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The immortality of a long-lived

A imortalidade de um longevo

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Abstract

The essay advocates for theoretical reflection on elderly subjects as a constitutive element of South American capitalist societies, which is reflected in urban content. The proposal emerges from an interdisciplinary epistemological and theoretical link, which aims to contribute to the Applied Social Sciences, particularly Urbanism and the multidisciplinary fields of Urban Design. The research identifies the challenges faced by the elderly in the cultural and economic context of short-term capitalist culture. One significant aspect of contemporary capitalist society is the pervasive influence of temporal dissonance on subjects' experiences, particularly the elderly. This essay presents the findings of distinct and related research proposals based on integrating two lines of action (theoretical and practical). The theme is relevant based on an interdisciplinary approach, as it seeks to analyze content that emerges from capitalist cultural consonances and dissonances. This includes phenomena such as dyssynchrony, which identifies the constraints that particularly affect the elderly.

Keywords: Short-term Capitalism. Consumption. Ageing. Older people. Longevity.

Resumo

Este ensaio promove uma reflexão teórica sobre os sujeitos idosos como parte constitutiva de sociedades capitalistas sul-americanas, que são refletidas nos conteúdos urbanos. A proposta evolui a partir de um entrelace epistemológico e teórico interdisciplinar que pretende contribuir para as Ciências Sociais Aplicadas - em especial, para o Urbanismo e os campos multidisciplinares do Desenho Urbano. A pesquisa identifica os desafios enfrentados pelos idosos no contexto cultural e econômico da cultura capitalista de curto prazo. Um aspecto que se destaca na cultura da sociedade capitalista atual é como a dissincronia nas temporalidades estão profundamente enraizadas nas vivências dos sujeitos, sobretudo para os idosos. O ensaio reúne os desdobramentos de propostas investigativas distintas e correlatas a partir da articulação entre duas linhas de atuação (teórica e prática). Utilizando uma abordagem interdisciplinar, o tema se mostra relevante, na medida em que procura analisar conteúdos que emergem das consonâncias e das dissonâncias culturais capitalistas, a exemplo dos fenômenos de dissincronia que incidem nas vivências urbanas revelando fatores limitantes, particularmente para os sujeitos idosos.

Palavras-Chave: Capitalismo de curto prazo. Consumo. Envelhecimento. Idoso. Longevidade.

Introduction

The present essay promotes a theoretical reflection on elderly subjects as a constitutive part of South American capitalist societies, which are reflected in

urban content. The proposal evolves from an interdisciplinary epistemological and theoretical intertwining that aims to contribute to the Applied Social Sciences, especially to Urbanism and the multidisciplinary fields of urban design.

The reflection is inspired by the theme proposed by the journal *Oculum Ensaios* for its 2024 edition, which articulates three current and related subthemes: aging, territory, and environment. In common, the subthemes share larger issues, among which are the temporalities contained in the cultures of capitalist societies.

The assumption that enlivens the idea of the “immortality of a long-lived person” adheres to the proposed theme, highlighting the objective and subjective characteristics of longevity in a perspective of a *continuum* of the cultural cycles of capitalist societies reflected in the urban. In this sense, the cultural dimension of urban societies admits the incidence of a temporal component that is increasingly relativized on individuals and their processes.

The urban cultural dimension is based on two premises associated with the elderly as subjects of societies in focus: the first is an aging process linked to a chronometrically pre-established life expectancy, and the second is a culturally induced longevity consumption pattern as a strategy of resistance to the aging processes in the face of the present urban contents.

The essay’s justification and relevance are linked to the opportunity to connect the concepts of longevity and consumption in urban societies from a perspective of how the urban reflects this interaction and meets the needs of an important and variable demographic segment. Based on this, where, when, and how is the elderly subject situated in an urban society like this?

The structure of the text reveals, in fact, two challenges, namely, epistemological and theoretical articulation in the fields of Applied Social Sciences and Social Sciences, based on two lines of action that have proven to be convergent and complementary over the past six years.

The first of these lines of action considers part of the theoretical framework of investigations carried out within the scope of the Housing and Innovation Laboratory at the State University of Maranhão between 2018 and 2020 through the research line “Spatial limits and shared spaces,” while the second involves a selection of authors whose works were re-situated and republished from 2001 onwards, based on the new perspectives of these researchers on their studies, conducted between the 1960s and 1990s, regarding cultural and urban contents of Latin American and South American societies.

