

In step with b-boys: individuation and reflexivities from a practice

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ABSTRACT

Attentive to the debates on individuation process lived in the contemporary social relations, this essay has resulted from dialogues with hip-hop's activists. It aims to discuss how breakdance practice has contributed to identity individuation of dancers of *Restinga Crew*, group from Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Propositions by Alberto Melucci and Danilo Martuccelli are the main references and the research was conducted in 2013 and 2014, by *in loco* observation and narrative interviews. The text emphasizes the reflexive dynamics produced by the crew regarding possibilities of individual singularization built in relation with peer recognition and the collective belonging. In this sense, it analyses the challenges experienced as ambient to production of cultural capital and as support to get integration in others social spaces.

KEYWORDS

individuation; reflexivities; young people, breakdance; hip-hop.

AOS PASSOS COM B-BOYS: INDIVIDUAÇÕES E REFLEXIVIDADES DE UMA PRÁTICA

RESUMO

Este ensaio resulta de interlocuções com ativistas do *hip-hop* e atenta aos debates sobre os processos de individuação vivenciados nas relações sociais contemporâneas. Propõe-se a problematizar como a prática de *breakdance* tem contribuído à individuação identitária de dançarinos do *Restinga Crew*, grupo atuante em Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. As proposições de Alberto Melucci e de Danilo Martuccelli são as principais referências, e a pesquisa foi efetivada nos anos de 2013 e 2014, mediante observação *in loco* e realização de entrevistas narrativas. O texto destaca as dinâmicas reflexivas produzidas pela *crew*, considerando as possibilidades de singularização individual gestadas aí, em articulação ao reconhecimento dos pares e à pertença coletiva. Argumenta-se que os desafios experienciados nesse sentido ambientaram produção de capitais culturais e sustentavam inserções em outros espaços sociais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

individuação; reflexividades; juventudes; *breakdance*; *hip-hop*.

A PASOS CON B-BOYS: INDIVIDUACIONES Y REFLEXIVIDADES DE UNA PRÁCTICA

RESUMEN

Fijándose en los debates sobre procesos de individuación vividos en las relaciones sociales contemporáneas, este ensayo resulta de interlocuciones con activistas del *hip-hop*. Problematiza cómo la práctica de *breakdance* ha contribuido a la individuación identitaria de bailarines del *Restinga Crew*, grupo de Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. Proposiciones de Alberto Melucci y de Danilo Martuccelli son los principales referentes, y la investigación fue realizada en 2013 y 2014, mediante observación *in loco* y realización de entrevistas narrativas. El texto señala las dinámicas reflexivas producidas por el grupo y considera relaciones entre estas y las posibilidades de singularización individual concretadas en articulación al reconocimiento de los pares y a la pertenencia colectiva. Argumenta que los desafíos vividos en este sentido ambientaron producción de capitales culturales y aportaron inserciones en otros espacios sociales.

PALABRAS CLAVE

individuación; reflexividades; juventudes; *breakdance*; *hip-hop*.

INTRODUCTION

Studies about youth have emphasized the singularities of the contemporary juvenile condition by highlighting the youngsters' relations with artistic and symbolic productions *vis-à-vis* ties of sociability and sense of belonging and, what is more, in relation to processes of socialization constituted by a multiplicity of experiences. Therefore, the questioning of the tactics deployed by the youth upon constructing their trajectory and with regards to the actualization of their expectations, deserves a prominent position.

Sensitive to such a scenario, the problematization posed in this study results from researches started in 2011, when the researcher first contacted Hip-hop practices in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Upon dialoguing with young activists of this movement, the *Restinga Crew* was met, a group of break dancers¹ who had kept their activities for over a decade, which is an unusual situation in comparison to the other groups identified in incursions into the poorer neighborhoods of the city.

The aforementioned study aimed at identitarian productions and, as the interlocutions with the b-boys evolved, to the better understanding of their relationship with the dancing practice and the “hip-hop culture”² was sought. During the rehearsals organized by the crew, some attention was drawn to the significantly autonomous way with which each one conducted their exercises and, also, the recurrent emphasis in the composition of individual styles expressed by the dancers in such a way that it did not jeopardize their allegiance to the group.

Some of the contributions by Martuccelli (2007) and by Melucci (2001; 2004) have helped to elaborate arguments related to what was witnessed among the dancers, so much that this essay becomes an exercise of comprehension about indentitary processes, especially regarding the individuation level. Therefore, an analysis of the trajectories lived by the youngsters in a slum context is presented, yielding the possibility for an understanding that an approximation to their dynamics of identitization and reflexivity may promote stimuli to educational practices, especially if production of knowledge, meaning and subsisting conditions are recognized as legitimate in this context.

1 Breaking is considered a kind of street dance. It was established in the 1970s amongst other elements of the hip-hop culture, in neighborhoods comprised by a majority of Caribbean and black people in New York. At first, the dance presented gestures which resembled battle circumstances, alluding to the Vietnam War, destination of many Afrodescendant and Latin youngsters then (Oliveira, 2004). Nowadays, this style gathers dancers in championships and recreational activities throughout the whole city. Amidst the interlocutors, breaking was especially characterized by flexibility in the composition of the choreographic sequences, and it even presented interpretations of daily events, steps from other dance styles, etc.

2 The use of the expression “hip-hop culture” between quotation marks is intentional and aims to signal the appropriation of the term used by the interlocutors. Therefore, also it was intended to highlight that the use of the word “culture” does not have the intention to refer to the meanings the academy attributes to it.

The text is organized as follows: the analytical context and the theoretical references are presented. Then, the reflexive dynamics built by the crew are analyzed, rendering a discussion about their daily potencies regarding the singularization of performances and individualities. Finally, the biographical trajectories of two young men who partake in the group are presented, serving as case studies to illustrate the individuation processes *vis-à-vis* breaking and Hip-hop.

CONTEXT AND REFERENCES

Individuation is the cultural tendency that emphasizes an individual's projects as the guiding principle of their behavior. Individuation is not individualism, because the individual's Project can be adapted to suit collective actions and communal ideas, such as preserving the environment or creating a community, whereas individualism makes the welfare of the individual the main goal of their private project. (Castells, 2013, p. 168, translated by the author)

The perspective presented by Castells (2013) evidences the existence of sociocultural contexts whose organizational dynamics fosters the individuals to build their socialization processes. In his words, the author especially regards the actions of the social movements and the effects of the administration of social network anchored in communication and information technologies, which constitute situations that no longer depend exclusively upon the action of social institutions. Thus, he invites us to observe that the constitution of the biographical trajectories is altered by contemporary social relations.

