Urban Anthropology

Interdisciplinarity and Boundaries of Knowledge

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Resumo

Este texto lida com a complexidade e o desenvolvimento da Antropologia Urbana. É também um relato da carreira do autor e suas relações com os diferentes campos do conhecimento, não apenas de Ciências Sociais, num sentido mais restrito, como sociologia e ciência política, mas também literatura, filosofia, história e artes em geral. O texto enfatiza a importância do cruzamento de limites e fronteiras com o objetivo de enriquecer linhas de pesquisa e pensamento. Entre outros grupos, cita a Escola Sociológica de Chicago e a Antropologia Social Britânica como exemplos importantes de trabalho interdisciplinar. Chama a atenção para a complexidade e a heterogeneidade da sociedade moderno-contemporânea e para a importância de mobilizar diferentes tradições de trabalho e pesquisa, especialmente no que toca os estudos urbanos desenvolvidos nas grandes cidades e metrópoles.

Palavras-chave: Metrópole; Heterogeneidade; Sociedade Moderno-Contemporânea; Interdisciplinaridade

Abstract

This text deals with the complexity and development of Urban Anthropology. It is also an account of the author's career and his relations with different fields of knowledge, not only Social Sciences like Sociology and Political Science, but also Literature, Philosophy, History and the Arts in general. The text emphasizes the importance of crossing borders and frontiers as a way of enriching different lines of research and thought. Among other groups he cites the Chicago School of Sociology and British Social Anthropology as important examples of interdisciplinary work. The author draws attention to the complexity and heterogeneity of modern contemporary society and to the importance of mobilizing different

traditions of work and research, especially when dealing with urban studies centred on the big cities and metropolises.
Keywords: Metropolis; Heterogeneity; Modern Contemporary Society; Interdisciplinarity

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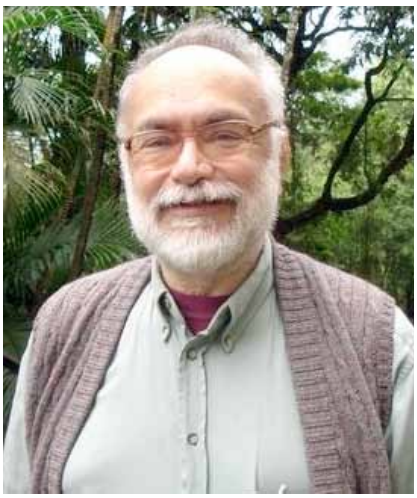

Gardens of the National Museum, 2010.

At this advanced stage of my career, on various occasions, whether giving interviews, lectures or classes, I have had the chance to comment on what I know and think about the anthropological work classified as *Urban Anthropology*. From the outset, I should make clear that I have no intention of providing any complete or restrictive definition of a thematic area that is characterized precisely by its amplitude and diversity. Thus, inevitably, by presenting my particular version, linked to the circumstances of my own life and career – though these are not completely original, since I belong to a field of work and knowledge – I will emphasize a singularity inseparable from personal dimensions.[1]

The first course in Urban Anthropology at the Museu Nacional was given in the first semester of 1969, taught by Professor Anthony Leeds, who was then at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas in Austin. He came to give classes at PPGAS (the Postgraduate Program in Social Anthropology) through a collaborative agreement with the Ford Foundation. Tony Leeds had a highly original intellectual profile and very much his own

1* This article was first published in Mana, Volume 17, número 1, abril de 2011, Rio de Janeiro p.161-185. Obviously other versions exist of various professionals and research groups who have dedicated themselves to this area of anthropology. Today there is a rich and diverse literature, whose merits and characteristics have recently been analyzed by Eckert (2010).

way of being an anthropologist, with strong, sometimes aggressive opinions. He had been a student at Columbia University and researched plantations in southern Bahia before immersing himself in the world of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and other cities. It is always tricky, and generally not particularly healthy, to label authors, as with people in general. Certainly Leeds could not be said to have been an heir of the Chicago School, from which he diverged in various aspects. Rather he was fairly representative of a more left-wing American liberalism: a reader of Marx and Engels, and was strongly interested in ecology, especially its implications in terms of a materialist form of evolutionism. In fact, his theoretical profile was far from simple, but where he really stood out was in the talent and leadership he displayed in opening up new areas for fieldwork. Though primarily known for his research in favelas, he also had a wider interest in various aspects of the urban question.

Although he also did research outside of Brazil, it was here that he spent much of his career, looking to comprehend life in the favelas as an expression of a system of social relations rather than seeing them in an isolated or compartmentalized form. He was always interested in the forms of relationship within and between distinct social categories (see Leeds, A. & Leeds, E. 1978). Housing undeniably held a particular fascination for him, and it was precisely through this question that we were able to work more closely. In the course he gave at the incipient PPGAS, students were given the chance to develop studies on different types and modes of housing. This was a unique opportunity that would in fact shape the rest of my career. Ever since my undergraduate course and my work as a researcher at the former Institute of Social Sciences of the UFRJ, I had been interested in studying the middle class. When I married, still an undergraduate student, I went to live with my then wife, Yvonne, in a studio apartment made available to us by my parents in a tower block in Copacabana whose units were 39m^2.

