

## SPECIAL ISSUE: 'POLY-PERIPHERY' AND THE 'PERIPHERAL TURN' IN URBAN STUDIES

### PERIPHERAL NARRATIVES AND URBAN ETHNOGRAPHIES: THE EVERYDAY PERSPECTIVE OF SUBJECTS ON URBAN EXPERIENCES

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#### Abstract

*We have drawn on elements of urban ethnography and action research to examine socio-spatial practices and urban experiences from a peripheral perspective. The study, conducted in the districts of Cidade Tiradentes and São Mateus, in the city of São Paulo, evaluated the urban routes and narratives of residents who, associated with the researcher's experiences, have exposed a unique, fractured peripheral condition that reveals socio-spatial fragmentation.*

#### Keywords

*Production of Urban Space; Urban Experiences; Urban Ethnography; Urban Peripheries; Socio-spatial Mobility; Socio-spatial Inequality and Segregation; Socio-spatial Differentiation.*

**NARRATIVAS PERIFÉRICAS E ETNOGRAFIAS URBANAS:  
A ÓTICA COTIDIANA DOS SUJEITOS SOBRE AS  
EXPERIÊNCIAS URBANAS**

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Resumo

*Utilizamos elementos de etnografia urbana e pesquisa-ação para examinar práticas socioespaciais e experiências urbanas a partir de uma perspectiva periférica. O estudo, realizado nos distritos de Cidade Tiradentes e São Mateus, na cidade de São Paulo, avaliou percursos urbanos acompanhados e narrativas de moradores que, associadas às vivências da pesquisadora, desvelaram uma condição periférica singular, cindida e reveladora da fragmentação socioespacial.*

Palavras-chaves

*Produção do Espaço Urbano; Experiências Urbanas; Etnografia Urbana; Periferias Urbanas; Mobilidade Socioespacial; Desigualdade e Segregação Socioespacial; Diferenciação Socioespacial.*

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## Introduction

We have investigated socio-spatial fragmentation in the city of São Paulo by evaluating urban experiences and socio-spatial practices, taking into account both social time (the longer term) and everyday time, associated with mobility and the peripheral condition of residents in the districts of São Mateus and Cidade Tiradentes. This condition was explored from three complementary perspectives: the narratives of peripheral subjects, evaluated through urban ethnography; the analytical perspective of a peripheral researcher (first author), who, positioned in the periphery as both a researcher and a resident, offers an interpretation shaped by shared common experiences with the researched subjects and herself, thereby enriching the interpretation of the observed realities; and the reflective mediation of the researcher-observer (second author), who linked immediate experiences to the broader dimensions of social reality.

The text has been structured with this introduction, which presents the theoretical and conceptual foundations regarding the periphery, followed by a section that uses narratives as the investigative starting point, linking urban experiences and socio-spatial practices, and examining them through the everyday routes taken by the investigated subjects. We then discuss the protagonism of these subjects in interpreting and validating these narratives. The fourth section offers a deeper analysis of the representations constructed by the subjects and captured through their urban routes, which form the central narratives of the text. Lastly, we reflect on the main findings and the contributions of our investigation to the

ongoing debate regarding the production of urban space in peripheral contexts. These narratives are highlighted considering the importance of valorizing the cultural and political aspects of peripheral areas (D'Andrea, 2021; 2022).

The notions of inequity and the lack of resources for collective consumption are, as a rule, associated with the periphery by different authors. Milton Santos (2020), for example, questioned the possibility of citizenship and being a citizen in urban peripheries, stressing how living in the periphery often signifies being condemned to poverty, as a consequence of the prevailing economic and socio-spatial model. In other words, in our interpretation, this means that the peripheral condition exacerbates the peripheral situation.

However, as Milton Santos (1990a) suggests, if urban space is a complex fabric, the peripheries should not be considered as a monolith. The notion of periphery is often framed as an area located on the outskirts or limits of an urban center, marked by unfavorable socioeconomic conditions and a lack of collective consumption resources (Lojkine, 1981), which negatively impacts life. For example, authors such as Canettieri (2019) and Merrifield (2015) characterize the periphery as a residue of urbanization, highlighting how the production of urban space reproduces inequalities and social marginalization. This pattern of urbanization is commonly present in these areas of Brazilian cities, as noted by Sousa (2019), who associates this space with the importance of housing complexes, which Barone (2013) traces back to the 1970s, during the military dictatorship. Thus, authors such as D'Ottaviano (2021), Rolnik (2015), and Maricato (2001) emphasize the intricate interaction between urban policies, housing, and space, demonstrating how state interventions and real estate speculation contribute to unequal patterns of occupation and access to urban resources.

The history of São Paulo's periphery, particularly the Eastern Zone, reflects a complex interplay of geographical, social, and historical factors. Milton Santos (1994) underscored how rapid urbanization and population growth have been pivotal in shaping the formation of these areas. Bonduki (2007) analyzed how housing programs targeted at these regions have contributed to socio-spatial segregation and the deterioration of housing conditions. Similarly, Kowarick (1993) emphasized the lack of public services and basic infrastructure, thereby reinforcing social inequalities.

However, it is essential to recognize the heterogeneity of the periphery and the complexity of its formation. Cruz and Legroux (2023), for example, address the issue of territorial stigma and socio-spatial disparities in peripheral areas, emphasizing the importance of uncovering the complexities inherent to them. Within broader theoretical debates, D'Andrea (2013) discussed how the definition of "periphery" has evolved over time, influenced by both academia and social and

artistic movements. This redefinition is crucial for understanding the periphery not solely as a space of precariousness but also as a site of cultural expression, sociability, and political projects of emancipation, as proposed by Kopper and Richmond (2020).

