# Gender Issues in Consumer Culture

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**ABSTRACT** The study is part of an ampler project which investigates the conditions and modes of subjectivation of children and adolescents in modern urban consumer cultures. Consumption has emerged as a fundamental part of the process by which children enter western capitalist cultures and their symbolic systems of meanings. An important thematic area of this project deals with gender issues. Deep open-ended dialogues with 30 children aged from 11 to 17 living in different socio-cultural contexts were carried out. Dialogues focused on the daily experiences of the child, his/her projects for the future and his/her views on relevant issues, such as school, TV, city violence, adult-child relationship and so on. Consumer culture has been found to serve as an identificatory basis, in terms of gendered activities and things which become emblematic, specially for boys. It also provides anchorage for androgynous identifications that co-exist with gendered ones. Consumer culture also brings forth the issue of social space, as new sociabilities are made possible with the transformations of the urban landscape. Differentials between boys and girls in the way that space and place are territorialized and signified are also discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

Consumer culture has become the current label whereby a variety of social, economic and cultural aspects of contemporary culture has been understood and denominated. Social theorists of different theoretical traditions have sought to highlight important transformations that have affected Western societies since the second half of this century, accounting for what has been designated as a "new social order".

Baudrillard has, since the seventies, been concerned with the deleterious effects of consumer culture (1970, 1981), which, from his point of view, have produced the "death of the social as well as of the subject". He has emphatically suggested (1978) that all social life has been reduced to a closed system of signs, operating through classificatory and hierarchical mechanisms which remain impermeable to real change and innovation. Therefore, social life is doomed to repeat itself ad infinitum maintaining an apparent flux of events through the creation of illusory changes; what takes place, as a matter of fact, is the impact of a constant re-invention of consumptory needs which are permanently re-aligning modern subjects in relation to one another. Modern subjectivities become, then, the epiphenomenal reality of this game, or to use his own words, of a *predetermined structure*, impervious to the action of social agents. The point of view expressed by Baudrillard, in his seminal works, has produced much debate on the "effects" of consumer culture on modern subjectivities. Part of the problem with Baudrillard's work stems from his theoretical position which postulates a non-symetric relationship between the subject and the social structure. The former is conceived to bear a stringent and coercive influence upon the latter turning subjects into cultural or social dupes, as Giddens (1979) has observed it in relation to the pitfalls of structuralism. Human social action is described as hardly effective to bring about social change, crystallizing, thus, subjects' positions as mere reproducers, and not creators, of social structures.

Much of the contemporary debate in the social sciences today has attempted to focus on this specific issue, namely, the constitution of subjectivities in the context of late twentieth century capitalist social formations affected by radical transformations introduced by technology and computerization, media communication and pedagogy, re-structuration of urban landscapes, internationalization of national economies and so forth. The question to be posed seems to be, "what specifies contemporary subjectivities in today's *fin-du-siècle* societies?", "what specific

connotations do notions like, identity, citizenship, subjects' political and social action, acquire in contemporary times?". Undoubtedly, the notion of subjectivity itself becomes the target of much controversy. Alain Touraine (1994), in his penetrating work about modernity, asserts that the processes of rationalization that originated and served to organize modern society have precluded the notion of subjectivity, conceived as *an actor and an agent of the social order*, reducing it to a repertory of social roles. Therefore, he continues, it is necessary to think about the crisis of modernity in order to move towards a re-definition of what constitutes the "social" and what constitutes the "subject".

Like Touraine, other social theorists (Lyotard, 1979, 1988; Deleuze and Guattari, 1976; Guattari, 1989; Lasch, 1979) have provided interesting insights which directly relate to the discussion of modes of subjectivation in contemporary culture, offering more or less pessimistic analyzes concerning the position of the subject within contemporary social formations.

The aim of this paper is to examine in what ways gendered identificatory practices are established in consumer culture and to what extent such practices, being related to novel dimensions of our contemporary culture, point at transformations concerning subjectivation processes.