I shall leave aside the details of the study I pursued at the time. However, it is important to note that it was my starting point for the type of *Urban Anthropology* I would later go on to conduct. After all, my wife and I were residents in a studio apartment block, albeit for just a year and a half. We were *Copacabanenses* living in a type of housing mostly occupied by people from the lower middle class, some students and also certain social types who would later become important in my career, described in the literature as *deviants*. As I have discussed elsewhere, there were numerous situations involving

accusations of prostitution, homosexuality and drug use. In addition, living under a military dictatorship that frequently used violent means of repression, there was also a constant risk of people being denounced and accused of *subversion* (Velho 1977). On at least two occasions while we lived in the block there were operations by enforcement agencies, some resulting in deaths.

We ended up leaving, moving out of the building and the neighborhood, but I believe that I had literally begun to produce an "anthropology at home," anticipating various discussions and developments that took place in subsequent years (Peirano 2008). In my case, it really was "home" since the focus of my research was the building in which I lived. Although I visited other studio apartment blocks and with the help of students tried to contact a more diversified population in Copacabana, it is undeniable that, favoured by the circumstances, I engaged in my work as an anthropologist in the very place where I lived, the building, neighbourhood, district and city. In other words, anthropologists or not, we were, like the others, residents of the apartment block.

The apartment that belonged to my parents was usually rented out to provide a source of income, but my paternal grandmother also lived there for a few months after she was widowed. When I married, persuading the existing tenants to leave the apartment was far from easy. They were an elderly couple, between 60 and 70. Negotiations via lawyers and financial assistance were needed to convince them to leave the apartment. The environment was certainly very different to the building where I had previously lived with my parents where the apartments were much bigger and almost all the residents were owners. The families were mostly headed by members of the armed forces, usually army officers with the rank of major and above, or navy officers, lieutenant commanders and higher. Over time, some had become generals and practically all of them senior officers. Certainly the predominant ethos contrasted with the apparently tumultuous heterogeneity of the "Edifício Estrela," the name with which I baptized the apartment block in my dissertation.

The point I wish to emphasize is that setting out from the topic of housing, so dear to Leeds, I switched the focus of my anthropological work to a social universe in which, in some form, I participated directly. The fact that our stay in the studio apartment block was temporary did not distinguish us in any clear way from other residents. Our social origin linked us to an upper middle class background. Our apartment was decorated in a form consistent

with the standards of this class, and our lifestyle in general displayed these standards. But we lived there, alongside people not only of more modest background, but with very different lifestyles. *Deviants* became another key research topic for me. In a way they represented a type of *other* that contrasted with the conventional normality of a middle class morality. Hence, those accused of prostitution, homosexuality and drug use became an opportunity for research and analysis in an exploration of a society's internal differences. The big city, as a product and producer of heterogeneity, was a productive field for this undertaking, especially Copacabana.

Little by little I discovered the interactionist literature associated with the Chicago School. While still in Brazil, I read some of Goffman's texts and when I went to the United States, in 1971, I had the great opportunity to broaden my knowledge about this current of thought. As a result, not only Erving Goffman, but Howard S. Becker, Everett Hughes, Herbert Blumer, Anselm Strauss, W. F. White, Louis Wirth, Georg H. Mead, Robert Park and William Thomas become important touchstones for my work. I had already read isolated tests by Park and Wirth, but now I began to widen my horizons. A crucial intellectual endeavour during this phase of my work was identifying and reflecting more systematically on the relations between these authors and the work of the German thinker Georg Simmel, a task that still interests me today. The city was simultaneously the focus and pretext for the development of this remarkably fertile and stimulating perspective.

I successfully completed my doctoral thesis in 1975 at USP under the supervision of Ruth Cardoso, at a time when I was making connections between Marxism, an important dimension in the initial phases of my career, interactionism and authors who are less easy to classify, like Karl Mannheim, Walter Benjamin, Pierre Bourdieu, Lionel Trilling and C. Wright Mills. Both Simmel and Max Weber (see the bibliography) were already core references. The research that I undertook or supervised was mainly based in large cities, principally in Rio de Janeiro, but undoubtedly dealt with questions and topics central to what was becoming known as the *Anthropology of complex societies*. This classification was always highly problematic, since the anthropological ideology of the time included a critique of traditional evolutionism, emphasizing that no society could be deemed *simple*. Nevertheless, the argument was that the idea of complexity referred to a combination of size, the presence of the State, sociocultural diversity and striking social differentiation.

In this sense, the Roman Empire was clearly a complex society. The same could be said about many others, including those of China and India, Medieval Europe, pre-Colombian civilizations and so on. I fixed my attention more on the study of modern-contemporary society, which could be taken to extend from the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance to the present. Brazil therefore formed part of the set of modern-contemporary complex societies, presenting the characteristics of the presence of the State and a vast territory occupied by socially and culturally highly differentiated populations and groups. Without a doubt the reading of authors like Gilberto Freyre, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Caio Prado Jr., Celso Furtado, Florestan Fernandes and Raymundo Faoro helped me to conceive of Brazil as a totality. These more general interpretations were always implicitly present and sometimes made explicit in the development of my work. Like many of my generation, the political issues that concerned me were directly related to the country's situation under the military regime.