#### 1. Narratives, urban experiences, and socio-spatial practices

In the intricate fabric and multifaceted organization of urban spaces, where urban experiences and socio-spatial practices intertwine and identities are forged, urban ethnography emerges as a crucial methodological approach for assessing the space and social time of city dwellers. The methodological episteme of narrating and documenting experiences and practices serves as an essential tool, enabling the narratives of subjects to be apprehended through their rhythms and trajectories. In this regard, we draw on Certeau (1984) and Geertz (1989), whose work was foundational in understanding urban ethnography and its relationship with epistemological narratives.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Certeau (1984) outlined the significance of quotidian practices – here identified as socio-spatial practices – as expressions of resistance and culture, emphasizing the need for an approach that goes beyond dominant structures to capture the vibrancy of urban experiences. Thus, the actions of urban subjects, even when not always the object of their own autonomous reflection yet intrinsically linked to socio-spatial practices and urban experiences, should be interpreted and understood, as Geertz (1989) suggests, within the framework of everyday life.

Frehse (2016), Goffman (1967), and Lefebvre (2000) recognized that space is inscribed with symbols that are continuously re-created through experiences, practices, and rhythms observed in the lived space. This space, in turn, both reflects and is shaped by dialectical processes that contest a uniform, repetitive, and fragmented understanding of daily life (Frehse, 2016). For Lefebvre (2021), everyday life harbors deep structures that, although often concealed, can be brought to the surface through experiences and practices, generating narratives that, as in our case, are interpreted from the perspective of urban ethnography.

The epistemology underlying urban ethnography must acknowledge the importance of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in shaping its investigative practices. As argued by authors such as Lareau (2003) and Becker (1998), the position of the researcher as an active participant in social interaction is crucial for an authentic understanding of urban dynamics. Thus, the act of narrating and documenting everyday life is not merely a methodological technique but also a critical reflection on the researcher's role in the production of knowledge.

Ethnographic research methodology, as proposed by Magnani (2002), is not based solely on a fixed set of techniques and procedures for data collection and analysis, such as direct observation, detailed note-taking, interviews, questionnaires, and mapping (Magnani, 2002, p. 17). While it may incorporate any of these methods, depending on the specific context and demands of each study, ethnography should be understood as a strategy for engaging with and comprehending reality, thereby allowing for the flexible integration of multiple techniques as needed. In ethnography, attention to detail can be revealing, since it uncovers patterns and trajectories, proposes alternative interpretations, and facilitates comparison, generalization, and typification (Magnani, 2002).

Telles (1994) underscores the importance of ethnographic comparison, which, in our case, involves urban experiences and socio-spatial practices related to urban mobility. She emphasized that the researched subjects are not passive but rather active in constructing their identities and reinterpreting spaces. This perspective suggests the possibility of assessing these actions through the analysis of narratives.

Thus, the ethnographic approach foregrounds the multiplicity of urban voices, considering narratives that reveal socio-spatial experiences and practices. By exploring the intersections between mobility and urban space, Telles (1994) proposed an analytical framework that uncovers the unique characteristics of different groups, later expanding this inquiry (2006) by investigating urban trajectories, thereby demonstrating how subjects experience and transform their spaces. Karina Santos (2024) adopted this comparative perspective in her investigations of subjects, taking into account the temporalities and spatialities of the narratives, which are mediated both bodily and materially. These interactions manifest in forms and dynamics that are inherently conflictual, not only expressing tensions but also emerging from them. In summary, we propose employing an epistemology rooted in the lived experience of everyday life (Lefebvre, 2021), as narrated from the periphery by those who inhabit it (D'Andrea, 2020).

Narrative research (Breton, 2020, 2023) explores the connection between the reference experience, the emerging narrative, and the narrative situation. According to Batista and Sposito (2023, p. 17) ,

From this perspective, the rhythm of everyday life, analyzed within a spatiotemporal framework, facilitates the comprehension of habits, behaviors, and customs of society in motion, which evolve over both extended and fleeting moments, yet always shaping the subject's narrative.

The epistemology of narrative provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding complex urban narratives, emphasizing the importance of grasping how individual narratives intersect and influence the spatial realities of peripheral subjects, as exemplified in our research.

## 2. Peripheral narratives: the perspective of subjects on their urban experiences in the periphery

In this section, our focus turns to investigating and presenting the narratives of peripheral subjects, thereby disclosing their urban experiences. We recognize that these experiences often stem from socio-spatial practices and at other times are expressed through them. However, these practices, typically occurring over short periods of time, infrequently become objects of reflection for the subjects themselves, and are thus closely linked to everyday life. This very same everyday life, when viewed as social time – the lived time, the subject's time – can become representative of experiences when an object of reflection or self-reflection. Narratives, as proposed by Breton (2020, 2023), enable this evaluation, while rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 2021) situates them in a perspective of movement, serving as a methodological tool, thus forming the basis of our ethnographic approach.

Thus, our focus was on understanding the experiences of peripheral subjects (D'Andrea, 2013) as they navigate the city through their daily movements, which encompass their socio-spatial practices, primarily related to urban mobility. In doing so, we sought to identify not only the challenges and adversities they encounter but also the strategies of resistance and adaptation they employ in response.

While peripheral areas are often associated with deprivation and social exclusion, for authors such as Kollontai (2017), they are also spaces of power, where life manifests in vibrant and creative ways. This perspective is supported by Silva (2019), who argues that peripheral narratives offer a vital counter-narrative to the stereotypical images often reproduced by the media and traditional literature. Each narrative serves as an artifact that provides a unique perspective on a reality often marginalized in various dimensions of daily life, in which peripheral subjects emerge not merely as passive recipients of circumstances, but as protagonists in the creation of their own narratives and identities. These identities are shaped by intricate socio-spatial relationships (Sposito, 2019) that mold their understanding of urban space and influence their interactions with the surrounding environment.

