The Multiple Faces of the Future in the Labyrinth of Life

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ABSTRACT *The study of life courses remains subordinated to methods wedded to linearity, in which present, past and future are linked together in a sequential chain. Social structures, however, are increasingly maze-like, and life courses are written out in hypertextual networks, guided by metamorphosis, multiplicity and reversibility. The future has unchained itself from plans that sought to tie it down (defuturizing it), and the corresponding horizons of possibility have broadened. In order to deal with this changing situation, we will probably have to think in terms of a 'post-linearist sociology'. The maze-like structures in which 'life dilemmas' are lived out also suggest that we should discuss the hypothesis of 'defuturizing the future'. 'Biographical research' into Portuguese young people (*n = 14*) suggests that the future is not defuturized as a result of being under control, given that, in reality, the principle of uncertainty rules. On the contrary, the defuturization of the future occurs through 'utopization' (imagined or open future) or 'atopization' (the banalization or absence of the future).*

In the Labyrinth of Life

When they analyse young people's transitions to adult life, youth sociologists feel confused. They therefore resort to an adjectival repertoire that stresses the vulnerability and unpredictability of these transitions. They describe trajectories as lengthened, fractured, delayed or frustrated (Craine, 1997). Young people themselves imagine multiple scenarios for their future, but their actual future is very often quite different from any of these. Political measures aimed at young people also seek to plan the future, but unpredictable reality creates uncertain conditions that often get in the way of these plans. The life courses of many young people are like garden mazes, with bifurcating paths, like that described by Borges in *Fictions*, as webs containing all possibilities. Possibilities that are not pre-determined but that branch out as we gradually realize their reality (*El Aleph*). The life plans idealized by young people open doors to a temporal vacuum, to be occupied at a postponed point in the future. Life plans that actual trajectories fail to match. The options are many, but they are also reversible and not always possible.

In Europe, youth policies tend to 'standardize' transitions from youth to adulthood—defining school leaving ages, educational careers, vocational training, employment policies—but young people tend to take independent control

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of their lives through 'autonomous searches' for life courses that do not always fit into the prescriptive policies that tend to normalize transitions. Why is there so often a contradiction between the standard patterns planned out for them and their non-standardized trajectories? Probably because the policies of standardization create a logic of linearity that fails to match the non-linear trajectories of many young people's life courses.

To paraphrase Adorno and Horkheimer, in their *Dialectic of Reason*, we might say that risk has secularized the 'fate' or 'destiny' that characterized traditional societies, but that, in the course of this process, risk has converted itself into mythology, given that its very incalculability makes it indeterminate, although indeterminably present, as a threatened future.

What is the meaning of the much vaunted institutional crisis in contemporary society? It means that a social change that Deleuze anticipated, in *Pourparlers*, when he formulated a historical shift from the 'disciplinary society' to the 'society of control'. Why do we say that the institutions that constitute the disciplinary society are in crisis (school, family, factory, hospital, prison)? Because the borderlines between the scope of action of these institutions are subject to a process of collapse; and even if their disciplinary mindsets persist, they are dispersed, in fluid fashion, throughout the social fabric. It is in this order of changes that the 'striated space' characteristic of the institutions of the disciplinary society give way to the 'smooth space' characteristic of the society of control (Deleuze, 1980). While the disciplinary society forged immutable moulds for its institutions, the society of control operates through flexible and modulating networks.

The move from a disciplinary society to a society of control is characterized by the collapse of the walls that ensured the autonomy of institutions. As these walls come down, there is less and less distinction between the inside and outside of these institutions. The outside invades the inside and the inside moves into the outside, in a dance of varying intensities, hybrid forms and artificiality. But the outside has also gone into decline, from the point of view of the dialectic that opposed the public (outside) to the private (inside), as demonstrated by Richard Sennett (1978). In the liberal tradition, the modern individual who was at home in his private space regarded the public as the outside. Outside was the domain of politics, the territory where we were exposed to the eyes of others, to the public gaze. In postmodernity, these public spaces are being privatized. The urban landscape is increasingly made up of 'closed' spaces: shopping malls, condominiums, sports centres, 'retraites' …

The education system is often out of step with the reality that surrounds it. It closes in on itself (in an inside), which makes it independent (from the outside). Dropped inside the system, young people are expected to prepare for a future (outside the system). Why do young people go to school? The answer points to a widely held belief: 'to prepare for the future'.