I have already explained elsewhere how the motivation to study middle class people in Copacabana was linked to my wish to understand the world view that had motivated so many to support the movement/coup against the legally elected government in 1964. My reading of the anthropological classics, including the works of Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard and Edmund Leach and others, made me increasingly convinced that our knowledge of Brazilian society, and in particular its middle classes, was superficial, stereotyped and schematic. The ethnographies central to the early history of anthropology read during my training indicated the need to delve more deeply into the cognitive dimensions and ethos of the social groups and categories I wished to understand. The middle classes were and continue to be a priority theme for me and various of my students. But it soon became evident that it was important to comprehend them in a variety of moments and relational contexts (Salem 1986). And here the anthropological tradition of fieldwork and participant observation was a crucial source of inspiration.

It was not a question of starting from scratch, but of re-reading works, including those of Gilberto Freyre, for example, that contained valuable reflections on Brazilian culture and lifestyles. The study of deviant groups and categories allowed questions to be posed about boundaries and relations in which moral values and social rules marked not only the situation of the accused and discriminated, but in particular those who imposed or tried to

impose rules, as well as these rules themselves: in other words, the intention was to search, by identifying what was interdicted and prohibited, the dominant patterns and their effectiveness in a particular socio-historical setting. This involved a critique of the notion of social pathology. The book *Desvio e divergência,* which I edited and published in 1974, collecting texts by myself and students in the department, was a landmark on this journey. Some people misunderstood what it was about. People who today enthusiastically embrace the interactionist bibliography thought at the time that speaking of *deviance* meant adopting a prejudiced view, rather than realizing what seemed obvious, namely that it involved the study of a system of relations.

The fact is that by researching prostitutes, homosexuals and other people accused of all kinds of transgressions, we were dealing with the bearers and above all the *crusaders* or defenders of the most conventional values and standards. Hence our attention shifted to the middle classes in general, including our own families, insofar as their life histories reveal attitudes and stances shared not only by acquaintances, but by many of our parents, uncles and aunts, grandparents and so on. It should be emphasized that this was one of the most significant contributions made by the anthropology pursued by myself, several of my students and some of my colleagues. The large cities where we lived, with their numerous dense networks, presented themselves as a challenge.

We assumed the task of studying our own environment, our lives, as something relevant to anthropology and capable, in turn, of contributing significantly to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the society in which we lived. It was in this context that I published the article "Observando o familiar" (1978) which, through a dialogue with a text by Roberto DaMatta (1978), questioned our knowledge of the *familiar*. I claimed that being familiar with facts, situations and even people did not signify knowing them, since such knowledge involved another kind of meaning. Knowing required an effort to both approach and obtain a distance from ourselves that could provide the basis for a more complex understanding of the phenomena in which we were directly implicated through experience, emotions, feelings and internalized forms of classification. This was perceived as a major challenge, but confronting it was essential if we were to establish connections between the anthropological tradition and the wider production of knowledge about our society. Consequently, the approximation and dialogue with other

disciplines like psychoanalysis and the history of culture, as well as the arts in general, has always been very fruitful.

I keenly recall the impact that the film *Opinião pública*, by Arnaldo Jabor (1967),had on me precisely when I was immersing myself in the Copacabana research. Literature in particular, whether Brazilian or international, was a considerable help to myself and a number of my students (Velho 1988). In my particular case, the works of Marcel Proust and Thomas Mann played a crucial role in awakening my sensibilities and providing insights into subjectivity, trajectories and social networks. Among Brazilian authors, Machado de Assis also played an important role, especially his *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* and *Memorial de Ayres*. A dialogue with History was also always present: since adolescence I had been interested in the subject and indeed I avidly read both historians and historical novels, ranging from Alexandre Dumas and Walter Scott to Georges Duby and Jacques Le Goff. In the process, I developed a receptivity and attentiveness to historical phenomena, strongly stimulated too by Marxism, including *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (Marx 1963). Lukács, Hauser and Lucien Goldmann were valuable reading. Later Panovski, Bakhtin, Ginzburg and Norbert Elias strengthened the ties with a cultural history of considerable anthropological interest. Inevitably, we also touch here on the importance of philosophical thought. This alone would require pages and pages of comments.

But since this involves a personal overview, what I wish to stress is how I made my own combination of Marxism and existentialism. Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, with their convergences and divergences, were authors that marked me profoundly and whose importance cannot be overestimated. Certainly the question of subjectivity and the concern with the notion of a project can be traced back primarily to the period when I was studying their works. When years later I came across the writings of Alfred Schutz, there was already a fertile terrain for some of his ideas to take hold. The relations between Marxism, existentialism and phenomenology constitute the philosophical bases of my work, even though the influence is somewhat fragmented and uneven. Close readings of Plato, Cicero and Montaigne have also accompanied much of my life and even today they are welcome company. In reality, we can see how the origins and bases for the development of a person's way of seeing and analyzing the world are complex, even confused to some extent and sometimes contradictory.