Similarly, the passage rituals considered as transition indicators regarding adulthood — professional stability, marriage, home ownership, children etc., a somewhat naturalization of the social references produced in the European post-war — are postponed, desynchronized and/or reverted nowadays (Pappámikail, 2012), lowering the barriers of what was supposed to be the phases of life and, what is more, contributing to the diversification of possible destinies for individual trajectories.

In the European case, new dynamics of the productive and labor systems resulted in an amplification of the time dedicated to study, and in the postponing of the entry of some young people in the job market, expanding the period known as youth. In Brazil, “a rearrangement” of the transitional sequence can be observed: school time amplification happens along with other events considered as landmarks of transition to adulthood, such as parenthood and early labor insertion, which happens before — and/or at the expense of — the conclusion of basic education (Camarano, 2006).

Two other factors, indicated by Vieira (2012), can be added to the aforementioned ones. First, a change in the representations of infancy and adolescence nowadays, which tends to recognize children and youngsters as autonomous individuals who deserve to have a say, which intensifies our experience of the inheritance of modernity. Second, and magnifying the first one, the diversity of socializing

contexts, especially peer groups, who present the necessity for the individuals to manage and elaborate plurality in their biographical trajectories. The latter, an acknowledgement also made by Melucci (2004), in “The game of me” (*O jogo do eu*), when he points out to the multiple, procedural and self-reflexive characteristics of the identities nowadays, generated in urban areas of high differentiation and intense informational appeal.

Contemporary systems provide to individuals the opportunity of symbolic resources that expand their potentials for individualization, i.e., for autonomy and self-realization: individuals experience the possibility to define and control who they are and what they do via the generalization of the educational process, the diffusion of political participation and of citizenship rights, the importance given to the organizational and communicative networks. (Melucci, 2001, p. 72, translated by the author)

Pointing to the experiencing of more and more urbanized and socially codified routines, Melucci (2001; 2004) considers our needs — and the sign of the lack they condensate — as tending to be reoriented to objects comprised by a strong symbolic connotation, due to our social constructions³. This would also be the contexts of the acknowledgement of identity as a social product historically cast to the desacralization of the metasocial principles, and to the diversification of the bases of identification — regarding consumerism, information appeal, social networks, etc. Therefore, the author seeks to emphasize that, instead of a situation supposedly static of attribution delimitation, identity is a process in which reflexivity tends to be intensified. Mentioning that maybe it would be more adequate to speak in terms of “identitization,” he characterizes identity rather as an action than a situation; besides a set of socially produced attributions, a reflexive and action ability built from the former.

Identity could be defined as the reflexive ability of producing awareness of the action — i.e., a symbolic representation of it — along with its specific contents. Identity becomes, then, formal reflexivity, symbolic ability, acknowledgement of sense production regarding action, vis-à-vis the limitations established for a certain moment by the environment and by the biological structure. (Melucci, 2001, p. 89, translated by the author)

Lash (2012) reminds us, however, that it is necessary to recognize the ways in which modern cultural apparatuses and resources reach the daily life of individuals,

3 The excerpt that follows illustrates what we are trying to refer to: “We are no longer simply thirsty or hungry, neither do we need to dress; the lack that we feel and which is already oriented toward specific objects, built symbolically by information, by the market, by advertising and by the social networks to which we belong. Therefore, we are thirsty for A, we can wear only B, at breakfast we wish C; we define, thus, our needs in accordance with specific codes present in the daily cultural environment we belong to and in which communication takes place” (Melucci, 2004, p. 40).

and only then observe the possibilities and forms of reflexivity⁴. The incursions in peripheral neighborhoods, contexts in which the presence of the modern institutionality is aggravated by the precariousness of the accesses and by the insufficient presence of the State, poses questions as to the forms of appropriation of the contemporary reflexive ambience.

Martuccelli's (2007) propositions about the sociology of the individual can be provocative in this sense, supporting a contextualized approach to biographical trajectories. In line with the previous arguments, the author emphasizes that contemporary social relations instigate diverse experiences, contributing to their particularization even when people occupy similar social positions. His interpretation is oriented towards the process of singularization structurally produced in modernity, and proposes analytical operators for the understanding of how individuals are constituted in the relationship with aspects that pervade socialization in the collectivity: a relation that concerns the production of identification, but that, for this author, also needs to be problematized below and beyond identity.

Martuccelli (2007) presents the notion of "trial" as an artifice for understanding the processes of individuation, highlighting the socio-historical challenges that individuals are forced to face — in accordance with their social conditions — and which can be experienced singularly in their self-production as subjects. As the author says:

The trials have four great features. First, they are inseparable from a *narrative* that gives individual or collective actors a greater role in understanding social phenomena. Second, the trials then refer to an actor's abilities to *face* the difficult requirements and processes he is subjected to. Third, all trials appear as an examination, as a *selection mechanism* through which, depending on their successes or failures, the actors forge their existences. Finally, the trials are inseparable from a set of major *structural challenges* to which individuals are obliged to

4 It would not be possible to deepen the problematization about the "reflexive modernization" that Lash (2012) shares with Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens within the limits of this text, but it is necessary to present the specifics of his arguments. Reflexivity in this perspective is associated with the condition of risk and ambivalence generated by the eclipsing of the "certainties" of modernity. In accordance with Beck (2012), it would be not only reflection, but a kind of self-confrontation with the dilemmas interposed by historically produced structural factors such as the environmental crisis or the reconfiguration of women's position in the labor market and in the family — that is, the experience of questioning and choices in fields where, before, there was tradition. In this context, Lash adds that reflexive knowledge and appeals are disseminated not only by conceptual elaborations, but also by mimetic dynamics, "symbolically by means of resemblance" (Lash, 2012, p. 212). Accordingly, he emphasizes that reflexivity also happens in the access to cultural artifacts (artistic, imagery: films, TV programs, etc.) with which we can reflect and/or which we can appropriate, in the guise of an "aesthetic reflexivity". However, when we come to 'appropriation,' we can also mention, with Lash, a "hermeneutic reflexivity," which means participation in groups of sharing and reappropriation.

respond and which differ vis-à-vis societies and historical periods. (Martuccelli, 2007, p. 125, translated by the author)

The author also associates the notion of “support” to this concept of trial in order to speak about the relations that support the individuals in the confrontation of their existential challenges. Hence, we can establish reciprocity bonds, networks of friendship and sociability, or, instead, the articulation with institutional devices that guarantee and/or promote conditions for subjects to carry out their projects and/or succeed in continuing the dispute.