From this perspective, young people are seen as beings in transit, with no present, potential adults in the future. Their present would be tacked on to their future because 'you go to school to be someone in the future' or 'to learn useful things for the future'. For the school as institution, the present would therefore appear to be of transitory value (i.e., of little value). This means that the present of young people is futurized in an ambiguous way, and this is even the case when some young people choose the best courses on the assumption that these will lead to the best 'job opportunities'. Once again, the idea

of '(future) opportunity' binds the schools to an interiority (an inside) and to an externality (an outside), the labour market. But in contemporary society, educational careers do not end with the getting the qualification (degree, or other diploma). What we call 'employability' pre-supposes ongoing training, given the permanent technological renewal of the economy that means that academic careers no longer lead to a 'definitive opportunity', guaranteed for a lifetime.

For many young people the labour market is increasingly chopped up into different segments. There is the black market (undeclared work), the blue market (blue collared work), the white market (white collared work), the pink market (cleaning ladies, secretaries, receptionists, telephonists and the like), the red market (telephone sex lines and similar encounters), the grey market (bureaucrats, yuppie mentalities and grey suits), and so on. In other words, the labour market is a 'rainbow' of different segments. And this has sociological implications, in terms of social stratification and mobility, in the way in which people are distributed between the different available segments, and also because of the new meanings assigned to work.

One weekend I invited my son to watch a football match. He is 16, and every now and then we go and see a match. But to my amazement he said that he could not go that weekend because he had a lot of work on. This was odd, as the Easter holidays had begun, so I asked 'How come you've got work in the holidays'. I was even more amazed when he said 'I'm leaving for New York!'. So like any other dismayed father I shot a series of questions at him: 'Going to New York? When? Where did you get the money? What are you going to do there?'. With a smile he replied, 'You're already going beserk. Don't worry, I'm only a KLM pilot and this afternoon I have a flight to New York'. Although all this took place before the events of 11 September, I was in despair. Only later did I discover that, as my son was a KLM pilot, he had to draw up a weekly pilot report for the airline, and that his ambition was to reach the post of hub manager, for which he needed a considerable number of flying hours, as well as demonstrating other skills, even if all this did take place in a virtual scenario, with a simple 'flight simulator'. So what would make a young person exchange one form of leisure (a football match) for another that carries with it a heavy load of 'duty based relations', more proper to the world of work? There is no doubt that new conceptions of work and leisure are taking shape. In the case of many navigators in cyberspace, we can perhaps say that they are discovering a new course: that of the compatibility of work with leisure.

In all likelihood, the 'work of the future' will increasingly combine the marks of the two life ethics that William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1984) (1st edition published in 1918) conceptualized in their classic sociological work, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America.* On the one hand, the 'traditional work ethic', which is characterized by the desire for security and the desire for response; and on the other hand, the 'adventure ethic', which is characterized by the desire for new experience and the desire for recognition. The combination of these two ethics depends on the circumstances, and the circumstances can be hard to control. For this reason, young people seek to adapt to the changing circumstances that make them change the course of their lives. What appears to be increasingly important to young people when faced with the dilemmas of their own lives is a 'life ethic' that treats life as an adventure (Pais, 1994).

Life Dilemmas: A Case Study

Faced with the temptations of the consumer society, but lacking the means to satisfy these desires, many young people face real dilemmas in their lives. I recently accompanied the life course of Inês, a young Portuguese woman studying at university, who decided to work as a prostitute in order to satisfy her consumerist dreams (Pais, 2001). Inês continues to live with her parents, who have no idea of the life she leads.

The meagre allowance that her father provided looked even more insignificant when compared with the rolls of banknotes that other men gave her. The industrial society created a model of social integration based fundamentally on waged employment. However, in contemporary society, the consumer market is, for young people, a prime domain for social integration. For some young people, it hardly matters where the money comes from, as long as they can satisfy their consumerist dreams.