Through their works, artists in general and some writers in particular, independent of more aesthetic considerations, have developed analyses that capture fundamental characteristics of the society in which they live, sometimes with great subtlety and astuteness. As well as the authors cited above – Proust, Thomas Mann and Machado de Assis –there are many others who have influenced me and certainly other social scientists: writers like Goethe, Balzac, Flaubert, Dickens, Stendhal, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Melville, Eça de Queirós, Graciliano Ramos, Fernando Pessoa, Jorge Luis Borges and so on. Indeed Homer and the Greek theatre fascinated and marked me from an early age, just like so many other intellectuals from the Western tradition. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides became reference points for me that went beyond the classificatory limits of conventional knowledge.

The period 1960-1970 was when I most frequented the theatre. My father had practically the entire works of Shakespeare in his library, part of which I read, mainly the most famous plays. My favourite even today is *King Lear*, which marked me profoundly, without overlooking the enchantment provided by *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *Richard III*, *Othello* and other works. I should also mention in my case, and indeed for many of my contemporaries at university, the intense relationship with cinema. I cannot recall my formative years without paying tribute to Orson Welles, Fellini, Bergman, Eisenstein, Bresson, Kurosawa, Glauber Rocha, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Buñuel, Stanley Kubrick, Antonioni, Visconti, Rossellini, Vittorio de Sica, Godard, and so on. In terms of movements, Italian Neorealism, the French Nouvelle Vague and Brazilian Cinema Novo played a fundamental role in stimulating concerns and refining our gaze. Likewise they provided insights into narratives and suggested themes relevant to our research, especially those in which individual biographies intersected with each other and expressed historical situations and social contexts favourable to an anthropological analysis.

In effect, since the start of my career, the sociology and anthropology of art have comprised not only important areas of study but a stimulus for my own work. The first article that I published, along with a series of collections edited by myself, focused on this theme, which has never abandoned me since (Velho 1966, 1967a, 1967b, 1967c, 1969, 1977b, 1988). Or never abandoned us. I later re-engaged in a dialogue with this area on other bases largely though the work of Howard S. Becker, especially his book *Art Worlds* (1982). This was one of the best ways I found to combine an art historical approach

With former students and colleagues, National Museum, 2010

with a sociological analysis of how art is constructed. It was another opportunity to make connections between different traditions, producing my own particular cocktail that combined the entire breadth and diversity that characterize a line of work that now goes by the name of *Urban Anthropology*. Seen from our present-day vantage point, it is abundantly clear how this area encompasses or interrelates with themes as varied as the *Anthropology of complex societies*, *Individual and society*, *Interactionism and deviance*, the *Sociology and Anthropology of Art* and the *History of culture*, with strong influence on the 90 theses and dissertations I supervised until 2010. Rather than a kind of demiurge, I see the supervisor as a key interlocutor who dialogues with authors with their own backgrounds and interests. The point I wish to emphasize here is that since the mid-1970s, my students and I have worked not only specifically with the urban phenomenon, but also with the more general problem of anthropological theory in relation to modern-contemporary complex society, taking Brazil as our main, though not exclusive, focus.

The first two dissertations that I supervised were on psychiatric institutions and social movements. These were followed by a total of 90 MA and Ph.D. works on topics as diverse as male homosexuality, urban housing, umbanda and spiritism, literature through various authors, institutionalized minors, elderly people and their identities, numerous works on the family

and kinship, football, neighbourhoods, suburbs and the periphery, capoeira, prostitution, popular music like samba, funk, hip hop, heavy metal and forró, military personnel, journalists, schools, theatre, the feminist movement, dietary habits, popular culture and folklore, favelas and communities, politics, soap operas, museums, the ethos of elites, sociability in public spaces, political correspondence, identities in Mozambique, diplomats and their training, authors like Rui Barbosa, Mário de Andrade, Béla Bartók, João do Rio, Nelson Rodrigues, the Academy of Letters, solitude, mediation, prisons, couples, adoption, separation, ideas of the person and individualism, therapies, modernism, condominiums, ethnic-religious minorities, uses of computer technology, porn films, beauty parlours, domestic workers, diverse types of urban identities and many more.[2] These topics obviously intersect and complement each other, and over time they have enabled the formation of work and study groups, delimited not only by potential thematic affinities between areas of study, but above all by more general interests related to anthropological theory and fieldwork. Through apparently disparate themes, therefore, it was possible to open and maintain channels for dialogue and closer interaction by using the same or similar authors and schools of thought and by sharing the challenges of research and writing. My intellectual trajectory and interests enabled and stimulated this multitude of diverse works to be incorporated within a vision that I have cultivated since the outset. I believe that in my personal work it is impossible to dissociate, for example, the interactionist perspective from a concern with sociological differentiation inspired by Marx and Weber, and a strong culturalist influence in both the anthropological and historical traditions. Simmel was fundamental to exploring the ambiguities and paradoxes involved in the continuities and conflicts of social life, as well as opening up endless areas of interest and analytic themes that go beyond more conventional disciplinary boundaries.