It is worth noting that the second line corresponds to the recent efforts in building the theoretical framework supporting the doctoral thesis of the student Andrea Duailibe, currently under development within the Graduate Program in Architecture at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

The theoretical framework of the essay is substantiated by the articulation between six disciplinary fields, based on the contributions of selected researcher-authors, namely: from Urban Anthropology, Debert (2004)¹; from Anthropology, Canclini (2008)²; from Health Sciences, Patrício *et al.* (2008); of Geography, Santos (2011)³ and Santos and Silveira (2021)⁴; from Social Sciences in Gerontology, Côte and Brandão (2018); of Psychology, Silva (2008); of Sociology, Sennett (2009)⁵, Castells (2022), and Bauman (2022)⁶

¹ Work originally published in 1999.

² Work originally published in 1999.

³ Work originally published in 1999.

⁴ Work originally published in 2001.

⁵ Work originally published in 1998.

⁶ Work originally published in 2007.

The text was structured as follows: (a) introduction; (b) first section, “Elderly do not sprout in the midst of the urban crowd!”, in which the elderly is understood as a culturally multidimensional subject, who is at the final part of what is presumed to be a human life cycle, temporally predefined; (c) second section, “Subjects in transition in transitional capitalist societies”, which attributes a transitional character to all components of urban capitalist society; (d) third section, “An absolute priority to the elderly in Brazilian law”, which deals with the fact that the subject, upon reaching 60 years old, is incontestably placed under a perspective of their rights, as an elderly, while at the same time being diminished by welfare; (e) fourth section, “Senescence and senility in elderly subjects: the epistemic, the time and the subjective”, in which the concepts of third and fourth ages are defined and placed in a perspective of participation and inclusion in societies; (f) fifth section, “The consumption of longevity”, which addresses the practice of a culture for the consumption of the illusory, and, finally, (g) the final considerations.

Elderly people do not sprout in the midst of the urban crowd!

The section explores the possibilities of syllogistic paths from a self-responsive exclamation under the pretext of a provocation. Obviously, from the point of view of admissibility, excluding the controversial Aristotelian doctrine of spontaneous generation, more interesting and fundamental paths for the evolution of reflection remain.

The exclamation arises from a present situation, especially in Brazilian society, where, within a 24-hour period, an individual finds themselves afflicted with a new condition, even if they do not show any sign of it.

From age 40 onwards, a person is considered a mature adult, socially and culturally belonging to the same group as others until the age of 59. Then he falls asleep and wakes up an old man, a categorical fellow. From this perspective, there is a temporary starting point for certain purposes; however, it is a milestone that does not correspond to an instantaneous metamorphosis, nor even to a “sprouting,” being more associated with labeling.

Just as a label is applied to a product, the condition of being elderly is imposed full of characters that are simultaneously conditioning and advantageous (under the argument of targeted and priority service) but also oscillate between the burden of pre-existing responsibilities and eventual dependence on someone.

The case exposes an imposition anchored in the temporal logic of a chronometrically established life cycle, where a normative set is shaped to discipline and direct the actions of the family, society, and the State toward this categorical subject. Thus, responsibilities are assigned through rights and duties, with impacts on society and the urban environment that reflect them.

Certainly, this temporal logic still accounts for a considerable part of the present dynamics, whether through principles that govern the linear dating of historiographical content defined by societies (and with which they are culturally familiarized) or by the apparent self-explanatory rigor of a periodization system associated with tangible phenomena.

According to Debert (2004), the concept of longevity has been based on more fluid and relative foundations in various research, especially in fields that allow the adoption of multi-method strategies including subjective and interdisciplinary approaches. These bases coexist with others, including the pre-relativistic principles mentioned.

An example of this is the persistence of adopting the concept of “old age” as a labeling criterion that proves to be mistaken (and perverse), where the proposition disregards the evolutionary vicissitudes throughout human life simply by imagining the damage to literary works, to systematic reviews of reference research, and even to philosophical thought if aging were understood only in the sense of successive losses and not of accumulations of knowledge, experiential gains, and repositioning of viewpoints.

From the gerontological and sociological perspectives, elderly individuals do not represent a group that only shares the symptoms inherent to aging as a dependent category, separated and/or dissociated from society’s dynamics.

These perceptions are part of discourses commonly found in texts and news that express understandings subliminal to the Brazilian constitutional text and the interpretations of officially established statistical data, preserving the efforts originally undertaken by the guarantees of rights of these subjects.

The elderly are admitted to this reflection as multidimensional subjects under sociological, cultural, and temporal aspects. They are considered components of heteronomous and capitalist societies, active parts of a conscious and living systemic whole, and representatives of a category diluted among the different strata of a capitalist society.

The next section is also dedicated to exploring the human life cycle within a spirit of time (*zeitgeist*) in which capitalist societies allow cultures to coexist between distinct and competing temporal references, which largely originated in the cultural paradigms of classical physics.

In this way, the exclamation that titles this section suggests an original and consistent path for understanding the connections between elderly subjects in a South American capitalist society and transient and equivocal urban contents to their existence.