Such peripheral narratives can ultimately reflect a social condition intricately tied to spatial conditions, and is expressed in the constitution of distinct subjects. In this regard, Mares and Paula (2023), engaging with urban spatial themes and intersectional issues, drawing on the work of Ratts (2003), Silva (2014), Henning (2015), and Moutinho (2014), suggest that the social markers of subjects play a

crucial role in assessing urban experiences. They highlight the interplay of both social and spatial conditions and indicate multiple dimensions.

Baby-Collin (2002), in turn, demonstrated how inhabitants of peripheral areas experience the city in a distinctly temporal manner, often marked by less agency and greater restrictions, compared to residents in central areas or those with better accessibility and access collective consumption. This disparity is attributed not only to the physical distance from central areas and the precariousness of transportation services, but also to the nature of daily activities, which tend to be more survival-oriented than leisure-oriented.

Moreover, Baby-Collin (2002) also emphasized that citizenship is constructed through spatial interactions and a sense of belonging to the city, a process that is especially complex in peripheral areas. This dynamic may be understood both as a form of resistance and as an expression of urban identity, suggesting that the right to the city for peripheral residents involves not only the recognition of their contributions but also the contestation of dominant urban narratives. Therefore, evaluating urban experiences and their documentation through narratives and rhythms, as expressed in our research through a combination of text and cartography, on one hand, are concurrently objects of analysis, and on the other, the voice and record of the subjects under study.

### 3. Ethnographies of urban routes

Conceptually and methodologically, our approach is grounded in key theoretical foundations that illustrate: a peripheral condition (Canetti, 2020; Sposito, 2022); a narrative process and its interpretations (Breton, 2020; 2023; Batista; Sposito, 2023); and the autonomy of the subject, particularly the peripheral subject (D'Andrea, 2013; 2020; Frehse, 2008; 2016). Procedurally, we adopted the urban routes taken (Jesus; Catelan; Calixto, 2022; Pereira, 2006), combined with interviews with city dwellers (Góes et al., 2022) and documented using netnographic techniques (Flores et al., 2023). The integration of the conceptual dimension and the investigative practice was established through an understanding of the value of rhythm analysis (Lefebvre, 2021), which functioned as a methodological amalgam linking theory and empirical investigation – captured through routes and interviews – and fundamental to assimilating the representations of the subjects studied.

Our research approach has integrated concepts – debated and applied – alongside investigative procedures and techniques, focusing on mobility during urban routes, where interviews were conducted while in movement with the subjects studied.



We paid close attention to narratives that illustrate how subjects interpret urban space, particularly on the periphery, which emerges as a key reference point for understanding these experiences. We highlight the diverse urban experiences embedded within this context, as represented by the perspectives of the research participants, which included Cris, Marta, Hortência, Joana, Guta, Isaac, Inácio, and Dante (Table 1).

<b>Cris</b>	
Young Black male, aged 20, resident of Cidade Tiradentes.	Geography student at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) and apprentice monitor at the Museu da Casa Brasileira (Brazilian House Museum).
<b>Marta</b>	
Adult mixed-race woman, aged 42, resident of Jardim Colonial, São Mateus.	Sales Assistant in the Cereal Market Zone of Brás and Parque Dom Pedro.
<b>Joana</b>	
Young Black woman, aged 24, born in Cidade Tiradentes and resident of São Mateus.	Visual Arts student at Universidade Estadual Paulista (Unesp) and an educator at Fábrica de Cultura Jaçanã.
<b>Dante</b>	
Adult Black male, aged 34, resident of São Mateus.	Teacher in the São Paulo state education system, community educator, and researcher at the documentation center on the peripheries of the East Zone.
<b>Hortência</b>	
Adult Black woman, aged 41, resident of Cidade Tiradentes.	Caregiver for older people in the Unified Health System (SUS) at the Basic Health Unit (UBS) Guaianases 1.
<b>Guta (Augusta)</b>	
Young mixed-race woman, aged 24, resident of Barro Branco, in Cidade Tiradentes.	Secretary at a private college in Lapa de Baixo, in the northwest zone of São Paulo. Digital Marketing student.
<b>Inácio</b>	
Adult Black male, aged 49, resident of Bairro Castro Alves, in Cidade Tiradentes.	Organizer of volunteer sports social projects in Cidade Tiradentes; driver at Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV) in the central area of São Paulo.
<b>Isaac</b>	
Young white man, aged 26, resident of Jardim Tietê, in São Mateus.	Nurse at the Hospital Emílio Ribas, in Pacaembu.

**Table 1. Profiles of the peripheral subjects who took part in the study**

Source: Santos (2024).

The systematization of narratives can be understood through two main dimensions: *lived experience* (Vr) and *narrated experience* (Vn) (Breton, 2020). Lived experience refers to the totality of an individual's experiences, encompassing

emotions, perceptions, and interactions that occur at any given moment. This experience is unique and subjective, reflecting the personal reality of the one who lives it. On the other hand, narrated experience pertains to how these lived experiences are transformed into narratives, enabling individuals to share and interpret their experiences for an audience. This transformation involves the selection of elements, a structuring of the story, and the language used, in a process that reshapes an understanding of the experience itself and the reflection upon it.

The narrative situation is the context in which these stories are constructed and shared, encompassing social, cultural, and temporal factors that influence both their production and reception. The narrative situation is essential for grasping how experiences are shaped and how they resonate in different contexts.