During the early years of PPGAS at the Museu Nacional, the three main areas of study and research were Ethnology, Rural Societies and *Urban Anthropology*. Indeed, it is interesting to observe the evolution of research themes over the 42-year period since PPGAS was founded. The initial topics of study were inevitably associated with research projects focused on the study

2 A list of dissertations and theses supervised by myself, with their respective authors, can be found on the website of PPGAS/Museu Nacional: http://www.ppgasmuseu.etc.br

of indigenous societies and contact situations. The issue of colonial expansion and rural societies soon assumed an important place and a degree of prominence. My MA dissertation on middle class sectors in Copacabana was the third to be completed and when I returned from the United States in 1972 I began to give lecture courses, initially focusing on Urban Anthropology more generally and subsequently exploring a vast field that would later be labelled *Individual and society*, the study of deviant groups, heavily inspired by interactionist authors, especially Goffman and Becker. The publication of *Utopia Urbana* and the edited collection *Desvio e divergência* in 1973 and 1974, respectively, helped divulge this current of social sciences now starting to be developed in a Social Anthropology program. I obtained my doctorate in 1975 and began formal supervision of students who produced the above mentioned works. Even prior to this, though, I had informally helped in the supervision of some students through conversations and courses. The fact is that the research in and about the city multiplied in the most diverse and original directions.

It is worth emphasizing the importance of Roberto DaMatta's work in opening up new fields and crossing boundaries. With a Ph.D. from Harvard and training in ethnology, he quickly showed how the anthropological tradition could be productive by applying himself to a wide variety of research themes, especially those of contemporary Brazilian society. His research and texts on rituals were particularly important, the main contribution being the book *Carnavais, malandros e heróis* (1978). Many students worked under his supervision and his courses in Anthropological Theory were of huge importance for various generations. I was never a student of his, but we were colleagues and office neighbours. Not always in agreement, we had plenty of opportunity to talk and swap ideas on all kinds of topics, enjoying an intellectual dialogue seldom found today. It is interesting to think that we actually had time to talk, which is something nearly impossible today due to the requirements and demands to present reports and projects and pressures imposed by computerized bureaucracy, which leaves little space outside of official meetings with their regulations and limitations, along with the plethora of forms and deadlines that now govern university life. As well as the other colleagues whose work played a highly significant role in the early development of PPGAS, it is worth highlighting the emergence of new generations with their own preoccupations and original projects. I am talking about people who today are between 50 and 60 years old. In this process, new lines

of research were developed and themes emerged that had previously been unknown or seldom explored. These growth areas have included religion, politics, economics, gender, sexuality, ethnic identities, health and so on.

One of the points that probably deserves a little more emphasis here is my relation to the so-called Chicago School, deepened by my increased contact with Howard S. Becker from 1976 onwards after I obtained my doctorate. It is significant that I have been very closely identified with the school and, in other contexts, with the interactionism that for some people represents its most theoretical dimension. There is no harm in pointing out, as have authors like Becker, that there was not really any single doctrine or theoretical unity common to the professionals associated with the Department from the end of the 19th century to the mid-20th century, first the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and, after 1920 when the disciplines were separated into separate departments. It should be stressed that pioneering authors like W. Thomas and R. Park covered various areas of research and analysis, making the task of identifying them under a single label well-nigh impossible. The same can be said of a number of their students, as well as scholars from other generations.

Of course some influences remain more significant, such as those of G. Simmel and G. H. Mead. These two authors corresponded to two distinct and indeed somewhat diverging lines of thought. What brought them together was a shared concern with the themes of subjectivity and interiority. But Simmel's notion of "subjective culture" differed markedly from Mead's notion of self. The concern for relating the individual, biography and society was a recurrent point of reference among the authors linked to these traditions. At the same time, what also clearly mattered to this universe of intellectuals was research, meaning that their focus on fieldwork assimilated them to sociological and anthropological approaches. Although the barriers between quantitative and qualitative methods were not impassable, a common language was produced through the challenges posed by observation, life stories, the investigation of trajectories and careers, and related factors.

The ideas of the "Chicago School" spread across the United States, invading various departments and universities more as a research perspective than a doctrine or homogenic theory. The differences between professionals like Wirth, Blumer and Hughes were also important in terms of enriching the repertoire of their students, including the likes of Becker and Goffman. The

Gilberto Velho and Howard S. Becker, Rio de Janeiro, 1976.

recollections of Becker (1990, 1996) and some of his colleagues, found in interviews and articles, indicate that in the period following the Second World War a relatively small number of academic staff were responsible, in their own particular ways, for a large number of students, assisted and multiplied by educational policy measures like the G.I. Bill. Hence, there was also intensive communications and relations among the students themselves, involving competition, exchanges and mutual influences. There is much more that could be said here about the Chicago School but what I wish to underline is that what most impressed me was the variety of alternatives, directions and styles (Velho 2005). I read some of the authors with pleasure, others less so. In parallel, or in some cases before and afterwards, I studied British Social Anthropology and American Cultural Anthropology, as well as the French authors who played a key role in my intellectual development. Among others, and at the risk of omitting important names, I would cite Evans-Pritchard, Raymond Firth, Edmund Leach, Clyde Mitchell, Elizabeth Bott, Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Marshal Sahlins, Marcel Mauss, Maurice Halbwachs, Lévi-Strauss, Louis Dumont, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and so on.

