due to diverse hours and locations to escape the official regulations that guide security services (cf. Caldeira, 2000).

Sivaldo began working at the very young age of 14. He has been an office boy, assistant in a street fair stand and in local corner markets, a garbage collector, a car wash attendant, started a bar with friends and then a fried pastry stand. He was also a fare collector in a clandestine public transport mini-van – it was an odd job, he says, which he picked up with his friends who were the drivers, neighbors where he lives. He did not do that for long. The van he worked in was robbed and he thought it was too dangerous and wanted something better. He was then 23 years old and sold his car to pay for the security course. It is in this line of work that he intends to focus his energy to progress in life.

Like so many others of his generation, to speak of friends is to recount deaths. From his childhood to adolescence, says Sivaldo, “there are only two or three left.” The others were dead, executed or had disappeared along crooked the paths of life. Sivaldo understands “the things in life” well and perhaps it is this that allows him a certain critical distance from his “promising” employment. It is dangerous, he says, not only because one is exposed to the professional risks, but also because “on this side” things are not easy. He tells that the security guards are frequently pressured by illegal networks: they receive offers of money, protection, and promises of a percentage of the “profit,” or they are subject to the heavy game of the open pressure to provide “the map of the mine.” They want to know all the details of how the local business works. It’s like that, says Sivaldo, the “curse of money,” since “there are guards that need money, that are desperate, so they go there, have a meeting at the ‘big boss’s’ house, he tells them everything, they analyze it all and, then, they do the ‘job.’”

But, says Sivaldo, the security systems in the banks, office buildings, and shopping malls is much more sophisticated. Entrance into these locations is increasingly difficult, causing the flows of organized crime to move out to focus on the poor periphery of the city: ATMs, supermarkets, local commerce, bingo houses, and night clubs spread along the avenues that cross these peripheral parts of the city. Sivaldo knows what he is talking about: “Those who know, who were born and grew up on the outskirts, know that at the end of the year they are targets of organized crime, to have a good New Year, right?...If they are in there, there is no way to react, you just give it to them and pray to God....”

Privatized security guards are undeniable figures of the “city of walls” and are a part of the devices of the privatization of public spaces (and of the city), while they are mobilized in an expansive, globalized market, making security a commodity sold under increasingly sophisticated and varied forms (cf. Caldeira, 2000). All lines cross around them: the market, the globalized fortresses of the city and the dazzling circles of modern equipment for consumption. But also this overflow to the city’s limits: the modern, avante-garde precarious work, the subcontracted networks and this mixture or indifferenciation between formal and informal, legal and illegal, which has been following the lines effecting events in the city.

What these characters (and the previous ones) show us in their histories is that these connections pass through the globalized fortresses of the city, they overflow their walls or leak through the pores of these walls, and like so many other urban flows, they also redefine the territories and their circles. Peculiarly, the relationship between employment and city is established by the path of a chain of mediations and connections where all the facets of the present urban world are ciphered. We do not need to accept a miserable argument, nor speak against world hunger to feel the measure of social tragedy encoded there.

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Where do we situate each one of these individuals? Are they poor, luckless people? Excluded? If not, does it make some sense that they are “included,” then? They are characters that make their paths in the events of the social world. These categories (and dualities) become too narrow to put the questions raised by these stories into perspective. The force fields and all the complication of the changing times are precisely in the connection points of these events that weave the tapestry of the social world.

These characters escape the habitual categories spoken of in recent debates. They do not correspond to the canonized figures of the regular worker or to those of the informal market, and much less the current stereotypes of the “poor” and “excluded,” target public of said programs of social insertion. Meanwhile, their courses weave the web of relations and force fields that are structured around employment, but are weakened under the current terms of the present debate.

Precisely this requires reiterating the question about the meanings of employment and its structural effects in social life. Returning to the questions at the beginning of this article, perhaps a change in the set of references is needed to resituate employment in the social world. If known employment regulations and the set of their political and institutional mediations are not stricter, then perhaps it is the case of appraising the horizontal vectors that articulate employment, the city and its spaces, which are other agencies between periods of life and periods of work. Also, they are other references by which the experience of inequality is being processed. If it is not returned to class configurations, perhaps it is being shaped in the spaces of the city and its circles.

But, then, we must question the fields of experience in their new forms: no longer the previous “class relationships,” but experiences that are formed and pulse in situations described here, as well as in subcontracted networks and their intermediaries, in work at home mobilizing relations of proximity between family and neighbors, and in the myriads of other employment situations that shape the urban world.

This is an opportune moment for another look at Thompson (1979), to learn to listen to the rumors of the city with him. It is no longer the “rumors of the crowd” (or not these), with

which the author identified fields of experience and outlined the scenario of conflicting relations and the deaf resistance or manifest in England in the 18th Century. Even when it does not rise to the surface, and it is socially invisible, resistance continues to exist as a deaf critical rumor in search of references, mediators and means of expression (cf. Telles and Cabanes, 2006).

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