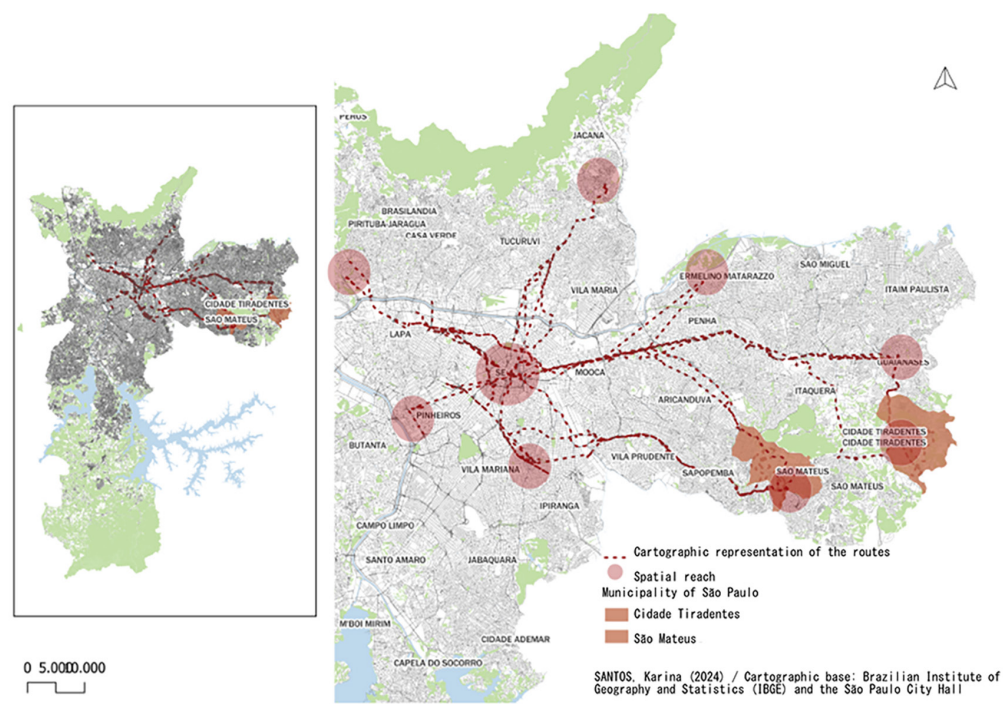
Breton (2020) suggests assessing how these experiences connect to broader contexts or to the experiences of other individuals. Table 2 presents the systematization of narratives according to the methodological framework.

<b>Cris</b>	<i>Lived experience [Vr]:</i> Cris described his journey through the city of São Paulo, highlighting the socio-spatial disparities between the periphery and the center. <i>Narrative situation:</i> He presented his perceptions and experiences, emphasizing the lack of representation and the segregation experienced in the city.
<b>Marta</b>	<i>Narrated Experience [Vn]:</i> Marta shared her daily struggles, particularly the lack of time for leisure and physical activities. <i>Narrative Situation:</i> She highlighted the challenges faced by those living in the periphery, such as balancing multiple responsibilities and having to deal with precarious infrastructure.
<b>Joana</b>	<i>Lived Experience [Vr]:</i> Joana revealed her strong connection to the periphery and her concerns regarding access to public services and efficient transportation. <i>Narrated Experience [Vn]:</i> She revealed her daily activities and the role of cultural spaces in the periphery. <i>Narrative Situation:</i> Joana underscored her sense of identity and belonging in the periphery, emphasizing community relationships and the resilience of local residents.
<b>Dante</b>	<i>Lived Experience [Vr]:</i> Dante observed the urban dynamics of the periphery, highlighting the lack of investment in infrastructure. <i>Narrated Experience [Vn]:</i> He reflected on urban transformations and cultural life in the periphery. <i>Narrative Situation:</i> Dante discussed the challenges and opportunities in the periphery, emphasizing the importance of solidarity and community activism.
<b>Hortência</b>	<i>Narrated Experience [Vn]:</i> Hortência shared her observations on the periphery, addressing issues related to mobility, public services, and security. <i>Narrative Situation:</i> She highlighted the need for public policies that promote social inclusion and security for the citizens of the periphery.
<b>Guta (Augusta)</b>	<i>Lived Experience [Vr]:</i> Guta described her personal experience in the periphery, addressing issues of security and mobility. <i>Narrative Situation:</i> She presented her perceptions on the environment in which she lives, emphasizing the lack of a sense of belonging and the challenges of public transportation.
<b>Inácio</b>	<i>Lived Experience [Vr]:</i> Inácio described his daily commute through the periphery, highlighting the challenges of public transportation and socioeconomic disparities. <i>Narrative Situation:</i> He reflected on the precarious working conditions and the lack of job stability faced by many in the urban periphery.

Isaac	<i>Lived Experience [Vr]:</i> Isaac provided an account of the complexities of the periphery, acknowledging both its shortcomings and its potential. <i>Narrative Situation:</i> He underscored the importance of public services and cultural spaces in the daily lives of residents, alongside concerns regarding security and the quality of life.
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**Table 2. Systematization of the narratives based on Breton (2020)**  
Source: Breton (2020); Batista; Sposito (2023). Organized by the authors.

Figure 1 presents a synthesized cartography that records the routes taken by the peripheral subjects studied, whose distinct yet complementary narratives we traced along their routes. This cartographic representation thus constitutes a collective narrative. Beyond its immediate elements, the image invites an analysis of the circulation of subjects through the city, their social interactions, and spatial reach – everyday dynamics that are crucial for understanding urban spaces, particularly in peripheral areas.