In describing my trajectory, I should stress that I did not become an intellectual through anthropology. My training primarily came from the influence

of my father, the Colégio de Aplicação where I went to high school, the courses offered by the ISEB (Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros) and my own interests since early adolescence, which led me towards the human sciences. My biggest hesitation was choosing between history and anthropology, but the field of history was very weak in Rio de Janeiro, worsened by the political persecutions and by subaltern interests. My brother Otávio Guilherme, who graduated from the Military College, had completed his course at the School of Sociology and Politics at PUC. He and some of his colleagues were also important influences (Velho 2001). At this time of my life and career, reconstructing my biography retrospectively, I can see that I developed a vocation for intellectual life through the National Faculty of Philosophy, the Institute of Social Sciences at UFRJ, and PPGAS at the Museu Nacional. The visits to the United States and, specifically, the contact with Howard S. Becker also contributed greatly to my intellectual career heading in a certain direction.

But like other colleagues, I dislike simplifying attempts to label and classify. There was a period when I considered myself a Marxist, when I was around 17 or 18 years old. Today I see myself as an eclectic intellectual, in the good sense, I hope. For a series of circumstances and to some extent by design, I developed an intellectual profile strongly marked by interactionism and phenomenology. On the latter, I should emphasize the wealth of ideas I encountered in the work of Alfred Schutz (1971), which provided me with connections between various interests and areas of knowledge, including art itself. Indirectly, through the reading of authors from the Chicago School, I also engaged with pragmatism, without ever delving more deeply into the area. Nevertheless, Schutz's dialogue with the works of William James, among others, made me keenly aware of the intellectual formation of social sciences in the United States, whose relations with Europe were much more complex than I had presumed.

Though their originality has now faded, I think it is important to recall the anthropological analyses that we developed. Our social networks enabled us to move through various worlds and levels of reality. Hence, literature, history, philosophy and other areas are constantly present, bursting through, sometimes almost unconsciously, other times called upon deliberately and consciously for more elaborate and theoretical work. The biggest challenge is to orchestrate this variety in a minimally consistent and productive way. It became very clear to me, for example, just how enormously important was

the reading of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, by Marcel Proust (1981 [1913-1927: 1st publ.]).[3] Although, as mentioned earlier, other writers like Dickens, Balzac, Flaubert and Thomas Mann had made a big impression on me, it was Proust's magnum opus that enabled me to encounter some of my most important concerns as an anthropologist and, in broader terms, shaped my intellectual and aesthetic perception of life and the world.

Without wishing to simplify or reduce such an important work of art, it is worth repeating what has already been said by various commentators, but highlighting some points. It is well-known just how important *time* is in Proust, its subtle meanings and crucial role as a point of reference in the development of the life of individuals and society. Strong connections can be perceived here with Bergson's ideas. Associated with this, in a unique way, is the importance of memory as an organizer of subjectivity and the relations between individuals. In his writing, Proust provides a continual lesson on the complexity of people, both internally in their subjectivity, and externally in their participation in society as they move through different social networks and spheres. The opus provides a true ethnography of life during the era and especially of Paris as a metropolis in Simmel's terms (1908). Proust's work not only shows the variety of relations, but also the meaning attributed to them and their repercussions on each person's life. Projects are clearly identifiable as understood in Schutz's terminology. The books show how individuals and groups orbit through social life over the course of time, and even simultaneously, rendering their identities ever more complex. Many things are visible and evident through the observation of public life. But there is also an entire spectrum of mysteries, obscure meanings, secrets and half-truths that can surprise us or never be discovered in the processes of social interaction. People meet, see each other and relate. But there is always something we do not know or that may suddenly emerge, radically altering the sense and meaning of relations. Memories are remade and reinterpreted, altering the perception of self and others. The potential discovery of transgressions can illustrate, as borderline cases, the almost indecipherable dimension of the individual's existence in society. In the journeys and trails taken by the

3 *À la recherche du temps perdu* was published in seven volumes between 1913 and 1927. After its polemical rejection by the Gallimard publishing house, the first volume was published at the author's expenses by the small publisher Grasset. However, Gallimard very quickly reversed its original decision and published all the remaining volumes of the work.

individual, and through his or her relative anonymity within the urban landscape, we are confronted in an even more acute form with this experience of multiple belongings and fragmentation.

Above all Proust shows the density and non-obviousness of social life, functioning as a kind of vaccine against the simplifying reductionisms of thought. In other words, through Proust I learnt even more about the complexity of individuals and social relations (Velho 1982). Appearances must be taken into account, but we must also go beyond them. At the same time, it is essential to recognize that, however hard we try to understand, something will always elude us. Far from being negative, this fact becomes a stimulus and a reason for greater modesty in our aims. We know that erotic-amorous relations permeate much of Proust's opus in the most diverse forms. It is an alert to the work of social scientists, who do not need to become psychologists to value and pay attention to emotions, desires and feelings whose sociocultural importance is enormous.