Both notions, namely “trial” and “support”, were taken as an inspiration to interpret the *Restinga Crew* b-boys’ practices and itineraries, by observing the material and cultural conditions of their existence and the paths taken to legitimize their individual choices and projects. Let us see, then, how it was achieved the purpose of the research in the field.

IN THE FIELD

The author’s interlocution with the *Restinga Crew* began when he started to accompany the rehearsals they performed in a municipal gymnasium. His inroads began in the second half of 2013, and he then sought to register his impressions of how they operated on learning dance steps and how they socialized and shared knowledge about the breaking or other practices they participated in a journal. Henceforth, the author gradually approached the way they enjoyed the music, maintained bonds of belonging to the crew and Hip-hop, and singularized styles.

After six months of observation, including the attendance to *Restinga Crew*’s presentations at city events, the author began to conduct narrative interviews with the dancers (Jovchelovitch, 2002) to elaborate their life itineraries, so that he could know their interpretations about the place of breaking and “Hip-hop culture” in their trajectories, and, also, the challenges that they considered outstanding in their trajectories.

After the interviews, a new observation period of approximately two months started in the first half of 2014. The activities carried out by the interlocutors when they were not with the group were regularly followed, focusing those that occupied them the longest (work and study) and/or had been narrated as more significant.

All diary records and the narratives elaborated by the interlocutors were analyzed to problematize the experiences of ‘trials’ and ‘supports’, in the sense attributed by Martuccelli (2007). Passages narrated as remarkable were analyzed as indicators of “successes” (or “failures”) in facing the challenges that their social contexts interposed and, also, as signs of the dispositions and networks of belonging that supported their paths. Reading about the conditions of life in their localities and the fronts of action of Hip-hop, as well as a transversal look at the various narrated trajectories, made it possible to clarify the boundaries of structural challenges, as well as to situate within them the breaking practices.

Regarding the similarity of the social positions occupied by the b-boys, the contrast of the tactics in the delineation of itineraries allowed for the ponderation

of nuances of the quests for distinction, interpreting their personal narratives as an expression of socially experienced processes of individuation.

Let us now turn to the exposition of the activities of the group and, afterwards, to the narratives about the biographical trajectories of the interlocutors.

ON THE REFLEXIVE DYNAMICS: THE GROUP, THE REHEARSALS AND THE SINGULARIZATION

In the early 2000s, most members of the current crew began attending the gymnasium at the Vila Restinga⁵ Community Center (CECORES) to partake dance activities. Then, Jukinha, a b-boy who organized breaking workshops there, organized his classes to have a formation of a group for presentations at events (Rekziegel, 2004). The group started rehearsing at the CECORES and, gradually, began giving presentations at events. Initially, the crew was formed only by young residents of Restinga, but, due to the visibility obtained in the city and to the networks of sociability and work of its members, they started to congregate dancers from different suburban neighborhoods.

When the interlocutions started, the group existed for approximately 10 years and, to the extent of its financial possibilities, sought to participate in championships in the state of Rio Grande do Sul or in the center of Brazil; sometimes they organized events in the neighborhood and in the city. Despite the oscillation of the number of members, the group maintained regular rehearsals three times a week in the evening. There were approximately eight young people, between 17 and 29, and, in most cases, they had school careers either fragmented or interrupted by the need to have a job. It was also noticed that, among the youngest ones, schooling was more successful, and the possibility of finishing high school more likely.

Each of the members of the crew had gone through different challenges and adversities. The oldest ones already had teenager children. All of them faced the need to work early in different precarious activities and cherished the desire to improve their living conditions. The group subsided without any kind of institutional sponsorship; they used public spaces (municipal schools or even the CECORES) for their rehearsals, and the enjoyment of their activities made squares and streets a *locus* of action.

In this scenario, the bonds between the interlocutors transcended those typical of training and presentations. As of their coexistence in the group, they

5 Restinga, located at the Southern end of Porto Alegre city, is a neighborhood created by power intervention in the 1960s. It was populated with families removed from the so-called "Vila das Malocas" (Maloca Slunms), a community whose houses were precarious and constituted by most of black population. The location of such slums was close to the downtown, in an area coveted by the real estate market (Nunes, 1990). Despite the achievements of the residents of Restinga, it is still a very impoverished neighborhood, and it presents the highest rates of social violence of the city, especially regarding the number of deaths amongst the youngsters (ObservaPoa, 2015).

formed bonds of friendship and reciprocity that were recurrently reaffirmed in their speeches and in social media publications. Usually, they mentioned that the crew was also their “family”; many times, the participation in events of some was often supported by collective resources; and in other situations, they cooperated with colleagues in the group, receiving them indefinitely at home.

The memories evoked by the b-boys were accompanied by the mention of living conditions and by the assertion of facing adversity as a reason for distinguishing the members of the crew. When they recounted their daily routines, they emphasized their efforts to maintain the quality of their performances, enunciating the need for resistance and resilience to accomplish their expectations. In this sense, they agreed that it was possible to consider the difficulties experienced and to admit ignorance about something, but that the subject should be exempt from trying and taking a position was not allowed. Here, the word “attitude” seemed to be a sign of their discourse, and the field incursions indicated that this would be a typical feature of the symbolic system of Hip-hop, as Pardue (2008) states.

Such a discourse also signaled criteria for joining the group. The training was open, but entering the crew was conditioned to the fulfillment of some requirements. It was told, by the way, that there would be a kind of selective process, which included demonstrating commitment to training, willingness to accompany the group in events, permanence and regularity of presence during activities, and experience of the elements of the “culture”.