The leisure time spent with her university friends introduced Inês to the leisure-based sociabilities of the young people's world: clubs, cafés and partying. She began to worry about her image, and wanted fashionable clothes, to wear designer labels. But her parents were not well off, and so she decided to work. She began with a number of casual jobs until … 'I saw the adverts. That's how it all started!'.

It is said that when a prostitute goes to work all she sees is the money. This is not really the case. Inês feels revulsion at the balding pates, greying moustaches, dentures, beer bellies and groaning rheumatics. But nonetheless, Inês needs money to realize her consumer dreams. She dresses well, goes to restaurants and clubs, hides her humble background from her fellow students, she has bought a Renault *Clio*, which gives her status and mobility. 'No, (my parents) don't suspect anything (with a great laugh) … I'll explain what it's like. Do you know something? The car is in my name, and the guarantor is my uncle and it's my boyfriend who pays … that's got nothing to do with it … I had to tell another story … It's in my name! I have to pay each month …'.

Inês' life story could be analysed through a process of articulation (collage), consisting of situating different cultural reference systems around a central problem: in this case, 'earning a living'. These reference systems are to be found, in latent form, in the speech of young people. We then have to add the functional connectors, which in psychoanalysis Guattari has called 'passage components', that enable the other co-ordinates of existence to emerge. For example, in the case of Inês, it is pertinent to create connecting bridges between the profession of prostitute and the reasons that led her to exercise this profession; between what she says and what she hesitates to say. For this reason, I let her speak freely about her life, preferring merely to listen, even when, interrupting her own accounts, she replied with silence. Whenever she spoke of aspects of her life as a prostitute, Inês lowered her voice, opened her eyes wide and spoke of 'that, "aaaaaah …", "thing" and "you know" '; in other words, the interrupted flight of a bird hitting its beak against the window. A simplistic interpretation of this might lead us to suppose that she was embarrassed to speak to me about these aspects. Not a very strong hypothesis, given the fact that Inês will go to bed with anyone. Trusting to the route of subjectivity that enables us to reconstruct the objective reach of a consciousness, I read in her diary: 'Despite the other negative aspects, my dark side does not influence by

person, my self'. In other words, although she recognizes 'negative aspects' in her life related to her work as a prostitute, Inês does not admit that this 'dark side' influences her 'self' as, so she argues, she continues 'to be the same person as ever'.

Having reached this point, we can establish a connector between two reference systems. On the one hand, we have a reference system that invokes the traditional and Roman Catholic pattern of family socialization, which produces 'the same person as ever'. Her parents, with whom Inês lives, are completely unaware that their daughter is a prostitute. Public employees from a rural background, they gave her a Catholic education and, with some hardship, allowed her to reach university. This reference system is instituted in a domain of moral co-ordinates that allow Inês to be aware of the 'dark' side of her life. But why then does she work as a prostitute? Money is the alleged motivation. Inês tells me 'I began to see that they would pay 3000 euros a month, something like that … a month!', 'God, you can earn a lot', 'university students charge more'.

We can also trace another connector between the reasons why Inês works as a prostitute (the need for money) and the reasons for working as a prostitute. According to Schutz (1972, pp. 115–125), the 'reasons for' (subjective reasons) refer to the end for which the action is carried out; they are part of the subjective world that projects the action. The 'reasons why' allow us to consider the action as the product of past experiences. Consequently, the reasons for issue from a planned action; the reasons why justify the plan. The former reach into the future, the latter are rooted in the past. While the reasons for explain everyday acts in terms of plans, the reasons why explain the plan in terms of past experience. In the case of Inês, the reasons why Inês works as a prostitute (to earn lots of money) are connected with the reasons for; that is, the need to consume (money for consumer lifestyle), driven by a youth consumer market. Here we encounter another reference system, connected to hedonistic values, widely shared by young people (Pais, 1998). When Inês started at university, she started to want to go out with other students, to go clubbing, to dress well. But her parents cannot afford to pay for all this. So she decided to respond to an advertisement asking for 'young escorts, with tidy appearance'.