Undoubtedly my reflections on people's projects and fields of possibilities led me to pay attention to the tensions between so-called rational motivations and the force of supposedly irrational factors. The importance of symbolic life, the efficacy of beliefs and myths, the weight of traditions and customs merge with intentions to plan, intervene in and transform social life. This play of contradictions maybe configured through the confrontation between groups and social categories, but also takes place internally within individuals themselves. Here I am prompted to comment a little further on my work in the area of deviance and deviant behaviour. As I pointed out earlier, what interested me was not behaviours per se, but a system of relations that involved symbolic and social limits and boundaries. My reading of the book *Outsiders* by Becker (1973) was an obvious stimulus to deepening my own ideas. I had already read and continued to read works from another tradition in the social sciences: I refer to the literature that includes, among other authors, Evans-Pritchard (1976 [1937]) and Mary Douglas (1970). Their research and analyses of witchcraft encouraged me to make connections between interactionism and this particular current of British Social Anthropology. I published a number of texts in this vein that received some recognition as innovative works providing fresh perspectives (Becker 1963).

Here we return to what I called eclecticism, which I take as a positive quality. The shift between different theoretical and interpretative currents

helps anthropologists and indeed social scientists in general to develop their ideas and formulations. Accusation is, for example, the dramatization of relations involving different actors. Basically, we have accusers and accused. But there is some variation in hues, nuances, changes of role and performances, with a strong potential for raising questions and proposing hypotheses on wider social processes. Hence, the accusations of *drug-taking* and *subversion* that I analyzed in my early work revealed characteristics specific to a particular historical-cultural setting (Velho 1976). They occurred at various levels ranging from what we could call the *micro*, within families, to a broader scale, including the level of the State itself. In reality, the research involved exploring a politics of the everyday with transitions between various levels, ranging from the apparently most intimate domains to instances of state power.

Since the outset of my work, one of the most important issues for me has been mental health. Through a reading of authors as diverse as those linked to antipsychiatry, especially Laing and Cooper, and others like Szaz, Scheff and Foucault himself, I perceived the important role to be played by anthropology in making connections and broadening theoretical horizons in this area. Psychoanalysis was one of the main intellectual and existential reference points during this period (Velho 1998 [1975]). The so-called School of Personality and Culture formed by Sapir, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead and closely affiliated with thinkers like Bateson, once again became fundamental to us as a way of comparing not only different societies through a critical reflection on culture and social life, but also, in our case, of trying to uncover the differences internal to modern-contemporary complex societies like Brazil. In this sense, the problematic of deviance and accusations could itself be analysed in a more systematic way in terms of language, codes and networks of meanings. To some extent, therefore, we re-adopted the viewpoint of *cultural relativism*, looking to establish connections with a more critical-sociological line of thought. Pursuing this approach, the dialogue between anthropology and history once again comprised a basic reference point.

Without embarking on comparisons and parallel discussions, I must cite the reading of Clifford Geertz and Marshall Sahlins as a decisive factor in reaching a more complex understanding of these issues. Through the notions of culture and the historical juncture, we had the elements needed to interrogate ideas of *normality* and *abnormality*. Cultural differences and historical

transformations prompted us to explore particularities, but also to adopt a more universalist vision of human societies.

During a phase in my career dating from the mid-1970s until the start of the 1990s, though it has never disappeared, I had the opportunity to dialogue and debate with psychologists, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts. The problematic of individualism and its relation to hierarchy, combining Simmel and Dumont, was one of the themes of interest, along with the re-adoption and implications of the notion of culture (Duarte 2000). It is difficult to delineate the boundaries between the themes that I researched and supervised in this vast world denominated *Urban Anthropology*. I will certainly omit even some of the most important. But, in relation to what I said earlier, it is essential to emphasize the importance of family and kinship as an area of interest, which indeed traverses dozens of works by myself and my students (Fonseca 2010). Here we focused on generational questions and specific research on young and elderly people, with greater or lesser emphasis on gender issues. The study of couples, alternative modes of conviviality, the emergence of new patterns of amorous relationships and co-habitation are other focal points of analysis.

Urban life in general, the social organization of space, neighbourhoods, political activities and all kinds of mobilization have also been matters of interest to me since my book *Utopia Urbana*. Seen in hindsight, the manifestations and relations between different levels of culture, implying power dynamics, the reinvention and construction of new artistic-cultural languages, the identification of worlds and movements with some degree of specificity but allowing for comparisons, were some of the main vectors of this production. Many of these ideas are discussed in several of my books, such as *Individualismo e cultura* and *Projeto e metamorfose*. Others appear in collections edited or coedited by myself.