**Figure 1. Cartographic representation of the routes taken by the studied subjects in the municipality of São Paulo in 2024, highlighting the main trajectories (dashed red lines) and their areas of influence (red circles)**  
Source: Santos (2024).

### 3.1. Cris: the periphery and the center

Cris’s route reveals socio-spatial dimensions, representations, and experiences related to urban mobility, social and cultural inequalities, identity,

and belonging. In expressing these, he reflected on the continuities and contrasting identities between his workplace in Faria Lima and his racial experience, as well as that of his family:

For me, this is what it is—this is the white center of São Paulo. That's the reality. At least, for me. This is the white center. I consider myself mixed-race, kind of in-between. My mother is white, my father is Black – so, in-between. So, like, the center is actually in the periphery, that fusion, our origin. When we look around, we see someone with my skin color, with hair like mine, with a background like mine. My father didn't go to school. My mother only finished her studies at 40, through the EJA [Youth and Adult Education program]. And here, it's different – there are people whose parents owned farms, who enslaved my father, my grandmother. This is the white center; it was built to be beautiful, to have trees. (Santos, 2024, p. 128)

Cris navigates the city using various forms of transportation each shaping his practices and experiences along the way. His daily route takes him from Cidade Tiradentes, a peripheral area in the eastern zone, to Faria Lima, a major hub of corporate capital in the city. As he moves through these spaces, Cris perceives their stark contrasts, noting the artificiality and social detachment of Faria Lima in comparison to the sense of affection and vibrant urban life in Cidade Tiradentes.

I think, like, people romanticize the periphery a lot, but for me, I really like walking at night, and, like, man, around 9pm, 7pm, Cidade Tiradentes is alive. You walk down the street, and you see people drinking, playing games, rollerblading, biking, out for a walk. And here in the city, that might happen too, but it's a different vibe – people walk around on edge, I don't know. I think it's real, people assume that in the favela, in Tiradentes, Guaianases, São Mateus, everyone is always scared. Yeah, people are cautious, but, like, not really. Faria Lima is actually worse. (Santos, 2024, p. 126)

Cris exhibited a keen awareness of the nuances of socio-spatial differentiation and social inequality, the latter being further intensified by racial markers. He emphasized the lack of “human warmth” and the pervasive sense of fear in Faria Lima, contrasting it with the vibrancy and sense of community in the periphery. Rooted in his origins, he associated his identity and sense of belonging with the periphery, highlighting the ongoing struggle for recognition and representation. His experience in Faria Lima evokes feelings of repulsion and alienation toward his workplace, prompting him to adopt strategies of resistance and reconnection with his identity – most notably through music:

I feel disgusted, I get sick of it, I hate being here. When I'm here, my playlist changes a lot. On the bus, I listen to something more atmospheric, you know, and just stare out the window – Pink Floyd. But when I get here, it's Racionais MC's, Facção Central, that kind of stuff, for the anger, you know? To process the anger. So I listen to a lot of rap [...]. When I'm away from the periphery, I just want to go back, so I listen to rap. I try to bring it back, to turn this place into an environment where I feel like I belong. (Santos, 2024, p. 127)

Lastly, Cris emphasizes his identification with the researcher due to their shared peripheral background, reinforcing his sense of belonging to the periphery:

I identify myself the same way you do – I think, like, as someone who wants to go back to the periphery and do something for it, for São Mateus, right? I want to go back to Tiradentes or São Mateus, Guaianases, but I think there are many ways to do that. I think there are people in the periphery who don't see this as a problem. (Santos, 2024, p. 128)

### 3.2. Marta: time

Marta, whose route is documented in Figures 2 and 3, stated that she does not perceive a distinction between the center and the periphery. However, her narrative revealed how she experiences these two areas differently and how she understands the peripheral condition.



Figure 2. Urban route taken by Marta on the access platform between the Parque Dom Pedro II and Mercado bus terminals in São Paulo. The image depicts the access turnstiles, the structural design of the walkway, and the movement of passengers between the two terminals

Source: Research archives from Santos (2024).



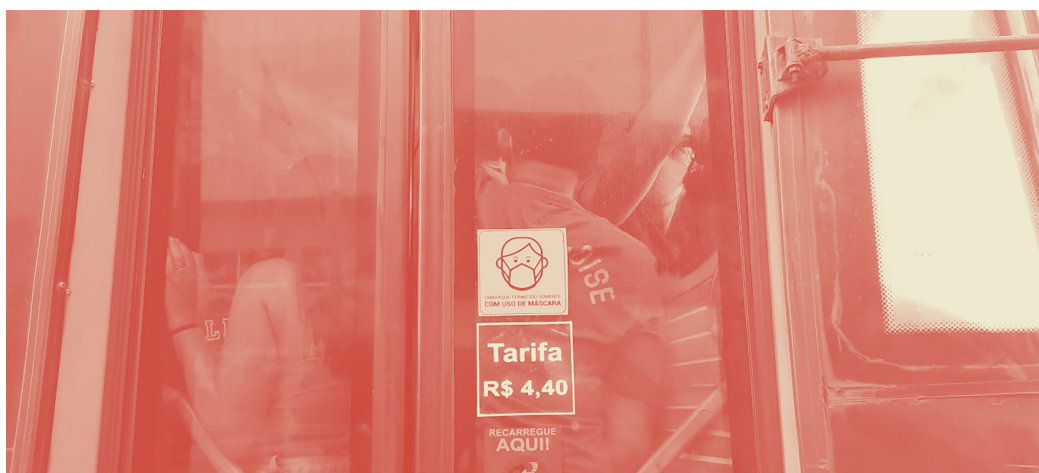


Figure 3. Urban route taken by Marta on the bus at a stop on Avenida Aricanduva, in São Paulo. In the photograph, passengers can be seen squashed inside due to the vehicle's capacity, a notice displaying the fare of R\$ 4.40, and signage reminding passengers to wear masks

Source: Research archives from Santos (2024).