Inês claims to be 'the same person as ever' but the fact is that her 'self', which she thinks is still the 'same', is a *saturated self* (Gergen, 1992), in the sense that it is colonized by a (con)fusion of identities and reference systems, not always compatible, that allow for the emergence of a precarious being. This precariousness is also due to socializations deriving from confrontation of opposing cultural models, as happens when, in a country like Portugal, the values of modernity intersect with traditional values. To have a career or vocation meant, traditionally, to have a singular and stable identity, valued and recognized by society. But today, the professional career of a young person does not follow a pre-determined path; the possibilities of professional integration are multiple and diverse. You can be anything at any time; for instance, you can be a university student and a prostitute.

Towards a Post-Linearist Sociology

The growing complexity of society forces us to look for new paradigms in studies of young people. Why? Because the old theoretical models that we once

used fail to capture the reality that they seek to describe. Youth sociology cannot remain insensitive to changing realities.

For instance, when we analyse the life courses of young people, what we find is that they are increasingly subordinated to the 'principle of uncertainty'. This means that we have to work on the concept of 'life course' (trajectory) in a complex sense, and not to tie it down to a linear view of life. As may happen with any other concept, the concept of life course may also refer us to other concepts, both in its origin and in its connections. Each concept possesses multiple components, which in turn can be taken as concepts. The concept of life course includes the concept of family life, of school life, of professional life, and so on. Each of these spheres of life may be related with distinct groups of trajectories, albeit interconnected. For example, educational trajectories (x) connect with professional trajectories (y). There is an 'xy' ambit that belongs both to 'x' and to 'y', where 'x' and 'y' are indiscernible. The blurring of boundaries is a defining characteristic of the internal consistency of the concept of the life trajectory in its dynamic sense, at one and the same time the point where the different components condense, and where the whole constitutes something greater than the sum of its parts.

Young people's life courses are written out in increasingly maze-like life structures. The question I now want to pose is one of methodology: how can we account for the non-linear aspects of life? We will possibly have to think about the need for a post-linearist sociology.

As a matter of fact, in the so-called biographical method, preference is still given to linearity. The very concept of life course refers to a representation of life that takes it as a line, in a tradition that goes back to chiromancy, to representing life in lines on the palm of our hand.

Now the line here is a metaphor: the visual metaphor of life that we seek to represent or relate. When the metaphorical appears in the guise of a model (life model), the result is significantly insidious, the line as a model of life. It is clear that this linearist representation of life leaves out the polyphony of the multiple meanings of life.

Linear methods produce temporal visions that include present, past and future in the form of continuous and homogeneous time. Even when people tell us their lives are made up of 'ups and downs', there is a tendency to smooth out these contours in a 'before' and an 'after'. Although all life is composed of changes and discontinuities, there is an anxiously felt need to grasp the continuity of this real discontinuity. How? By means of the illusion of a 'whole' that reduces time to Euclidian space.

Often, accounts of people's lives are constructions of vanished realities, absences present only in memory. Indeed, memory often expresses itself through silences, gaps, the unsaid. But is it true that linear methods offer us a true account of the upheavals of life? I think that the alignments of life are as important as the disalignments, that the connections of life are as relevant as its disconnections; the latter being much more difficult to apprehend.

In the challenging book *Playing the Future*, Douglas Rushkoff (1997) wonders whether we should not read more comic strips. He may be right. Although they may look visually oversimplified and thematically primitive, it is thanks to precisely to these characteristics that they allow the readers to take an active part in apprehending the plot of the story.

The type of representation most commonly found in comic strips should also make us think of what to value most in the social landscape around us. Although they vary greatly in their pictorial complexity, comic strips depend more on iconic representation than on descriptive illustration. In other words, they communicate through relations and basic symbols, and the rest is filled out, interpretatively, by the reader.

Charlie Brown's head, for instance, is little more than an amorphous face with a single curl hanging over his forehead; it is up to the reader to fill out his contours of his face as the story proceeds. Often, the lines of the drawing with the greatest impact on the plot or on the nature of the characters are the simplest. The apparent poverty of the pictures means that they communicate through their iconic qualities, which are precisely those which most easily allow us to recognize the plot of the story.