We make a test with 35 questions. These 35 questions are all related to Hip Hop and its four elements. So, I hand in the test to them; they do the test, they pass it back to me, I correct it, as they trust me! Because I am the one who studies the most. (Seco – Dec, 2013, translated by the author)

Regarding this configuration, although there could be several people sharing knowledge about dance steps during rehearsals, *Restinga Crew's* public performances maintained a relatively stable core of participants. Out of the eight dancers who made up the crew during the period of interlocutions, five were together from the beginning, in 2003.

Every time we introduced ourselves, we had to say our names [...] “Say your name, where you live.” The jokes already began: “Bah... Close the door coz the guys from Restinga are here. Watch your bags!” Then we decided to create the *Restinga Crew*. (Henrique - Sep/2013, translated by the author)

The name of the crew is due to the exhibitions outside Restinga. According to their account, biased comments were frequent when they informed the origin of the group. So, as a rejection of discrimination, they decided to name the group after the neighborhood, making the stigma an emblem (Reguillo, 2012). And such a formulation seems to coarticulate with the modes of operation in dance practices and with the relational arrangements that constitute them, which a recall here “reflexive dynamics” and will attempt to be sketched as follows.

FROM TRAININGS TO REHEARSALS

The weekly training sessions at CECORES were followed. They usually arrived around 7:00 pm at the gymnasium. The activities happened in a space contiguous to a multi-sport court, in an open place, and could be attended by anyone who wanted to. Those who wished to learn how to dance could approach the group and participate. The b-boys would give some instructions on basic moves.

Henrique⁶, the leader of the group for the organization of activities, was usually the first to arrive. He carried a sound box and his backpack, and he would presently put the equipment into operation. The sound of music at high volume pervaded the space and, little by little, the other members assembled. Each person, upon arriving, greeted each attendee and in some cases even talked about the events of the day.

In general, it was noticed that the rehearsals had a sequence: they started with stretching and warm-ups. Then they engaged in individual practices of performance and qualification of dance steps, in a persistent dynamic of trial and error. Finally, all of them would make a dance circle and rock to the tunes, and gradually each dancer would go to the center, perform his steps and instigated a colleague to do the same.

This routine was varied, though. Some did not do the stretching and warm-ups, and would prefer to start individual training straightaway; the collective circle would not always happen, or could be replaced by a moment for group discussion. The intensity of the rehearsals could vary due to weather conditions, and the cold winter evenings could limit the practice in the gymnasium. When fully carried out, however, the training seemed to compose a structure analogous to that of the group's experiences regarding their insertion in street dancing, and then it could be characterized as a rehearsal. That is, upon establishing a sequence that went from individual practice to presentations to the group, the organization of their practice was then constituted: preparation periods and the expectation of public performances between peers and for an audience in a trajectory permeated by musical fruition, sociability and recognition.

FRUITION EXPERIENCE AND SOCIABILITY

In this sense, the experience enjoyed during the trials deserves special attention. Often, the rhythms of the songs seemed to rhythmize the exercises of the b-boys, fostering the sharing of movements, expectations of success in the steps and jokes on the personal styles.

Seco is remembered to be once rehearsing some steps in front of the mirror to the rhythm of a song and then Hector beginning to accompany him as if it were a choreography. They called another boy and the three danced together.

6 The names cited here are fictitious upon mentioning the actions of the members of the group. However, two of them are not to have some details exposed upon describing their biographical trajectories.

The high-volume sound pervading the space seemed to help them concentrate and connect their bodies which, under a rhythmic motion, performed similar gestures and brought to me, as an observer, the sensation of an exciting fruition, anchoring the pulse of time (Melucci, 2004) in an experience of sharing, integration and protagonism.

On another occasion, a dance tournament for b-boys slots was watched during the Municipal Hip-hop Week. The dancers formed pairs and partook disputes, which eventually symbolically alluded to gang battles. Each pair made a performance with at least the basic sequence of the breaking⁷ and in the end invited the opponents to act by provoking them (a look, a gesture etc.), usually followed by an ovation or laughter from the audience.

In one of the clashes partaken by the members of the *Restinga Crew*, the dispute became very fierce, causing the audience to be thrilled. It was noticed that a certain vibration transcended the practice of those directly involved and took the members of crews who were there, on the stage: the performances of the b-boys were accompanied by provocative performances by their rivals. Imbued with the emotion of the “music battle”, the movements expressed the plasticity of a spectacle and showed, beyond performance for an audience, connection with an ambience and immersion into a practice.

It is proposed, then, the hypothesis of an intense experience of a feeling of belonging and of feeling socially powerful, evincing the incorporation of culturally valued forms of expression into a society permeated by spectacles (Herschmann, 2005). At the same time, fruition constituted memories of sharing in sociability and indicated position-takings in the reflexive performances of art and spectacle.

KNOWLEDGE, DISPOSITIONS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF NAVIGATING

Turning now to the training sessions attended; we can assess the details of how *Restinga Crew* b-boys worked upon developing their practice.

MIMESIS

Although they were all in the same space and enjoying the same song, each dancer was concentrating on one or another step that he was trying to learn. Sometimes, they exchanged glances or signaled in a few words the need for some change of movement to a colleague. None was entitled to centralized the guidelines as an educator. Beginners received elementary guidance, and the encouragement not to shy away but, above all, to persist. Then they would have to keep repeating and experimenting individually.

7 The basic sequence of breaking is comprised by “toprock” (a combination of steps performed while standing), “footwork” (part of the dance in which the b-boys can make step compositions, including solo movements) and “freeze” (closing of the performance with an unmoving presentation of a single position). Dancers can add acrobatic movements called “power moves”.

In most cases, learning happened by mimesis, as described by Bourdieu (1990) in relation to sports practices. The visualization of the example and the attempt to imitate it were paramount. Thus, the presence and performance of the most experienced ones were significant, creating references for the appropriation of movements and body memorization of gestures and sequences. It is also worth emphasizing that the structure of dispositions for the dance operated from an ambience that extrapolated the exercises in training, so that mimesis derived its effectiveness from the immersion in other practices that also comprised the context of the b-boys, such as the experiences reported by them regarding *capoeira*, gymnastics or musical consumption itself, as well as the attendance to celebrations.