Subjects in transition in transitional capitalist societies

The subjects considered elderly in 2024 were born and raised, mostly between the decades of 1935 and 1960, except for exceptions to the prevailing life expectancy pattern. Considering an approximate intergenerational interval of 30 years between these subjects, a perspective of transience emerges in which it is possible to conceive a significant incidence of cultural values from the late 19th century and the turn of the 20th century.

An interval like this presumes the coexistence between different family groups composed of individuals at different stages of life. In this case, each of them draws on a distinct repertoire of values, appropriated in intersecting territories and constructed in the mediation between spirits of time that correspond to each of them. This is because there does not seem to be a clear boundary between intergenerational cultural contents, established as borders to be abruptly broken; cultural contents are also susceptible to transitions of temporalities, thoughts, and social behaviors, among others.

An unusual feature of today’s capitalist society is the way the time component is incorporated into experiences. Time is admitted to processes as an accelerating mechanism rather than a disciplining one of urban human dynamics, constituting, above all, measures of consumption expressed in the urban.

This acceleration establishes a counterpoint to the temporalities admitted in analog technological capitalist societies, that is, to the chronometric intervals associated with the ways of

life of more recent ancestors. A time that presented itself as a powerful force capable of mystically and cyclically governing life in society, where the ringing of Catholic bells still divided the day into three periods from dawn. A culture that reflects a set of paradigms associated with the first two phases of capitalism in societies, whose traces still subsist in part of the characters and urban lifestyles under the present system's thick cultural layers.

Thanks to the enormous possibilities of production and, above all, the circulation of inputs, products, money, ideas and information, orders, and people, the territory gains new content and imposes new behaviors. It is the irradiation of the technical-scientific-informational environment (M. Santos, 1985, 1994b, 1996) that settles over the territory, in continuous areas in the Southeast and South or forming spots and points throughout the rest of the country (Santos, 2011, p. 62, own translation).

New temporalities impose themselves on current societies, fostering new cultural and experiential paradigms substantiated in networked capitalist societies. Castells (1999) describes this networked capitalism model, which has increasingly gained amplitude in financial capitalism, bringing the need for resizing culture and underlying concepts.

Together, informational capitalism and financial capitalism represent the last two capitalist phases out of a total of four (so far) merged into a single system.

Thus, three aspects are highlighted with the purpose of contextualizing the theoretical reflection on elderly subjects in the present: I. A logic of monopolistic capital (through the integration between large companies and the financial market), which favors operations between transnational corporations through investment assets (intangible and highly liquid); II. Subversion in the order of cultural values through strategies that function as mechanisms inducing consumption, as indicated by Canclini (2008), through communication tools that impose themselves as a culture of "flexible values" and "multiple belongings"; III. Urban content is conditioned by the use of values that reject internal regulation mechanisms, bringing a sense of instability while at the same time presenting itself as an indispensable component to the functioning of the set of gears contained in the short-term capitalist system.

The current capitalist system is notable for societies that heavily invest in establishing new consumption paradigms. In this sense, the maxim "people are what they eat" can be adapted to "individuals are what they consume" based on the strategies of spreading capitalist cultural ideology.

The subjects find themselves absorbed by a strategy involving everything from creation to argumentative strengthening and transforming products and services into identity factors. Consumption assumes a dimension of status and a philosophy of life. The notions of "exclusivity" and "flexibility" are incorporated into the discourses and, in a distorted way, alter perceptions and logic that substantiate the feelings of inclusion in the ways of life.

They are societies that behave technologically and financially as driving forces of a complex informational system in which, among other things, the notion of efficiency is measured by criteria of a *hybridist culture*, focusing on the immediacy of the "short-term" of financial capitalism. In this culture, proposed by Canclini (2008), individuals alternate between the positions of "creature" and "creator," fostering the necessary alignments between capitalist societies and hybridized cultures for consumption, whose results directly affect the times and ways of life.

At this point, the elderly subjects will be approached based on the three premises of current capitalism, considering that, once young, these subjects consisted of active entities equipped with values aligned with a temporality inherent to consciousness then present. For example, excerpts from the work of Sennett (2009) are associated. Side by side, these multidimensional subjects can

be related to a part of the dialogues present in the work above, when the author-narrator talks with two acquaintances, separately and at two different times, being a father and a son, in different places and times: first, with the father, Enrico, an elderly man, a “career” janitor established since he migrated to the United States, still young, with his family, in search of better working and living conditions. Later, with one of Enrico’s children, already an adult, with a family established, with a completed higher education, and a “career professional” inserted in the job market. Father and son maintain a difficult relationship, a conflict that intensifies due to the appropriation of competing values stemming from capitalist cultures at different times.

In “The Corrosion of Character,” Sennett (2009) highlights the cultural impact of distinct phases of capitalism on the values and ways of life of individuals in societies, situations where efforts to organize activities over time generate frustrations and misunderstandings.