## APPROACHING GENDER IN CONSUMER CULTURE

The process of becoming an individual subject is immersed in gender identification. This means that one does not just become a person, but rather a man or a woman, a boy or a girl. In this sense, ours is a gendered culture, one that, either explicitly or not, organizes heterogeneous persons as members of one, and exclusionary one, pair - man or woman. Feminist theorizing tends to see gender constructs as historical artefacts, products of a complex set of economic, social and cultural determinants. Flax (1993) proposes that gendering consists of a herogeneous and contradictory experience, and since there is no genderless persons in Western cultures, there are many highly variable and particular experiences of being a man, or a woman.

In spite of this diversity, and of the idiosyncratic nature of gender experiences, men and women, as well as boys and girls, enter social relations which are organized according to gender specifications, thus having an effect of modelling subjectivities. In this way, the construction of a gendered identity - male or female - is carried out within the gender system operating in a culture which serves to normalize standards of femininity and masculinity. However, gender systems, or other structures of power and dominance, are not unchangeable, but can be regarded as the part and parcel of living social relationships of struggle, and therefore subject to transformation.

Consumer culture poses specific issues concerning gender identification. The study of this aspect of consumer culture, among others, has drawn our attention in the context of our research project titled *"Contemporary Subjectivities - Childhood and Adolescence in Consumer Culture"*. The general focus of this project has been directed to the ways that children and adolescents validate their self- and other-images and experiences within new modes of subjectivation characteristic of consumer cultures of urban Brazil. In this research project, we have worked with deep open-ended interviews, where children and adolescents were invited to talk freely about their commonplace experiences in the city. Twenty-five children were interviewed individually, and twenty-one children were interviewed in groups of two, or for most situations, three children or adolescents. Interviewers were male or female. Interviewees were aged from 6 to 16 years of age and came from a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds: some lived with their parents, went to school, others were streetchildren, some lived in institutional settings. Some had privileged homes and received good formal education, whereas others lived in more squalor conditions of home and school. All interviews were tape-recorded, and some of them video-taped. A qualitative analysis of the data was carried out according to a Bakhtinian perspective, where the notion of dialogism stands as a central concept which points out the relevance of considering both interlocutors' discourses (the interviewer's and the interviewee's) as the object of discourse analysis. Thus, such a

perspective proposes a somewhat different analytical angle which indicates that the production of meaning in discourse is inseparably related to the conditions of discourse production and maintenance, as well as immersed in a *dialogic dimension*. Thus, when the child answers her/his interviewer's questions, her/his answers can only make sense as a *response*, that is, as a process of meaning construction in the course of that specific interview.

No systematic presentation of the data analysis is intended here, but rather the selection of some relevant topics of analysis concerning gender issues that will be discussed with respect to current theorizing about gender.

## I

### *Objectification*

Consumer culture has undoubtedly transformed contemporary subjects' relationship with the material world. The profusion and the ever-changing production of goods, to mention one aspect, favour subjects' attitudes of detachment, frivolity and un-ending search for novelties. What is more significant, however, is that products have become symbolic instances of social standing and image, the use value of objects having been gradually blurred by their capacity to communicate cultural and social differences among subjects. This means that when buying cars, cigarettes or tinned food, one is also identifying oneself with certain values and images that these objects convey through the processes of propaganda and marketing. In this sense, not only do objects become an anchor for identifica tory practices, but also assume an overarching importance in the dynamics of contemporary culture.