Comic strip stories related through icons liberate the comic strip from the restrictions of the linear form of storytelling, thereby training the reader in other ways of understanding the world. In the gaps we find meanings that make the stories make sense. Rushkoff speaks of the richness of the empty space, which he called 'drain space', illustrating this with the example of the use of a lamp bulb over someone's head as a primitive iconization of an idea.

Comic strip, unlike the cinema, cannot show someone standing up or opening wide their eyes. In a comic strip—as in a life history—communication is through a discontinuous set of images (in the strip) or discourses (accounts). The images are static and separate. It is up to the reader to understand them as a coherent whole.

But unlike the cinema or any other linear format, this understanding is not reached by reducing the space between images, but rather by emphasizing their differences: before the idea (iconized by the lamp), after the idea. The moment when a character has an idea occurs in the space between the two drawings, the empty space called the 'drain'. The meaning is in the 'drain' where time really passes.

What matters in the interpretation is deciphering how apparently contradictory realities overlap. The contradiction is often dismantled through the meanings of the 'drain'. The meanings are found in the information gaps and it is through these gaps that the work of interpretation is carried out. The apparent islands of discontinuity are, in reality, like an archipelago, joined together under the surface of the water. The only way of discovering these joins is by delving deep to explore these apparent gaps, through 'interconnectivity'.

Through the exercise of interconnectivity we discover the meanings of the drain (i.e., the meanings forbidden to the linear mode of questioning). And it is by using this pedagogy of connection that we can get beyond many of the descriptive fallacies identified by the philosopher J. L. Austin (1966). A descriptive fallacy consists precisely of taking 'meaningless' expressions or 'disguised' expressions to be factual statements (e.g., a 'statement of law' being taken as a 'statement of fact').

Unlike factual statements, apparently 'meaningless' statements do not describe or register anything (and are neither true nor false); they are what Austin calls 'performative utterances'. In this sense, the performative is characterized by not revealing anything in the utterance (this is true of greeting rituals: 'Good morning! How are you?').

The utterances made do not therefore have to be explained in terms of the meanings of these utterances. For this reason, Austin proposes a theory based on the 'illocutionary' and 'perlocutionary' forces: the former refer to the *context* of locutionary acts, the latter to their *effects* on the hearer.

Let us look at the case of graffiti culture. The descriptive fallacy would consist of taking meaningless utterances (such as tags) as factual statements. However, much graffiti serves precisely to indicate (and not to register) the circumstances in which the statements are made, or the way in which they should be taken.

For the writers, what matters is the perlocutionary effect that provokes an assessment of the artistic expression on the basis of aesthetic effects (an assessment endogenous to the world of the writers, which divides them into 'kings' and 'toys'). And, of course, it is the context of the use of the wall that allows us to include, or not to include, graffiti culture in the hip hop movement.

Fragments of life, taken in their discontinuity, are parts of the sociological task of 'collage'. Collage implies two phases: an analytical phase when the signifier units are dismembered; and an organizational, synthetic and constructive phase. This was how Lévi-Strauss applied the collage technique to his vast body of work. In bricolage the work proceeds without a prior plan, making use of facts or accounts that come to us as leftovers or remains, in the discontinuous form in which they are given to us.

The post-linear methods permit us to account for the ruptures in life—experienced or reported—amply suggested by their tendency to fragment. Fragments of life that seem to have fallen loose from the whole to which they belong. And it is here that we are faced with the challenge implied by the methodological strategy of 'piecing together the jigsaw'. The challenge we are faced with is that of finding how to interconnect the fragments of reality. But this is the challenge of interpretative analysis, of working on fragments of meaning, tying them together and turning over their meanings.

The prefix 'ana' in 'analysis' refers, etymologically, to the idea of contrary meanings, new meanings. Meanings that may rebel against the linearity of life, and its smooth form. These are the meanings of the emptiness and discontinuity that constitute a challenge to the sociological analysis of youth cultures.