Time constraints are a constant concern in Marta's life. Her day is strictly divided between family responsibilities, work, and commuting, leaving little time for leisure and rest. This lack of free time affects not only her quality of life but also her physical and emotional health. She maintains:

Look, our life is really hectic, there's more work than leisure. But, like, [...] every now and then, we do go out. When we can afford to go somewhere, we do so, or we just stay home and enjoy time with the family. (Santos, 2024, p. 136)

Marta's peripheral condition provides her with an understanding of the complexities of urban life in the periphery. She stressed the challenges that she and other peripheral subjects have to face, who must navigate multiple responsibilities while being constrained by the time demands of commuting and work. She also observed the stark disparities in collective consumption spaces, which limit their access to experiencing well-being and family life:

The route is exhausting, really exhausting. I was used to going by car, going there and back, and then suddenly having to take a route like this – it completely changed my routine. I was used to getting home and still having the energy to do things, but not anymore. The commute is so tiring that by the time I get home, I'm completely drained, really exhausted. (Santos, 2024, p. 140)

### 3.3. Joana: peripheral educator

Joana sees herself as someone who truly values her experience in the periphery. However, her narrative underscored the challenges that come with this peripheral condition, such as limited access to quality public facilities, precarious infrastructure, and an inefficient public transportation system. She particularly expressed her concerns over the inadequacy of public transportation, especially for residents living far from the center, like São Mateus and Cidade Tiradentes. These difficulties impact not only her daily routine but also that of others:

I work in São Paulo, and it's just crazy. The transport, the sheer number of people. I had hoped that the monorail would make things easier. While it has helped to some extent, it was supposed to alleviate the overcrowding, and improve this precarious situation [...]. The buses from Cidade Tiradentes are always packed, crammed with workers having to make endless transfers just to get here [...]. It's still overcrowded, and it's really disheartening to see this happening because it feels like the system just doesn't meet the demands. It doesn't reach everyone, it fails to provide real access to the subway or ensure public transportation with dignity [...]. I get anxious inside the subway. It's such a cold space, and that bothers me even more than the precariousness of public transport itself [...]. Honestly, transportation really takes an emotional toll on me. (Santos, 2024, p. 146)

Despite this, Joana's identity and sense of belonging are deeply rooted in her peripheral condition. In the periphery, she feels at home, welcomed and accepted. Moreover, she demonstrates an evaluative perspective, highlighting similarities and differences between São Mateus and Cidade Tiradentes, affirming that this peripheral condition has shaped her worldview and identity. Despite socio-economic challenges, Joana values community relationships and mutual support among residents, emphasizing the resilience and solidarity found in these areas.

It's a neighborhood where I really found myself. I feel at home because it's very similar to Cidade Tiradentes, which I know well. It's actually much calmer, too. (Santos, 2024, p. 150)

Activities and culture in the periphery play a significant role in Joana's daily life and are present throughout her route (Figure 4). She describes her everyday routines, such as going to the hair salon, practicing sports, and visiting the local market. Additionally, she highlights the importance of cultural spaces in the periphery, such as the Fábrica de Cultura in Jova Rural, where she teaches art to children and teenagers, underscoring the vital role these places play in fostering artistic expression and strengthening cultural identity.

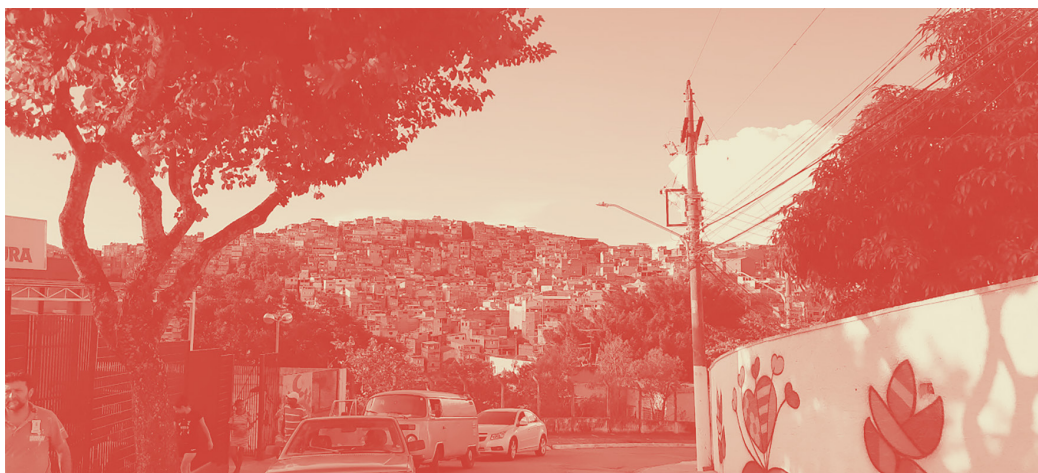


Figure 4. Urban route taken by Joana. In the background, the Jova Rural hill, and in the foreground, the Fábrica de Cultura Jaçanã. The photograph captures people moving along the street alongside cars.

Source: Research archives from Santos (2024).

Despite her strong connection to the periphery, Joana faces challenges related to safety in her everyday life. Harassment and violence are constant concerns, especially when walking alone in certain areas. This highlights the need for constant vigilance when moving through the city, particularly at night, drawing attention to the challenges faced by peripheral residents in terms of security and well-being.