Once, in a conversation among dance teachers and members of the *Restinga Crew* when Jean, one of the creators of the group, made invitations to the author of this work to try out basic steps. On this occasion, the b-boy posed as an educator and repeated movements slowly and explained how one should proceed. The author tried to follow his guidance, but the result seemed disconcerting. It was a great effort of concentration to imitate what the trained bodies of instructor and colleagues (from the dance course) seemed to do very easily. Basic steps of “toprock” and “footwork” were attempted, but the author’s body signaled that he lacked strength and balance, which made him think of all the work represented by the body of his instructor. His skillful body “connected” steps in a fluid manner and began the choreographic sequences from any point, revealing the expression of a memory beyond rationalization.

CREATION AND TECHNOLOGIES

Beyond and in articulation with mimesis, however, the individual work of the b-boys during training represented the quest for style construction, or flavor, as Henrique would say, using a current expression in their midst. Some would be more methodic in their gestures; others would explore elasticity or strength. Accordingly, the steps would receive variations vis-à-vis the singularities of the dancers. Although the mastery of fundamentals was a quest, rigorous learning of the steps was not restricted to a standardized realization; it was explicitly associated with the construction of a personal way of fruition, which singled out the b-boy among peers.

Style building was anchored, also, to study. Dancers spent hours on the internet looking for materials (songs, videos, tutorials etc.) to inform them about the history of “the culture”, about dance events and demonstrations, and about breaking dancers’ shows or other genres. Regarding the latter, they replicated a habit developed by their seniors, who would use VHS tapes, and amplified their resources, ending up knowing contexts from different parts of the globe. They claimed they looked for materials and inspiration on the net, so a video could be analyzed several times so that they could replicate a step and then change it by composing something personal and original.

On an extremely cold evening, not everyone was exercising in the gymnasium. Some were watching a video on the computer. It was about the history of

Hip-hop and it depicted scenes from the early 1980s. Seco commented on the different clothes and styles in the purposely non-audio video, which occasionally presented some short texts in English. As an example of what he explained, he walked around representing the gaieties of American and Brazilian b-boys, trying to establish the elements of the identities he perceived.

This was not an isolated fact. As a rule, the members of the group used digital technologies such as cell phones, notebooks, and tablets. Besides studying the steps of other dancers, they filmed their training to analyze their own movements; recorded their presentations, rudimentarily edited the records and broadcast them on social networks. Thus, the conditions of access to cultural equipment available to the interlocutors were close to that of Barbosa (2013) regarding the *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro. Since there were no alternatives offered by public-state apparatuses, they continued to build their aesthetic experiences in informal activities, combining audio-visual languages with informational techniques in the production of their strategies of enjoyment and learning, and in the socialization of what they did.

Their use of digital resources also suggested that we could revisit Lévy's (1997) ideas about the notion of "cognitive ecology". The demonstration of willingness to navigate a hypertextual environment and then to compose their own collections for study (music and videos, especially) and to operate in the composition of their own artifacts to share in a network, seemed to constitute a preferred way of learning, anchored to what was significant to them, and acclimated by the technological possibilities that they could enjoy.

Restinga Crew members, except in cases of short messages on social networks, did not make extensive use of writing or reading. Their experiences of schooling had guaranteed only an elementary appropriation of such codes. However, the use of images and access to the internet provided new bases of extended memory for what they were interested in knowing/searching, and for what they wanted to record and socialize amidst their achievements.

In order to invent a step, you do a research. You search several videos of other dancers to see how they are doing that step. Then you try to miss that step. After I've done it wrong, I'm going to try to make it wrong all the time, got it?, so that I create an identity and people see that I'm not doing it wrong. It's not a mistake because I do not know how to do it, but it's a mistake because I want to do it that way, so that you get recognized, got it? (Jean – Jan, 2014, translated by the author)

Moreover, due to the disposability of what is accessed or made available, given the intensity of information flow, and the difficulty of guaranteeing authorship, when the copying or adaptation of steps was common place, building an individual style seemed to be a quest regarded as necessary in this environment. Thus, we return to flavor, a condition for distinction among peers, and a possibility to anchor the singularization *vis-à-vis* the massive and recurrent production of variations on the theme (of which they were co-authors).

AESTHETICS

Regarding this analysis, it is also worth considering the relationship between the b-boys and their practice for the power of artistic production. Frequently, the interlocutors presented breaking as that dance genre whose flexibility and openness to composition deserved prominence. A characteristic that could be observed in the other elements of Hip-hop, when seeing DJ mixes or, as another example, compositions of rappers.

The sensitivity⁸ they professed was directed especially to the interaction with those who were willing to share dance moments with them. They stated their openness for the sake of the possibilities of reciprocal learning. According to the dancers, even the one who does not know could contribute with a way of walking, with some idea about which they had not thought. Their aesthetic experience seemed to be associated with an ethical disposition, open to interactions in what moves them and, accordingly, respectful for what the other knows and can make available to share with the group.

They said that they could compose choreographic sequences with steps from various types of dances, sport practices or everyday events. Therefore, they stated the need for sensitivity to what the environment presented to them. I think they spoke to me of what Pereira (2012, p. 186) calls an “aesthetic attitude”, as an “attitude with no agenda, an openness, a disposition not for the event itself, but for the effects that it produces in perception”. Such a condition of susceptibility would be, for the author, the empowering element of the aesthetic experience that instigates creation.

Therefore, it could be said that they enjoyed the songs by letting the body build the path in the swing of movements and thus they had ideas for sequences of steps. Seco once told me how he imagined the proposal of ‘*Feeling Gaucho*’, the group’s most well-known choreography in Porto Alegre, Southern Brazil. He was listening to music in the middle of the night, and while he was organizing his collection of *gaucho* songs, he had the intuition to compose breaking steps to their sound. Then he phoned Henrique and spoke of his inspiration. At that moment, it was nothing but an epiphany. Then, for the composition of the choreography, Henrique told me that he let the chosen song instigate what steps to put in sequence.