In this vein, G. Simmel (1988, [1911], 1971 [1918]), already in the beginning of this century, referred to the rapidly expanding capitalist culture as consisting of "a culture of things". The object world is invested of a paramout importance as far as the material dimension of life is tr ansformed in a process whereby things are constantly diversified and multiplied. In this "thing-like world", or in other words, in this commodified world, things have become an end in themselves to be possessed. The problematic aspect of modern culture lies, for Simmel, in the fact that the growing complexity and the sophistication of the material world does not enhance subjective life, rather, being sustained by an autonomous logic which consists of instrumentality. Therefore, things acquire a preponderance over subjects to the extent that modern man and woman can "have everything, but possess nothing" *(omnia habentes, nihil possidentes)*. For an analyst of the turn of the century, like Simmel, there was, certainly, a case to be concerned in relation to the cultural transformations produced by the expansion of capitalism. One could say that today this scenario has been by far radicalized, as "the culture of things", as Simmel put it, has outmatched initial analyzes related to the expansion of objective/material culture to the detriment of subjective life. In our present time the consumption of goods and services has reached a vertiginous point. Nevertheless, such a pessimistic outlook is not totally shared by other analysts who make a positive point in favour of materiality in the process of subjectivation. Canclini (1995), for instance, has remarked that things are a basis of our making sense of the world, constituting the material basis of our reminiscences, being supportive of our cherished values and enduring expectations. They are, therefore, important in the sense of anchoring identificatory processes.

### *Gendered*

In our research project we attempted to verify what were the major and most significant and/or idiosyncratic ways whereby children constructed an objective referentiality of identification. This means considering "things" as part and parcel of subjectivation processes in the sense that the concreteness of the material world provides cues for communicating to others notions such as "what kind of person I am". Furthermore, what was also the object of investigation was whether objective culture (comprehending goods and lifestyle activities) was marked by gender significance, and if so, in what different ways boys and girls identified themselves with certain aspects of the material world made available to them.

It was noteworthy that, for boys, a foremost

aspect of their experience was related to sports - either practising it, or a devotion to a team. Not all boys did mention such an aspect, but not even one girl mentioned it . Another noteworthy aspect refers to the fact that sports' talk was highly favoured when both interviewee and interviewer were males. These two aspects led us to believe that sports, as an activity among others in the domain of leisure consumption, denotes a certain lifestyle as well as entails a clear exclusionary practice impregnated with gender significance. When, on the other hand, the child or adolescent was male and the interviewer female, sports' talk was less frequent, or simply did not turn up. This means that besides sports being an important referent which serves as an identificatory basis for boys, it tended to assume an emblematic male symbol *within the male culture itself*. Talking about sports happened at specific points along the interviews and served certain purposes with respect to discourse maintenance. Younger children referred to sports when the interviewer asked about preferred activities and places to go to: the practice of sports was mentioned as a mark of distinction, what one liked, a symbol of what the subject took to be as his innermost inclinations. In a somewhat different vein, the practice of sports was also mentioned as an activity that set in motion a *collective* activity. Thus, participating in a peer-group, or having friends implied an allegiance to group interests which centred round sports activities. On the other hand, for older children and adolescents, sports' talk intervened at certain occasions when interviewer's questions revolved round plans for the future, profession, work roles and so on. At these occasions, sports became an identificatory symbol for making money, having success, or becoming a celebrity through being a sportsman (for Brazilian children, boys, as it is here the case, becoming a football player remains one of the most cherished expectations that a boy can dream of). Thus, for children of different ages sports took up different connotations in mapping gendered developmental paths — in this case, masculine ones — for boys' identification: either epitomized as a quality of the individual, or of the group, or still as a referent for mastering the outer world and having success in it.

The significance of sports for male identification, or putting it in another terms, the consumption of sports as a symbol which validates male image and experience, has been appointed elsewhere (Fisher and Gainer, 1994) as an activity which is symbolically related to the achievement of masculinity in modern times, when fighting, chasing, manual heavy work and other archetypical male activities have gradually disappeared. Organized sports, particularly in its more violent forms, are held to support male dominance both through the exclusion and the marginalization of women, and through binding men together employing aggression as a proof of manliness. The fact that in our research sports' talk took place preferentially among males - interviewer and interviewee - favours the interpretation that such an activity acquires an emblematic characteristic: *that of a communicative symbol among men which, by reinforcing the in- and out-group markers, defines men as "not feminine", excludes women, and fosters social bonds among men*. This means that sports activity, if it were to be taken up by girls, would imply a "masculinization" of girls, since it has become stereotypic of masculinity. Therefore, masculine attributes and qualities are conceived to be emblematic in character, based both on the active display of symbols and the validation of "domains of knowledge".