#### 3.4. Dante: the periphery and its transformations

Dante is a keen observer of urban dynamics and shared his experiences in the periphery of São Mateus, revealing how these spaces are often overlooked when it comes to investments in resources for collective consumption. He described the peripheral landscape as a patchwork of informal housing, neglected public and green spaces, and an inadequate public transportation network. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, he emphasized the resilience and vitality of these communities, which continue to foster support networks and vibrant cultural spaces even in the face of adversity.

In his narrative, Dante also reflected on the transformations reshaping the urban periphery, such as the construction of new facilities and infrastructure, including the monorail. He acknowledged the potential of these changes to improve urban mobility and accessibility in peripheral areas (Figure 5) but warns of the side effects, such as rising living costs and gentrification, which could displace local populations. Dante's concern is evident when he points out that communities are often neither consulted nor necessarily benefited by the development projects taking place in their territories.



I've started paying more attention to what we have in each space, in each territory. So, I've been really observant on the bus, or when I'm on the monorail – when I'm in a higher place, I get that map-like view [...], noticing what's in the space, how it's occupied. So, in a way, my distraction during transit has shifted toward something else. (Santos, 2024, p. 164)

I caught this bus almost at the lowest part of [Avenida] Mateo Bei. Over there, you mostly have auto repair shops and auto parts stores – it's a, let's say, 'less dynamic' area, in a way. And then you've got the brothels, the churches, all mixed together, which is kind of funny – a brothel, an STI/AIDS clinic, and then an evangelical church, all in the same spot. It really makes you think about the values and morals at play in that space. (Santos, 2024, p. 164)



Figure 5. Urban route taken by Dante, the Jardim Nove de Julho favela, in São Paulo. The photograph shows a healthcare assistant walking along a cobblestone street beside the stream, surrounded by buildings and power towers to her left

Source: Research archives from Santos (2024).

The cultural life of the periphery is another key element in Dante's observations. He highlighted his participation in cultural collectives and spaces for artistic expression, emphasizing how these environments are essential for fostering identity and self-expression within peripheral communities. He values the role of local artists and activists who fight for social justice and work to preserve the collective and historical memory of these areas. Dante recalled the cultural spaces he used to frequent, which have shaped his urban experiences:

Mobility for a long time [during the pandemic] was basically limited to my bedroom, the living room, and the TV [...]. Before that, I used to move around a lot in cultural spaces, balancing that with the activities I was involved in through the collective I was a part

of—places like the Casa de Cultura de São Mateus, São Mateus em Movimento, Sarau do Vale, Comungar, Ocupação Coragem, as well as spaces dedicated to culture, memory, and heritage, such as the Casa de Cultura Hip-Hop, Pombas Urbanas in Cidade Tiradentes, and the Solano Trindade Library. (Santos, 2024, p. 162)

To finish, Dante acknowledged the complex realities that shape the periphery and the lack of significant investment but sees immense potential for mobilization and resistance among residents. For him, strengthening solidarity networks and encouraging activism and community participation are essential steps toward building social justice in peripheral areas.

### 3.5. *Guta: a lack of belonging*

As she described her daily life, Guta, a resident of Cidade Tiradentes, revealed a set of challenges and reflections that have shaped and influenced her urban experiences. In her daily commute to work (one of its segments depicted in Figure 6), she recounted difficulties stemming from the lack of public security, highlighted by instances of violence experienced by her and her family. This reality has left deep marks on her perceptions of Cidade Tiradentes, leading her to express, in her narrative, a sense of disconnection and a longing for a safer and more welcoming environment:

Once, when she [her mother] and I were out [...], some guy pretended he was armed, although he wasn't actually carrying a weapon. It was terrifying though, you know? I was traumatized by that because he even hit me. (Santos, 2024, p. 174)

Because we don't really know anyone – at most, just the next door neighbor – but I don't have any friends, I never went to school there [...]. I think it's a very dangerous place [...]. People always follow the same path there, you know? And my mother decided: "You [Guta and her brother] are going to study far away, not here." (Santos, 2024, p. 186)

Moreover, her account of public transportation highlights the difficulties faced by peripheral residents in moving around the city. The lack of transport options affects their quality of life and access to job opportunities, leisure, and education. In the following excerpt, Guta shared her impressions of Cidade Tiradentes and Lapa, where she works:

Cidade Tiradentes is much more polluted. Of course, mainly where I live, there are trees, and some areas even look nicer, but it is much more polluted – it's not a good place, you know? It's not at all a nice place. Here, it's calmer; just the fact that it's not a dangerous place

already makes me feel better, you know? In Tiradentes, there are certain areas that are more beautiful because of the nature, there's a lot of it. I don't know if you've seen the back of my house, but it's literally a forest. But it's super dangerous; it's not a nice place. I feel much better here than there. (Santos, 2024, p. 184)



Figure 6. Urban Route taken by Guta, in front of the Guaianases station of the Companhia Paulista de Trens Metropolitanos [The São Paulo Company of Metropolitan Tains – CPTM]. The photograph shows 2 men seated in front of their food stalls. Through the metal bars, the train platform is visible, with people waiting to board

Source: Research archives from Santos (2024).

Throughout her narrative, Guta also mentioned issues related to access to resources for collective consumption. She highlighted the lack of leisure and entertainment facilities in her region, while also emphasizing that she has little interest in seeking out the amenities available in her neighborhood, instead focusing her activities in other parts of the city.

### 3.6. *Isaac: strategies*

For Isaac, who lives in São Mateus, the periphery is a place of contrasts and complexity. He acknowledged the presence of essential forms of collective consumption, such as public transportation and healthcare facilities, while also recognizing their shortcomings and limitations. His experience with public transportation highlights the vital role it plays in the mobility of peripheral populations, while also exposing the challenges they face, including overcrowding and a lack of accessibility across different transit modes and facilities.