... the artistic production is a rehearsing, a proceeding through proposals and sketches, patient questionings about the subject. But this creative adventure has a point of reference and a basis for comparison. The artist proceeds through trials, but his attempt is guided by the work as it should be, something that, in the guise of an appeal and of an intrinsic requirement of formation, guides the productive process: the rehearsing, therefore, has a criterion, indefinable but very solid: the presentiment of the result ... the guessing of the form. (Eco, 2008, p.18, translated by the author)

8 For “aesthetics”, it is considered here the meaning related to the Greek term *aisthesis*, which designates perception, sensibility.

They said there would be no narrative (*stricto sensu*) in the sequence that they composed. But their position-taking was explicit: the possibility of integration, of their gathering together with those who usually lived apart. It is then stated something not necessarily rationalized, but that composed a creation capable of interaction and mobilization; something intuitive, performative and spectacular that condenses a certain interpretation of scenery and reflexivity, and that invites the audience to share the latter.

INDIVIDUATIONS IN NARRATIVE

The set of dynamics described above points to a relational game in which belonging to the collective stands in articulation with the possibilities of individual singularization, so that the practice in breaking connects recursively with the structural process of singularization as analyzed by Martuccelli (2007). The opportunities for fruition, learning, and composition of personal styles engendered challenges, while at the same time the activities and bonds built by the crew constituted a support from which subjects could gain social recognition as well as signify the existence of their individualities. It is worthwhile, now, to go further into this analysis by pondering on specific cases from this experience.

For the analyses proposed here, two members were chosen to narrate their biographical trajectories. There is no way to explore all the singularities under discussion. The analyses that follow, aim to highlight different processes of individuation and, at the same time, different ways of approaching the reflexive dynamics of the crew. Such a choice considered time of permanence and position in the group, age and type of preponderant occupancy in the daily life: Henrique, leader of the crew, had participated in the activities since the beginning and worked as a “workshopper⁹,” and Heitor, a dancer in the group for two years, still considered one of the newcomers into the group’s formation, was a high school student.

HENRIQUE, BETWEEN SOCIABILITY AND CUNNING

Among the *Restinga Crew* b-boys, Henrique was acknowledged as the reference for contacts, schedules, and organization of group initiatives, from rehearsals to events in the city¹⁰. At the time of our interlocution, he was 29 years old and lived in Restinga, where he grew up. He had three children from his first relationship, and dated a crew b-girl.

He told that, in early childhood, his family lived in the wealthiest part of the neighborhood and lived under stable economic conditions. Henrique said that

9 Denomination used by them to designate his activities as facilitator in workshops for learning the elements of hip-hop.

10 During the period the group was accompanied, it was realized that they would frequently organize dance events both in the neighborhood and in the city, having access to famous cultural sites in Porto Alegre (*Casa de Cultura Mário Quintana, Usina do Gasômetro* etc.). The programs presented breaking disputes, workshops and parties; sometimes these would comprise (qualifying) stages of the national championship.

his father had a job, that they had a maid and used to make donations at Christmas. However, after his father had lost the formal work, they had to move to a house provided by her grandmother. And then, soon after that change, came the separation of his parents.

Not long after that, at about six years of age, his mother left him in the care of his grandmother in another house. According to him, his mother worked during the day and, from Thursday to Sunday, she got involved with parties and discotheque. So, he stayed home alone for several hours, which worried his family. In his narrative, the references for protection and support were his grandmother, with whom he had grown up, and his older brother, with whom he had learned to dance. However, he maintained regular contact with his parents and went both houses on a regular basis: a composition that maintains relation to the family dynamics and flow of children narrated by Fonseca (2004).

My mother's house always had lots of people. All the friends of my brother, who danced. And my mother's friends. And there was always music. My mother had a sound studio. They had parties, it *discothequed*. I was small and I sat on the couch and I saw them getting ready. It was loud, my mother dancing. (May/2014, translated by the author)

He emphasized that he had contact with music early in life, due to the dancing and the flow of friends at home. However, despite his brother's invitations to practice dancing in his workshops, he resisted getting started. He said he was "fat" and embarrassed. He had listened to rap since he was a child and wanted to stand out by singing. However, when a friend of his age, about 15 then, decided to learn breaking and invited Henrique to join him, he found the courage to attend training at CECORES.

As he recounted his trajectory regarding learning to dance, he mentioned school only very few times. He managed to learn the steps with considerable effort, including some change in his physical condition. At that time, he learned about a dance workshop at the public school where he studied. He joined the classes, helping the educator with the teaching of his colleagues. In his words, the school environment would thus have been the first scenario where he had gained significant public recognition for what he was doing; the place where he experienced shyness, especially due to his physical condition, became the place of prominence among his colleagues.

The birth of the first of his three children (all from his first relationship) coincides with the immersion and success in dance. An urgent need to work came along with that, which led to a series of informal and precarious activities and eventually the abbreviation of his school trajectory, finished in the first year of high school. Regarding the latter, Henrique did not seem to demonstrate significant ties, and only mentioned cases associated with sociability with colleagues and/or visibility due to the dance.

Counting on the support of family members to provide for the subsistence of their children, Henrique continued practicing dance despite his precarious life

conditions and, as he pointed out, he rigorously attended the training of the group still in formation. Crewmates regularly went to his home and stayed late into the night, watching videos and talking about their activities; sometimes, they had even lived with him for some time¹¹. Participation in events and championships were intensified then.

Shortly after the constitution of *Restinga Crew*, in 2003, the b-boy got the first insertion as a dance workshopper in an assistance project. In a very reflexive testimony, his relation with the practice is narrated in different phases.

When I started dancing I wanted to perform the movements I would see on cassette tapes, got it? I wanted to use my arms more, because I did not like that thing of putting my back to the ground. The second reason I wanted to dance: I started to get very well-known and it gave a lot of luck with gals. As I was very chubby, I did not have those things at school. The third one, I wanted to make more money from what I enjoyed doing. This was what led me to elaborate choreography, seek knowledge, participate in championships. (May/2014, translated by the author)

Henrique's testimony is a narrative patchwork elaborated from different moments of his trajectory, signaling to continuous attempts of distinction articulated with the relational contexts in which he was. His reports indicated that street dancing, in which he had a resemblance of family socialization, was the space where he built a distinction (not even close to those experienced both at school and at work). The practice of dance in Hip-hop initiatives became the arena where it found articulately "support" and "proof" that would allow social recognition and elaboration of a reflexive project.