The first premise of current capitalism associates society with a logic of monopolistic capital, which favors operations between transnational corporations through intangible and highly liquid investment assets. Their focus is on capital accumulation through monopolies and on the profitable return of the invested value in the short term.

Based on these conditions, a void opens up between the ways of life of subjects, taking into account the values and temporal references of each one. Next, a dialogue between the narrator and Enrico’s son is presented:

The dimension of time in the new capitalism, and not the transmission of high-tech data, global stock markets, or free trade, most directly affects people’s emotional lives outside the workplace. Transposed to the family area, ‘There is no long term’ means to change, not to commit, and not to sacrifice. Rich suddenly exploded on the plane:

— You can’t imagine how stupid I feel when I talk about mutual commitments with my children. For them, it is an abstract virtue; they do not see it anywhere.

During dinner, I simply didn’t understand the outburst, which seemed uncalled for. But its meaning is now clear to me, as a reflection on itself. I wanted to say that children do not see mutual commitment practiced in the lives of their parents or their parents’ generation (Sennett, 2009, p. 25, own translation).

The second premise reveals a subversion in the order of cultural values through strategies that function as mechanisms inducing consumption, through communication that imposes itself as a culture of “flexible values” and “multiple belongings.” Next, another dialogue between the narrator and Enrico’s son.

And as far as your family is concerned, your values are not just matters of nostalgia. Rico truly detests the real experience of a rigid paternal role, like the one he suffered at the hands of Enrico. I would not return to the linear time that ordered the existence of Enrico and Flavia even if I could; he looked at me with disdain when I told him that I have a lifetime job as a college professor. Treats uncertainty and taking risks as challenges at work; as a consultant, he learned to be a competent team player.

However, these forms of flexible behavior did not serve him in his roles as a father or member of a community; he wanted to maintain social relationships and offer lasting guidance (Sennett, 2009, p. 29, own translation).

The third premise presents an urban content conditioned by the use of values that escape all internal regulation, bringing a feeling of instability – currently, an indispensable component to the functioning of the set of gears contained in the short-term capitalist system. Next, the narrator reflects on this “flexibility”:

It is quite natural for flexibility to cause anxiety: people do not know which risks will be compensated or which paths to follow. To remove the curse from the expression 'capitalist system', circumlocutions were previously created, such as 'free enterprise system' or 'private enterprise'. Today, flexibility is used as another way to lift the curse of capitalism's oppression. It is said that by attacking rigid bureaucracy and emphasizing risk, flexibility gives people more freedom to shape their lives. In fact, the new order imposes new controls, rather than simply abolishing the rules of the past – but these new controls are also difficult to understand. The new capitalism is a system of power that is often illegible (Sennett, 2009, p. 9, own translation).

Subjects in transition in current transitional capitalist societies rely on flexible and superficial values to remain included and participants in this consumer culture. However, one aspect that stands out is the predominance of superficial values that, perhaps, do not correspond with the elderly subjects, which the distance can explain and the difficulty of establishing areas of intersection between these generations.

Elderly subjects offer a kind of resistance to hybridized content, not only due to a certain (in) consistency of values established on other cultural bases but also due to the difficulty of engaging with ephemeral content with hybridized cultural values of a short-term logic. These are contents that antagonize analog experiences and manifestations.

An absolute priority for the elderly in Brazilian law

The Brazilian nation is a capitalist society constituted on typical heteronomous bases, just like many others in the South American cone. Brazil is a Federative Republic and, formally, constitutes the Democratic State of Law, a condition that subjects its society to a dense set of normative social rights.

The Federal Constitution of 1988, when addressing the "Social Order" (Title VIII), innovated by providing special provisions related to the elderly. Art. 193 provides that the social order is based on the primacy of work and, as its objective, social welfare and justice.

Forward, in art. 203, item V, Section IV of Chapter II of Title VIII, the Constitution advocates that Social Security has as one of its objectives "[...] the guarantee of a minimum wage of the monthly benefit to the person with a disability and the elderly who prove they do not have the means to provide for their own maintenance or to have it provided by their family, as provided by law" (Brasil, 1988, online, own translation).

It is in Chapter VII, however, that the constitutional text is more specific with regard to special treatment for the elderly, with emphasis on the provisions in art. 230, *in verbis*:

Art. 230. The family, society, and the State have the duty to support the elderly, ensure their participation in the community, defend their dignity and well-being, and guarantee them the right to life.

Paragraph 1 The programs to support the elderly will be preferably carried out in their homes.

Paragraph 2: Free urban public transportation is guaranteed for those over sixty-five years old (Brasil, 2003, online, own translation).

In view of the new constitutional provisions, Law No. 10,741, of October 1, 2003, which establishes the Statute of the Elderly Person in the Brazilian legal system, came into force.