Rio de Janeiro has been the main, though not the only, research site. Works on multiple themes have been produced in the city, ranging from the south zone to the north, the Baixada Fluminense region, and various suburbs and peripheries. Other urban centres, small and large, such as São Paulo, Lisbon, Boston, Curitiba, Porto Alegre, Florianópolis and "towns of the interior," have also been field sites, studied in relation to a variety of subjects, traversing social structure and different cultural boundaries. The large concentration of work in Rio's metropolitan region has undoubtedly been for logistical reasons and because of a clear initial project I had to approach the

Lecture at The Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, 2002.

city as a kind of laboratory. But what we found there did not fit into a spatial-ecological model: instead it multiplied and fragmented into various worlds, social networks and cultural trends, making the challenge even more fascinating and provocative.

The neighbourhoods or "moral regions," the different areas of the city, had to be comprehended via their identities, not statically but through the movements and diverse representations that generated communication but also impasses with conflicts that questioned the very continuity of the basic processes of social interaction. Hence, I came face-to-face as both a researcher and a citizen with the rapid worsening of what has become known as *urban violence*. This phenomenon, which affected Brazilian society more widely, struck Rio de Janeiro in particularly dramatic form. Since the beginning of our analyses, we have realized the importance of violence as a constitutive element in the formation of Brazilian society as a whole. Here is not the place to recite the long and complex discussions and analyses of the socio-historical processes revealing these features. We recognized that poverty and inequality were important variables for the creation of a setting ripe for conflict, frequently manifested in bloody episodes of various kinds, situations that could present political and religious dimensions directly or indirectly associated with needs and exploitation.

What we have seen over the last few decades is the dissemination of a

"culture of violence" that has swollen in volume, assuming proportions that seriously threaten the everyday lives of practically all social sectors. Hold ups, kidnappings, robberies, assaults and murders are just some of the modalities through which the phenomenon is manifest. This expansion in criminality and its inherent risks appear to be associated with drug and weapons trafficking. Drug use is widespread throughout the world. Cartels, rings and gangs emerge and flourish in some societies more than others. Sadly, Brazil is one of the countries where the volume and intensity of criminal activity is vividly apparent. There is clearly an economic motivation that goes beyond the more basic struggle to survive. Diverse interests multiply, feeding and producing extensions of these networks that in various ways attain an international dimension when we observe them from a global perspective. What has most struck me is the use of violence not as a means but as an end in itself: in other words, there are people and groups who dedicate themselves to and possibly obtain pleasure from the perpetration of violence.

As has been said before, Rio de Janeiro, for a series of circumstances that we ourselves have discussed and researched, appears as one of the extreme cases of Brazilian society.[4] Numerous social scientists and many research projects have confronted this challenge. The phenomenon presents multiple dimensions and produces a wide range of effects. The basic question of public security involves considering, as a priority, the relations between public authorities and civil society. Thus corruption, abuse of power, the indiscriminate use of force and deep-rooted inefficiency undermine not only those directly responsible for fighting crime, but also all kinds of political and administrative authorities. The legitimacy of the police, judiciary, legislature and executive branches are all compromised by the continuation and intensification of criminal activities. It is a well-known fact that a considerable part of Rio de Janeiro's metropolitan region is controlled by criminal factions, whether drug gangs or militias. In one form or another, respect for and trust in law enforcement agencies is minimal, leading to demoralization. Some speak of anomie and social disorganization. Certainly the expression "crisis of values," though limited, suggests the need to think of violence from an anthropological viewpoint.

4 "We" here refers to various researchers who over the past few decades have been investigating the theme of violence in its multiple aspects, focusing on Rio de Janeiro. These are important works, already cited by myself in other texts.

In sum, then, I am not speaking of *Urban Anthropology* as a subarea, but as a meeting point for research projects and analyses in which the symbolic universe and representations are increasingly incorporated into public policies and studies. I believe that, with the necessary caveats and all due modesty, one of the most important ways to ensure the development and increasing relevance of our area of intellectual investigation is to recuperate, renovate and combine analyses of meanings with processes of social action and interaction. In other words, we need to cross disciplinary boundaries and specific traditions to bring together different contributions that can widen our conception of intellectual work. This has been a concern of particular importance to me over the last few years, a period during which I have been looking to compare the experiences and worldviews of different generations of the middle class universe. In part this involves the privilege of being able to know and examine different social age categories. More than ever, the recourse to distinct areas of knowledge has proven both necessary and crucial due to the complexity of the questions involved.

Researchers themselves are, at least in part, characters in the stories and narratives that they themselves collect. Like the people from the universe being researched, they shift between different planes and levels of reality, in a retrospective and prospective play of memories and projects where subjectivity is always present. Anthropology in the metropolises, and in large urban centres in general, must increasingly deal with new and rapid communication and information systems, which combine and interact with networks of relations and social categories of every kind. Although this is occurring in societies as a whole, in a process of interaction between more or less long-lived currents of cultural tradition (Barth 1989), these phenomena appear with more intensity and clarity in the contemporary urban environment, with all its complexity and dynamism,. The study of different generations, their values, attitudes and projects, suggests pathways and possibilities of knowledge in which interdisciplinarity becomes ever more essential.

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