It regards to both individual and group participation in the championships and/or in the organization of events, but also to the achieved insertions and tactics produced by Henrique. The activities as a workshopper were his main source of income at the time we talked. In addition, he assumed a stand and tried to replicate and to extend the experiences of sociability, fruition and visibility that he had experienced in his trajectory. As a result, he said that one of his goals upon working as an educator was to publicize *Restinga Crew* and bring new dancers to the group.

I was thinking of giving dance class because I wanted to have more dancers, got it ?! Go to places and bring more people to *Restinga Crew*. Expand the

11 According to Henrique, the relationship with the mother of his children would have ended partly because of the intensity of his involvement with dance and friends, making his house a space often taken by the dynamics of the group. This situation is specified because, in the brevity of the narratives presented by the author, it was considered appropriate to remember the tensions that happened along the itineraries narrated, as a means of avoiding the impression that they constituted linear and projected biographies. They are more like a retrospective look at the trajectory, which was formed by a series of attempts, variations of intensity and links, discontinuities and tactics.

network, and today we do not have people just from Restinga. Wherever *Restinga Crew* went, I always found a way to get my students to do presentations. (May/2014, translated by the author)

The young man once said that he started educational practice because of the needs and opportunities that had arisen. So, under the circumstances, he found a way to have a job. In the workshops conducted by him in the counter-shift of the classes of a public city school¹², he realized that he was trying to establish a work program oriented to school festivities. He taught basic steps so that by composing a sequence, students could present at events¹³.

The b-boy did not have the status of a teacher, he was an educator or workshopper. He said that there were no meetings with teachers, besides, the workshops that he did were not articulated to curricular contents or to practices of teachers and their disciplines. There was a certain hierarchy between cultural capitals, and the work they performed seemed to be instrumental in the attempt to offer alternatives for extending the length of time spent at school.

If the school would add breaking to the curriculum as a technique only, or intended to keep the students considered “agitated” or “troublesome” busy, despite the “culture” to which the dance was attached for the b-boy, this did not seem to be considered. His work was to ensure (financially, above all) the experience of what he felt as his calling. Henrique’s identification with the school dynamics was not perceived and, as indicated above, he was more concerned about turning his activity as an educator into the space for his initiatives.

In any case, his position does not prevent us from observing the achievements of the cultural capital accumulated in his informal practices of dance, fruition and sociability in a context of poor neighborhoods.

By keeping the historical changes and the inevitable effects of the differential of the social position between the actors first, the trials allow to cope with the way in which the individuals are produced and produce themselves. (Martuccelli, 2007, p. 112, translated by the author)

12 The opportunity to work in public schools (and not only in assistance projects) arrived for Henrique after the implementation of new governmental education policies. The City Department of Education enables educational projects after-school with federal resources (by the More Education Program) and, also, by arrangements with non-governmental organizations working in the city. At the time of this research, the interlocutor was hired by a foundation belonging to a local football club. That was his main occupation. Sometimes, he did activities to supplement income or to raise funds that enabled participation (his and/or of a colleague of the crew) in dance events.

13 Besides the aforementioned work program, it was noticed that Henrique sought to create an environment of sharing with the students, as he experienced in the training of the crew. He also said that he wished to serve as an example and to support learners to be more “focused on and mindful of” their goals, avoiding involvement with “bad things” (referring to violent practices and/or crime), approaching the discourse of hip-hop activists listened in the field trips.

HEITOR, THE DANCE AND THE QUESTION FOR A PROJECT

Unlike most of his group colleagues, Heitor did not grow up in a neighborhood of very precarious living conditions. He told that until then he had lived in the Aberta dos Morros neighborhood, in a semi-rural area near Restinga. He was 17 years old, an only child, and he lived with his parents. His mother worked at home and had completed fifth grade; his father had completed third grade of elementary school and had worked since he was eight years old in gardening and construction.

He spent his childhood in that place. He used to play with friends on the street before his house and he said that that was a quiet place, without the danger of a “neighborhood like Restinga”. His schooling began in early childhood education and, from the age of ten, he began to accompany his father in work activities. On the wall of the living room there was a picture of him as a child, wearing a toga: “it was the graduation from kindergarten”, as he told, upon talking about his parents’ strong encouragement for him to study.

Unlike his colleagues, Heitor’s family had not undergone changes of composition throughout his short trajectory. In this relatively stable scenario, the encouragement of early involvement in work practices and the encouragement of studies seem to have embodied the “reasons of the unlikely” in the sense defined by Lahire (1997) upon listing aspects that could lead children of populace groups to school success, even when the reduced cultural capital did not.

My father always demanded that although I worked, it was always my education in the first place, my mother also never let me miss classes. There was a year when I did not miss any classes. So, I’ve always tried to be as assiduous as possible in class. I missed only once to do a crew presentation with Renato Borghetti. (Mar/2014, translated by the author)

Heitor finished high school without failing a single year, and wanted to attend college. It is worthwhile to consider here that the relation with his school career, even articulated to personal projects, did not seem to mean adherence to school objective. He showed disposition towards the construction of a personal path of independence, of “doing it himself”, created along with the family morality coordinated by the precocious insertion to work and to schooling. Thus, although he acted in conformity with the institution, the production of meanings in relation to it presented nuances.

Around the age of 10, he decided to attend a *Centro de Tradições Gaúchas* (CTG - A Center of Gaucho Traditions), for the desire to try something different from his routine tasks. His request was taken care of by the family, who also attended the activities at the Center. He told that his parents participated only to accompany and encourage him. As soon as Heitor left CTG, they also stopped attending.

The only contact I had with hip-hop culture was music, you know? The rap I always liked, I learned about the dance without leaving here, you know?, by some of my friends who started dancing. One of them danced freestyle and did *capoeira* and then, in the *capoeira* thing, he met a young man who trained

in the group *Restinga Crew*. At the age of fourteen, I began to go to practice assiduously. (Mar/2014, translated by the author)

He was still attending the CTG when friends taught him some breaking steps. He attended *Restinga Crew* training sessions through his sociability network, and when he started to attend them, the group was already well known in the hip-hop scene in Porto Alegre. He stated in an interview that the dance represented, at first, a kind of compensation of the routine he had: besides attending school and helping his father, he worked in various informal activities that guaranteed income and relative financial independence.