The law is analytical and conceptual. It is structured in seven titles and has almost 120 articles covering matters of civil, procedural, administrative, social security, and even criminal law.

Soon in the art. From the aforementioned law, it can be inferred that the federal legislator's action aimed to regulate the rights guaranteed to people aged 60 or older.

Still in its preliminary provisions, the devices of art. Article 3 of Law No. 10,741/2003 deals with the obligations, actions, means, and instruments capable of ensuring the guarantee of priority granted to the elderly.

The family, the community, society, and the public authorities have an obligation to ensure the elderly's absolute priority in realizing their right to life, health, food, education, culture, sports, leisure, work, citizenship, freedom, dignity, respect, and family and community coexistence (Brasil, 2003, own translation).

In this sense, the measures that are already widely disseminated in the law above stand out, such as the "immediate and individualized preferential service" for the elderly with "public and private service providers to the population," according to item I of §1 of the article. 3rd of the Statute, and others that are not yet, such as the "[...] privileged allocation of public resources in areas related to the protection of the elderly", as established in item III of §1 of art. 3rd of the same legal statute. Recently, in July 2022, the Elderly Statute underwent some changes, highlighting the rule of 2 of art. 3rd, which "ensures special priority to those over 80 (eighty) years old, always attending to their needs preferentially in relation to other elderly people," establishing a connection with the current concepts of "third age" and "fourth age," as will be seen in the subsequent section.

It is perceived that society, family, and the State are called upon to protect the elderly when the law categorically establishes that "no elderly person shall be subject to any kind of neglect, discrimination, violence, cruelty, or oppression, and any violation of their rights, by action or omission, shall be punished according to the law," in accordance with the article 4th.

Thus, a proposal for reflection directed at the elderly subject in an urban capitalist context of South American societies may give rise to the idea of a study that is based on categorical redundancies and/or statistical clichés, which, in the worst case, unfold into punishments or Conduct Adjustment Terms in the judicial sphere.

This is because elderly subjects tend to be highlighted as a population fraction representing an age category, mostly understood as just one among many in a population statistical scenario, and which also demands budgetary resources to fund differentiated and priority actions.

Notwithstanding the contributions to the field of Law and Statistics for the configuration of targeted public policies, the elderly are often referred to in the news pages of different government bodies as a burden on the public budget, given that the interpretation of data and information is incorporated into political speeches in welfare and anachronistic tone when topics such as "population aging" and the "need for pension system reform" are highlighted.

Senescence and senility in elderly subjects: The epistemic, the time, and the subjective

According to Silva (2008, p. 156), the "[...] emergence of age categories is closely related to the process of social ordering that took place in Western societies during the modern era."

The prevailing notion of "old age" still refers to the concept's origins, developed between the 19th and 20th centuries. The term emerged considering a stage of the human life cycle in society, associated with conditions of limitation and cessation of activities and a gradual process of social isolation (Silva, 2008).

Thus, from the emergence of the term “old age” to the current concepts of “third age” and “fourth age”, the conceptual boundaries have advanced based on rhetorical convergences and divergences that still predominantly rely on a linear organization of research results in line with a linear and chronometrically established time of life expectancy.

A current look at the evolution of these and other related terms indicates a rhizomatic process, stitching together the advances and intertwinings of this knowledge in different disciplinary fields of Social Sciences and Health Sciences, especially Gerontology, Geriatrics, Sociology, and Anthropology.

Bringing the issue to the South American continent, human longevity and the life cycle can be seen from numerous scientific and capitalist perspectives, and they are associated with the development of societies.

According to Silva (2008), the medical definition of “old age” was appropriated by other fields of knowledge, broadening its cultural spectrum and embedding itself in the collective imagination. With a view to rearranging the course of life, the concept of “old age”, inherent to human existence, is a condition *sine qua non* for categorizing the elderly person.

From this moment on, these subjects are connected both to initiatives for the formulation of targeted welfare policies and to health sciences, especially those based on interdisciplinarity, such as Gerontology.

It is through Gerontology that the emergence of a medical-social science occurs, seeking the integration between specialized discourses so that it is possible “[...] to propose new ways of understanding aging” (Silva, 2008, p. 159, own translation).

Through the disciplines that make up Gerontology, it has been possible to investigate the experiences that are part of aging, considering social, cultural, and historical aspects inherent to the process from the points of view of the subject’s physical, psychological, and social changes.

Regarding public policies, old age still represents a state that motivates palliative actions aimed at assisting the elderly, once the irreversible conditions of progressive health degeneration – or the concept of “senility” – are present, which evolve until the total extinction of the subjects.

The terms “old” and “old age” were and still are attributed to all individuals who reach the minimum corresponding age and/or are within the age range of 60 years and older, and, given their pejorative nature, they are likely to fall into disuse both categorically and representatively of these individuals in the medium term.