The Multiple Faces of the Future

We can find young people who claim to 'look at the future with their feet firmly on the ground'. But this does not mean that the future they eventually encounter will be that which they saw with their feet on the ground. The idea of having their feet on the ground refers to a 'foundation' (Calvo, 2001, pp. 77–102), which is not necessarily projected into the future. This 'foundation' conditions what can be done. But what can be done is not always the same as what should be done. At this point normative, ethical and cultural constraints come into play, causing people not always to do what they can, because of the imperatives of duty.

Gil Calvo likens what can be done to the material foundation (of structures), which is based on the principle of reality. On the same lines, what should be done can be likened to a cultural ceiling (of rules, beliefs, ideologies), regulated by the principle of duty. The material ground and the cultural ceiling are the main components of what I have called the 'labyrinthine structures of life'. The labyrinth would only cease to exist if the earth (ground—foundation) reflected the heavens (cultural ceiling). This utopia—that of the earthly paradise—is the

improbable utopia to which ecclesiastic theocracies and authoritarian regimes aspire, albeit on quite distinct grounds.

It is in these labyrinthine structures that young people ask themselves: what should they do? This opens up a field of dilemmas and strategies where the basic principle is wanting (associated with desire and choice). The crossroads of life force young people to make a choice, to opt for a path that mediates between a material ground (what can I do?) and a cultural ceiling (what should I do?)—the path of constriction, but also of liberation, of both the determinism of the infrastructure and the normative control exercised by the superstructure. It is at these labyrinthine crossroads that life and life's future are played out.

In the labyrinth of life, some young people want (principle of desire), but are not able (principle of reality), to overcome to challenges they set themselves. As a result, they sometimes refer to the future in conditional terms, the idea of planning for the future is replaced by expectation, by the idea of waiting invested in dreams or illusions.

Life courses are synchronized with life plans, but often it is the planning process that stops people from reaching their destination, an impasse encountered in the present which makes the future absent, the treacherous terrain that makes it difficult to choose.

So we find that many young people are strongly geared to the present, given that the future fails to offer the chance for them to turn their aspirations for it into reality. Future plans are relatively absent. Those that they have are short term. They concentrate on living their lives from day to day.

In tackling the question of the future, Luhmann (1976) draws a distinction between 'technological schemes' and 'utopian schemes'. The concept of 'present future' is regarded as belonging to the utopian type. The future appears as a scenario on to which hopes and fears are projected. It is a future that cannot begin, which remains as present future. It escapes us if we try to get close to it. It is the shadow of the present. In contrast, the concept of 'future presents' belongs to the technological type. Technologies are geared to future presents, turning them into anticipated presents. They postulate and anticipate causal and stochastical links between future events, incorporating them into the present. In Luhmann's view, technology can use the defuturized future as a fictitious present from which the present is chosen, for conversion into a possible past of future presents, or one capable of encompassing these presents.

To think of the future as a 'present future' means recognizing the influence of surprise, the unexpected and the new, but it also means understanding its maze-like structure. To think of it as future present is to conceive it in the image of the present, under control, in an effort to reduce its complexity at the cost of a sequential model in which what happens and what will happen are interconnected and inter-related, thanks to the anticipation of causal links that incorporate the future into the present.

This is a 'defuturized future' (Díaz, 2000, p. 103) that is converted into a fictitious present, from which uncertainty and unpredictability are banished. My contention is that that the young people of today are embracing the utopian time (present future) proper to labyrinthine societies, characterized by unpredictability.

Among 14 Portuguese young people that I recently accompanied using the biographical method (Pais, 2001), the tendency is to defuturize the future through 'utopianization' or 'atopianization'. The utopianization of the future

results in a fantasy or open future, while the atopianization of the future reduces it to ordinariness, or else results in an absent future.

In 'fantasy futures', dreams seem to take control of people's lives. These subjects have no hesitation in talking about their plans for the future, as if their lack of concern about the future were a strategy in some cases for alleviating the worries of the present.