I only studied and worked, so I was a robot! So, the dance got me out of it, you know, because it does not matter what happens outside the training door; from the moment you listen to a song that you like, your feeling is already different, your head is already different, you want to dance and the rest doesn't matter at all, you know

And it would not be a hobby... Ah Wednesday I'm going out with my girlfriend so I will not dance. No, no way, you know?! It's something I can't miss any more, for some reason. One thing you already need, you know? (Mar/2014, translated by the author)

In accordance with his narrative, being among the b-boys represented the possibility of fruition, recognition and, in consonance with his way of "doing it himself", a way of experiencing autonomy. In addition, it was the means by which the experience of urban space reconfigured: with friends, he started to circulate through different parts of the city and, sometimes, to travel to participate in events; also with them, he had learned to walk the streets, identifying and avoiding potential danger situations.

However, Heitor's membership in the dance needs to be put into perspective. He stated as priority the projects of continuity of his school career and of professional insertion. The bondage to the group and to the breaking was not presented as temporary, but also did not enjoy centrality. Instead of committing to choose, he tended to focus on the possibility of conciliate multiple interests and belongings.

Turning to Vieira's (2012) arguments, it can be considered that his individuation process was configured by at least three elements: the socialization provided by the family, which, by its means, seems to have recognized early on his condition as an individual with autonomy; in complementarity and contrast, in the freedom of fruition and protagonism built with friends, in relative distancing from parents; and in the assumption of the institutional relationship between education and work, in which he had been working with discipline and success, for the narrativization of an individual project.

They [the crewmates] have been oftener in need than I, you know? But they lived much more intensely the dance than me too, you know? When they clung to it, they took the plunge! I have a very large control around the other things I

want, you know. I do not want to just dance for the rest of my life. (Mar/2014, translated by the author)

Thus, if Henrique made his path of individuation from the possibilities constructed in the practice of breaking, and later, insertions in other *loci*, Heitor conceived projections closer to institutional arenas, in accordance with the possibilities presented to him. But he also sought to articulate his feelings of belonging and to keep his connection to dance and to the group alive, which he considered paramount in his still short existence.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the narrative about the dynamics set up collectively in the *Restinga Crew's* rehearsals and on the trajectories of two of the b-boys that were part of the group, it was brought arguments about the possibilities of individuation, trying to characterize them in accordance with the subjects' participation in their possible spaces, similarly to what Leão and Carrano (2013) say about the "young Milton".

It was attempted to signal that the dancers built spaces to singularize practices and styles, and among the more experienced ones, they managed to accumulate cultural capital. These gave them the opportunity to have occupations concerning what they enjoyed doing, expanding the spaces of action where they could take a stand. It can be considered that, through the practice of dance, they found space for building autonomy, and extended their possibilities of independence, just like the problematization presented by Pappámikail (2012).

In spite of the adverse economic and cultural conditions of the interlocutors' places of origin, hip-hop guaranteed networks of sociability and reciprocity, fostering the production of individual distinction projects, including conditions of subsistence¹⁴. However, the articulation between individuation and autonomy did not lack institutional bonds and was organized in the integration of institutionalized environments and informal networks operated by the subjects during their trajectories.

The youngsters of the *Restinga Crew* seemed to have a reflexive practice in an intense and regular way. And dance, taken in its symbolic allusions to wars

14 Something should be noticed here: the practices of Hip hop in Porto Alegre, as I have observed, suffer from a certain loss of their mobilizing capacity. The initiatives of "the culture" seem to be sectorized, and many of those who were leaders of the movement seem to have been put in institutionalized positions (as producers or political advisors), without any kind of gain, for the movement, regarding a political organization that would guarantee satisfactory conditions in relation to disputes for public resources and funding. In addition, rap no longer has the same appeal for periphery communities as it had in the 1990s and early 2000s. I make these considerations so that there can be a reflection on the position of groups like *Restinga Crew vis-à-vis* power disputes. Although they had invaluable knowledge and were consulted every now and then due to it — by researchers, journalists, companies etc. —, this scenario does not change the vulnerability of their material condition. Although b-boys have better-paid jobs in some cases, they are unstable. If there are possibilities for individuation, the possibilities for financial independence are still restricted.

and/or gang fights or in compositions with elements perceived in everyday life, brings an invitation to the contemplation of reality, to “return” it to the peers and to the audience as in a spectacted version. In addition, the training and the battles — especially — are moments that promote reflexive dispositions by casting individuals into gestural dialogues that, more than imitation, require provocative response. Breaking brings an interpretive component without necessarily implying rationalization, in the guise of an aesthetic (mimetic) reflexivity, which alludes to a community where a “hermeneutic of reappropriation” is shared (Lash, 2012).

This hermeneutics of reappropriation, unlike the masters (and contemporary artisans) of doubt, will not continually destroy the foundations, but will try to keep the ontological foundations of the communal being-in-the-world open [...] will seek to designate a established set of substantive assets as the basis of any kind of communal ethics [...] will not be chronically in Faustian doubt, in pursuit of “transcendental meanings,” will not chronically postpone and deny signification. (Lash, 2012, p. 224, translated by the author)

This condition does not necessarily contradict and even may be complementary to the cognitive reflexivity performed by hip-hop activists when they elaborate narratives about the history of “the culture”. But it is a condition that keeps the uniqueness of not necessarily being restricted to the statement, maintaining sociability and providing learning and enjoyment in the connotatively. The hypothesis that, as a form of expression representative of the fragmentations and discontinuities of urban daily life, the choreographic sequences gave the audience of the crew movements is considered, whose interrelation would not be linear and rationalized, but did not fail to communicate sensations concerning the experiences in the city. Looking for an analogy, watching the performances was like watching scenes from a fast-paced movie, or staring at the shifting landscape from a bus window.

The dance practiced by the interlocutors was constituted intuitively so that one could show of the other an expression of what is perceived and felt. It seemed like a spectacular do-it-yourself, returning to us the multiform and intensified urban daily life we produce nowadays. Although it is not a narrative in the strict sense, it does not stop telling us “look, have fun seeing what is possible to make come true; feel what we have to express by watching what we can do”; through multiple icons, which can be interpreted by the hypertext of those who watch it, breaking communicates by tuning.

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