According to Côte and Brandão (2018), reflecting on the so-called “advanced longevity,” which considers individuals living from the age of 80, constitutes the challenge of the moment for societies. Reflection encompasses, simultaneously, the perception of a Human achievement as a result of its scientific and technological efforts and, on the other hand, a human condition for which societies have little prepared, an extended period of life not yet designated and not conceptualized. What now?

Until the last century, this age group had little representation in capitalist societies. It was treated mainly with palliative measures, both from the perspective of access to health and cultural life, revealing the “[...] perception of physical decline and absence of social roles” (Debert, 1999 *apud* Côte; Brandão, 2018, p. 215, own translation).

According to the authors, Brazil experienced a growth in the “elderly population” around the 1960s and 1970s, understanding it as a “social problem.” From this, the first social interest projects aimed at this group, then called the “third age,” were developed. The concept was applied to the

age group between 60 and 75, who until then “[...] lived the ‘time’ of retirement” (Côrte; Brandão, 2018, p. 215, own translation).

In 1980s Europe, the concept of the “fourth age” emerged, applicable to individuals aged between 75 and 80 years, with a more compromised health status – a category with a higher incidence of comorbidities and more affected by chronic diseases; therefore, with less participation in social life (Côrte; Brandão, 2018).

Thus, the distinction between the concepts of the 3rd and 4th age does not consider, mainly, the possibility of a change in life expectancy for a broader subcategory, based on qualitative findings present in surveys conducted through research that recognize a greater participatory potential in social life for individuals who are currently in the “third age.”

This phase represents a new stage in the life cycle for a growing number of individuals, while “old age” becomes a qualifier for a period in which limiting biological changes become more pronounced, regardless of individual characteristics (Côrte; Brandão, 2018).

At this point, it is necessary to address the distinctions and conceptual associations existing between the terms “life cycle,” “life expectancy,” and “longevity” today.

From an epistemological point of view, these three concepts are anchored in temporalities and spatialities that refer to Classical Physics and analog technologies.

The human life cycle encompasses at most four phases: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. These occur within a life cycle limited by two major events: birth and death.

Life expectancy consists of an estimate of the number of years an individual can live, a calculation that considers different variables, both internal and external to the human body, from the life cycle perspective (Côrte; Brandão, 2018).

Longevity adheres to the life cycle based on a “standard human being” – that is, the maximum lifespan that the human species can live. According to Patrício *et al.* (2008), this limit is currently considered to be 125 years.

Currently, the concept of “old age” is substantiated in the presentation of certain physical changes acquired over the years and in the conditions of activity and social interaction, a set of characteristics often linked to the concept of “senescence.” Not rarely, individuals in this age group are still present both in the labor market and consumer societies, as Bauman (2022) described.

The “fourth age” represents the beginning of a phase of intensification of characteristics already present in the aging process of the elderly subject, whether due to the onset or worsening of diseases and/or accelerated cognitive degeneration linked to the concept of “senility.” In these circumstances, the elderly individual envisions a scenario of longevity within the currently established life expectancy, potentially reaching a condition of “advanced longevity” that signals a new maximum age, without the possibility of establishing new phases for the human life cycle.

From the psychological and sociological points of view, aging involves a process that includes the perception of the passage of time in society, causing the notion of quality of life to be redefined successively by the elderly themselves.

The changes represent the gradual erasure of these subjects’ ways of life in society, which gives them a growing sense of incompleteness. They often transform a condition of longevity with quality of life into a problem for the elderly in terms of social and cultural inclusion.

Côrte and Brandão (2018) cite Baltes’ 2006 work in defending the idea that theoretical and practical advances suggest that efforts made for the additional prolongation of life could prove

innocuous since an extended condition presents “[...] a high level of vulnerability and biocultural ‘incompleteness’ in its behavior, affecting the limits of vital functioning” (Baltes 2006 *apud* Côrte; Brandão, 2018, p. 217, own translation).

The field of Aging Psychology focuses on the cognitive, affective, and emotional aspects of aging and its repercussions for individuals’ bodies and minds. The feeling of vulnerability grows as “blackouts” related to the following factors intensify: the deaths of spouses, close relatives, and friends; increasing cognitive and physical limitations; the gradual reduction of autonomy and the increase in dependence on caregivers; the decrease in possible events and activities; cultural and environmental changes, styles of music and places that disappear, etc.

In this way, the issues that arise from the conditions of senescence and senility of the elderly are also associated with aspects of asynchrony in relation to spatialities and temporalities. The phenomenon of desynchronization can be established amid the distinct expressions of cultural context, where the values substantiating the different subjects of the same capitalist society are anchored in distinct and conflicting bases.