> I'm going to be rich, because my money stretches so far, it's incredible, it goes a long way, you see, because I'm learning to be economical. (Xico, pizza delivery boy)

> I think like anyone else, I'm a bit afraid … But I'm very, very hopeful! … Lots of dreams, lots of hope … Sometimes I surprise myself and I don't know whether I'm dreaming or not … (Ninó, agronomy student, final year)

> I know exactly what I would like to do. It would be to do what I've always dreamed of. Have a band, write my own songs. Me and the band … And compose our own stuff, our own numbers, or own style. Try to be original. Play gigs like … happiness … That's my dream … to play gigs, teach, work, to go on tour! … It's my dream and I've been working for it since I was fifteen. (Zé Manuel, unemployed)

In the 'open future', people simply hope that the present will reveal itself, that things will happen. The present is extended precisely by suspending the process of becoming, thanks to a moratorium on decisions that might modify the present. As a result, the young people we followed tended to draw back in the face of simultaneous options (either … or ….), preferring to combine them instead (both … and ….) (Díaz, 2000, p. 195), in order to keep the future open. The actual prolongation of the life stage associated with youth represents postponement of the decision to be adult, to contract matrimony, to accept family responsibilities.

> I've always got my head all over the place! (Ninó, agronomy student, final year)

> I'm praying for a steady job in design, and whenever possible, as a music lover, to play a bit … (Festo, DJ)

> Professional objectives? I would obviously like to take part [in politics] … and in the future, if the chance is there, the chance is there. I don't mean that people aren't little angels and don't want anything for themselves, they have ambitions, of course! (Teodoro, member of the youth wing of a political party)

In the 'future reduced to ordinariness', life is compulsively centred in the present, in the absence of any expectations of the future. When the future is relatively unpredictable, the ordinary is more strongly invested in and the future takes on the trappings of the same ordinariness. This process of 'banalization' of life is due to both the relative desertification of a temporal horizon of projects rooted in the present, and to a present populated by stigmas that the subject wishes not to project into the future.

> When I finish the course, I have to make a decision about my life. I really will. I don't know where I'll go, whether I'll stay here in Portugal, or go to Spain … I'll get married, of course! And then when I'm married I'll start working, I don't know what, I'll leave [lowering her voice] all this … (Inês, young prostitute)

> I hope one day to be forgiven, like I say, that I can pay everything and go back to my normal life. (Joana, prostitute)

> My plans for the future are to have a family, have a wife, have a son, have a house, and have a life like that … live from my work and manage to have one thing at a time. (M7, young prisoner)

> The aim I'm struggling to achieve is to be a P.E. teacher, to have a good job, to earn a good salary one day, and to have a wife. (Rotter, young prisoner)

Finally, the 'absent future' reflects an inability to plan, due to circumstances of life (drug dependency or imprisonment), which themselves make any such plans unfeasible.

> I know this is no life for anyone but … If I carry on like this I won't last long, That I won't. (Rui, drug addict)

> There will be lots of problems, because he's a convict, because he's been in prison, and I'm going to have to start from zero, to build my life from the square one. (M7, young prisoner)

> I'm here in the cell writing amongst the walls and the railings, listening to the buses, the cars and the planes passing over. (Blatte, young prisoner)

In short, anticipating the future means predicting it, submitting it to a projection, to a linearity in which the starting point (or place of transit) is the present. As a result, time is anticipated (which means projected), starting from a present situation. In this case, the future is virtually an experience of present time (future present). But how is it possible to project the future on the basis of such an unstable present. The dominant trend among the young people we interviewed is to adopt a defensive strategy. Concern about the future is compensated by the greater value attached to the present. In the face of a threatening future and the lack of job opportunities, young people prefer to live out the need to project today onto tomorrow in a prolongation of the present. There is no escape from the maze of life; what counts is knowing how to live life in its labyrinthine form. There is no point in projecting unstable futures, mirrors of the instability of the present. Better to utopianize the future, and one possible form of this is to imagine multiple futures. In order to create the conditions that make utopia possible, best not to take any decisions that might constitute a commitment, either for the person making the decision or for the utopias of their ideals. Today's commitments compromise the future, fixing it within a geometric order that contests a present that is meant to be lived. So it is preferable to speculate about the future (a fantasy or open future) or to imagine it as banal or absent, thereby making the present possible in the maze of life.

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