Isaac also expressed concerns about security and the quality of life in the periphery. He observed social inequality and the socio-spatial differentiation between areas that are better equipped with resources for collective consumption and those in the periphery:

*Issac:* As we approach Vila Prudente, the neighborhoods become more urbanized, so to speak, but they also seem safer somehow [...].  
*Entrevistadora:* Is this perception based on something you've heard, personal experiences, or just observations of the landscape?  
*Isaac:* Both from observation and from what I've heard. People often say that the Sapopemba region is very violent, right? I've never witnessed anything, never been robbed or anything, but I've heard many accounts from people close to me, about robberies and even harassment. (Santos, 2024, p. 220)

However, despite the challenges, Isaac acknowledged the value and potential of peripheral communities. He highlighted the resilience and solidarity present in these areas, as evidenced by local initiatives such as volunteer groups linked to evangelical churches, in which he participates, that provide assistance to residents in vulnerable situations. His perspective on the periphery is, therefore, multifaceted.

### *3.7. Hortência: experiences and community*

Hortência also offered a multifaceted perspective on the periphery, particularly through her experiences of living and working in Cidade Tiradentes and Guaianases, recognizing the periphery as a space of potential.

She highlighted the mobility challenges that residents face, from the lack of transportation options to the precarious conditions of the streets and sidewalks. When mentioning the presence of exclusive lanes for car and public transport traffic on a main road, she underscored the inequality in access to different areas and the need for policies that prioritize the well-being of residents. Additionally, Hortência also discussed the importance of resources for collective consumption in the periphery, such as municipal markets and Health Centers, recognizing their essential role in the everyday lives of the population. She also values locally available amenities, such as free cinema screenings and cultural spaces:

I try to access the city as a whole. I rarely go to the city center. Most of what I need is right here, but that's a personal choice, mainly because of exhaustion. I think we are living in the era of mental health, and that matters a lot. The stress of waiting for the bus, often having to stand, and then rarely speaking about this with other people, because everyone is exhausted, both physically and mentally. So, I try to make the most of what's available in my neighborhood and even make an effort to get to know it well so I can fully utilize what it has to offer. (Santos, 2024, p. 207)

### 3.8. *Inácio: multi-displacements*

As he travels between Castro Alves, in Cidade Tiradentes, and other parts of the city, Inácio reflects on the precarious state of public transportation infrastructure and services, demonstrating an understanding of socio-spatial differentiation and social inequalities.

He is actively engaged in voluntary projects, coordinating initiatives that provide young people in the community with spaces for social interaction and learning. These activities offer opportunities for socialization and serve as crucial support for both the personal and collective development of young athletes.

However, Inácio is constantly challenged by his peripheral condition. More than a third of his day is consumed by commuting, which takes up long hours of his routine. He emphasizes:

I find public transportation exhausting. It takes too long and is stressful [...]. I prefer my job as a driver over being a public transport user [...]. Today, I spent more time commuting than actually working.  
(Research archives from Santos, 2024)

### Final considerations

We have pursued direct, meaningful engagement with the everyday lives of subjects in urban peripheries, examining their experiences captured through narratives that reflect mobility and peripheral conditions. This approach has revealed the complexities and everyday challenges faced by peripheral subjects while also highlighting the potential for a critical reflection centered on their perspectives. The methodology adopted in this study invites a reexamination of conventional practices in urban studies, viewing peripheries not merely as objects of analysis but as essential starting points for a more comprehensive understanding of urban life – one with the potential to reshape center-periphery perspectives.

Urban mobility has emerged as the central axis of our investigation, proving to be a crucial lens for understanding not only how individuals navigate urban spaces, but more importantly the social, cultural, and political relationships that shape their urban experiences through their socio-spatial practices. These experiences, articulated as peripheral narratives, became a key element of our analysis, since they represent a perspective often overlooked in urban research. By examining the lived experiences of subjects in peripheral areas, we have confronted socio-spatial differentiation and social inequalities, as well as the manifestations and constructs that arise in response to these conditions – dynamics that today characterize the peripheral condition in Brazilian cities.



This perspective on the peripheral condition invites us to reexamine the territorial distribution of resources for collective consumption and to consider alternative worldviews and epistemologies on the social production of urban space that emerge from the lived experiences of peripheral subjects.

Moreover, our approach challenges the traditional center-periphery logic, revealing instead a fragmented dynamic expressed through the atomized appropriation of the city by peripheral subjects; the recognition of multiple centralities materialized in peripheral spaces and their reappropriation by those who inhabit them; and the active role of these subjects in shaping their peripheral condition. This agency is evident in the narratives we analyzed, which not only assess but also critically reflect on their lived realities.

This study has been essential in revealing the multifaceted nature of the peripheral condition, highlighting how categories such as race, gender, and class intersect in urban experiences, adding complexity and depth to studies in this field. While not all aspects were exhaustively explored, the study nonetheless underscores the potential of ethnographic methodologies to capture the everyday narratives and practices of peripheral subjects.

Our interest lies in further exploring urban experiences as an epistemological movement to rethink the urban, valuing these lived realities as central elements in the production of new perspectives and epistemologies on the city. Thus, the study paves the way for future investigations that broaden the understanding of peripheral dynamics and expand the analysis of spatial practices and urban narratives.

As its main contribution, this study offers a methodology built upon concepts, procedures, and techniques that support the assessment of urban mobility, the peripheral condition, and research centered on narratives and the amplification of peripheral voices.

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