This occurs because, throughout their life cycles, subjects are equipped with values tied to successive layers of cultural content configured in fluid and abstract spirits of time or *zeitgeist*.

Like most of the epistemological content discussed here, the *zeitgeist* represents a phenomenon that brings together different components emanating from societies—in this case, capitalist ones. Although there are no fixed border limits for a spirit of time, it is distinguished by its transient elements (material and immaterial), mainly by the values that embody these generations in transition.

The consumption of longevity

Recently, the Pan American Health Organization and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean focused on the health and well-being of older people in the so-called “Decade of Healthy Aging” (2021-2030).

The effort resulted in an updated report titled “The sociodemographic and economic context of aging in Latin America,” whose data reveal not only the aspects of sociodemographic and socioeconomic heterogeneities of the elderly but also the prevalence of barriers to sociocultural inclusion in current capitalist societies.

The publication describes the socioeconomic condition of the elderly from an “individual perspective” (and, as stated, “not population-based”), incorporating the demographic, social, and economic dimensions of the investigated audience into the report.

At the same time, the report highlights the obstacles to be overcome, considering a cultural and economic perspective of multiple transitions. These challenges permeate the cultures that characterize networked and financial capitalist societies, highlighting a phenomenon of asynchrony between the values that substantiate the subjects, the emerging urban contents, and the incident timings.

In Brazil, the barriers have focused on different aspects of elderly individuals’ experiences, especially regarding the dissemination and access to means for their health and quality of life. For example, communication and mobility are highlighted as the main means affected by conditions of transience and asynchrony.

The recognition and institutionalization of information about the elderly, combined with the evolution of the processes of identifying these individuals with their respective age categories, have allowed not only a more efficient targeting of efforts but also greater engagement of these groups in actions for health promotion.

According to Silva (2008), understanding the third age as a culturally and socially constructed categorical representation strengthens identity formation in the contexts of cultures, societies, and gerontological research. A well-defined and well-articulated categorical representation can also enable the interests of elderly subjects in consumer culture.

Efforts to build content to strengthen the concepts of “third age” and “positive aging” have served as a strategy for a cultural paradigm shift in societies. However, both have been more culturally disseminated outside the academic context and a specialized discipline, being admitted as a topic of great relevance in the media since they have configured numerous opportunities for services and products targeted at these groups.

From the point of view of autonomy, this new category emerges in capitalist society from the reorganization of specialized agents. A good example is the opposition between the concepts of old age and senior age, which brings with it a series of opportunities for consumption based on different social and cultural habits, more specific consumption needs, and, eventually, more sophisticated ones.

Capitalism has shown agility and assertiveness in offering products and solutions for this segment, so exclusive programs and tourist itineraries for this age group are already identified. A variety of products, ranging from special footwear with a design aligned with fashion to aesthetic procedures, luxury vehicles, and residential condominiums aimed at elderly individuals, are also available.

At this point, two concepts stand out as two sides of the same coin: positive aging and longevity consumption.

Behind these market solutions, a culture of consumption arises with the engaged discourse of Social Gerontology and the concept of positive aging, which have been disseminated through the media. In truth, it is a new market based on a lifestyle aligned with different consumption practices.

The consumption of longevity is embedded in capitalist society as a status paradigm, embodied in the illusion of extended youth, and appears as an abstract dimension of the most varied products. The desire for an eternal life crystallized in a body with a healthy appearance of, at most, 30 years, for example, appears in different forms, subliminally or not, linked to perfumes, margarines, shampoos, and many other products and services available on the market.

Thus, the consumption of longevity precedes the condition of being elderly, having a contradictory character, both preventive and illusory – after all, how can a small bottle of product really be anti-wrinkle and anti-aging?

Along with the “consumption of longevity” comes the “consumption of exogenous patterns,” especially in the context of network societies, as Castells (1999) describes a South American capitalist society in its condition of dependency.

These patterns are being inserted into South American culture with enough force to nullify long-established customs; in some cases, to the detriment of consumers, especially regarding food.

A networked society represents, in general terms, a complex structure based on social networks operated by information technologies and artificial intelligence. These networks are massive communication models enabled by the globalization of major economic activities. Among

the numerous features of this system is the culture of “real virtuality,” through which hybridized cultural values are advertised, tending to suppress local values.

A strong example can be seen in recent experiences of immersion in virtual realities through technological solutions capable of deceiving the human brain in a virtual environment in which human senses are simulated so that the interactions between the user (subject) and this environment resemble an activity in the physical world.

In these controlled environments, Augmented Reality (AR), Mixed Reality (MR), Virtual Reality (VR), and 360° visual material technologies are simulated, allowing interaction between subjects and different platforms, which are considered interactive and experiential. At the moment, young subjects are the most susceptible and dependent on these forms of interaction since they are increasingly suited to capitalist urban content.

Thus, its great contribution to the development of scientific and productive viewpoints, especially in different fields of Medicine, Biology, engineering, and others, virtual environments are increasingly present in urban social experiences, configured as conveniences and problems related to temporalities, as they substantiate the perception of asynchrony in current societies.

In South America, various situations that are part of local customs are affected, such as eating patterns, human aesthetic aspects, social behavior, housing, etc. Today’s societies appropriate the new capitalist paradigms in numerous ways.

Considering the spirit of this time and cultural and generational transience, the new capitalist cultural paradigms highlight the paradoxical aspects contained in the flexible cultures of today’s societies, resulting from the intersections and coexistence between disparate cultural values.

These societies, in turn, express themselves through intertemporal and “trans-temporal” urban contents; that is, urban ideologically representative of both the multiple cultural transitions (with changes, overlaps, and erasures) and the new temporal paradigm, which presumes the crossing and simultaneous alternation between the references of chronometric time and relative time.

Final Considerations

The proposal for reflection evolved from an interdisciplinary epistemological and theoretical intertwining, substantiated in the articulation between six disciplinary fields, namely: Anthropology, Health Sciences, Geography, Gerontology, Psychology, Sociology, and Law, contemplating elderly subjects in an urban capitalist cultural content of South American societies, with an emphasis on Brazil. In this sense, two aspects were explored, allowing for the establishment of some considerations about the processes that permeate the aging of an individual.

Regarding the aging process, linked to a chronometrically pre-established life expectancy, individuals face the procedural inevitability of a life cycle so that there resides a perspective of countdown and a pre-relativistic temporality.

Regarding longevity consumption patterns, the subjectivities that adhere to this idea are part of a culturally established set that aims to confront the inevitable processes from the perspective of the human organism cycle.

Current capitalism invests in discourses that, more than ever, transcend products and services so that individuals acquire, through them, “new ways of life” or “new experiences” in a perspective of lasting and flawless becoming.

An example of this movement can be identified in the marketing of residential properties in club condominiums, where consumers acquire a “new way of living” in a kind of “oasis” amidst the urban environment. In this segment, proposals for “equipped” club condominiums are already emerging to meet the demands of today’s elderly, where the square meter values are linked to the flexible values of a culture of long-lived youth.

These ideal cells configure nested structures, which stand out in the urban context as independent units, dissociated from the layouts, where hybridized culture materializes in environments, components, equipment, and ways of life that are supposedly controlled and separated from direct interaction with the trivialities outside the walls.

Already in cosmetic genres, the term “anti-aging” appears on the packaging of various products that claim to have revolutionary substances in their compositions that allegedly interrupt a natural and inexorable process of the human life cycle.

In practice, it is about the strength of a system that simultaneously creates demands (consumption) and generates products and services that transcend their own purpose, being converted into “something experiential.” In this sense, they represent a consumption that symbolizes status and longevity for the subjects of these societies.

In a capitalist society where temporalities are incorporated into experiences as an accelerating mechanism rather than a disciplining one of urban human dynamics, it is possible to infer that temporal misalignment decisively affects the logic for the performance of different activities. This forces individuals to deal with the effects of desynchronization on human health, with even greater harm to the elderly.

On one hand, there is a perception of always tight times for activity performance when the current model of short-term capitalism is considered, and, on the other, grand efforts are employed so that the subject sees themselves “frozen” in a past time because an aged image cannot be associated with a culture “of the new” and “of the immediate.”

As for the place of the current elderly, the timing that determined the experiences in analog technological societies no longer favors them, as the current spirit of time imposes itself through forces diametrically opposed to human existence.

Furthermore, the culture of capitalist societies presents itself as a kind of “metaphysical dilemma” that demands a fast pace. The eyes are drawn to past content that needs to be maintained in the present, like an ephemeral anchor, considering the distorted aspect inherent to memory.

Santos (2021, p. 263, own translation) argues that the dynamics of globalized societies “[...] do not erase remnants of the past, but modify their meaning and add, to what already exists, new objects and new actions characteristic of the new time.”

More than a new paradigm for urban temporalities, the current capitalist scenario is characterized by the imposition of hybridized cultural values associated with the new rhythms of social dynamics. These values substantiate a trans-generational cultural continuum that does not harmonize with individuals’ human temporalities, even less with elderly individuals, at any time.

From this set, the perception of immortality for capitalist culture emerges. A system that proves to be long-lasting as it dies and is reborn within the same ideological body, which is successively reinvented by societies, leaving its different forms of cultural expression imprinted on the urban landscape at each stage.

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Collaborators

A.C. S. C. Duailibe collaborated with the Conceptualization, Data curation, Data analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resource availability, Development, Data validation, and Writing of the original manuscript. S. M. Rola collaborated with the Supervision, Writing - review and editing.