As far as girls were concerned, there could not be found any kind of objective referentiality that assumed a prevalent function to define feminine attributes. Girls' experiences were by far more varied, and, what is more important, not even one among them appeared as defining or circumscribing feminine qualities. Thus, for girls a wide gamut of activities was mentioned as favourite ones, no one in particular noteworthy for being highly recurrent.

Thus, the objectified world of consumer culture, revolving round the consumption of goods, either material or symbolic, and services validates specific types of experience according to gender parameters. In this sense, this "culture of things" cannot be said to be gender-neutral in a general way. On the other hand, as we shall see subsequently, not all aspects of the objectified world provide children and adolescents with gender-significant features as key

parameters for identification. Quite the contrary, the identificatory parameter lies in the ungendered quality of goods and activities, or in their androgynous characteristics.

### Ungendered

Technology enters quite early in the lives and experience of children in our times. Besides the most frequent machines, such as television, cars, telephones, and hair-driers, children today are surrounded by more sophisticated equipment, like computers and video-machines. In some sense, the material world has become de-naturalized, and has assumed a technologized flair. The evocation of children climbing up trees, digging in the sand, playing around with insects and birds is gradually alluding to a more and more remote and idyllic situation for our generation of contemporary urban children. In our group of children and adolescents, machines were found to exert a deep attraction, specially upon younger children who are more tied up to their homes and have less freedom to wander about by themselves in the big city. Both boys and girls talked enthusiastically about being able to employ the computer, either to do their school homework, or to play games. Less privileged children, who have no access to computers, referred to video-game machines, either owned by themselves, or by some relative of theirs. Being able to approach computers without fear, suspicion or restraint seemed like the "adequate" attitude towards objects which might still engender quite different reactions and attitudes from parents and grandparents. Computers were talked of in a "naturalized" way: they were referred to as part of the contemporary scenery as if they had been always there, as if life on this planet had always been automatized. In some ways, children even took up a "blasé" attitude when referring to their activities with computers, in a clear attempt to impress the interviewer (many a times the interviewer was, in fact, impressed): for instance, one of the girls, when asked whether she had any difficulties to use the computer, answered that she had not, and went on saying that she loved to "play around" with the computer when she was alone at home.

Computers seem, then, to materialize the epitome of modernity and progress of our contemporary era. Strangely enough, the ideological underpinnings of modernity and progress have legitimated an abhorrence of anything that may question and problematize the achievements of technological progress. Thus, modernity and progress have self-validating and self-legitimating claims. Adult interviewers were generally impressed by the general ease, and above all, the unproblematic mediation between children and computer-machines. Furthermore, computers pass over gender distinctions appealing to boys and girls alike. As objects of a *postmodern culture*, one which vindicates an effacement of gender positions (Kaplan, 1993), computers evoke a postmodern identificatory perspective which plays down on gendered subjectivation. Moreover, the effacement of gender identificatory boundaries seems to allude to futuristic fictional imagery, like that of science-fiction films crowded with androgynous robots. One might read this as a disassociation between gender and objects, as a process of bracketing the centrality of gender in the processes of identification.

Another instance of ungendered activity that serves as a basis for identificatory purposes is shopping activity. Some analyses of gender stereotypification (for instance, Firat, 1991) have stressed the importance of shopping activities for reinforcing feminized identifications. The crystallized social division of labour whereby man was the producer and to the woman was attributed the domestic role, both of the mother and of the consumer, has, undoubtedly, exerted a deep impact on social and economic practices. However, as Bocock (1993) has argued, major shifts in Western capitalist societies of the second half of the twentieth century produced transformations at the level of social-psychological identifications; thus, rather than work roles, lifestyles and consumptions patterns have come to define identifications. Or, in other words, what one is able to buy and to consume, either in terms of material, or, of symbolic goods, seems to delineate one's identity (Featherstone, 1991). Most children and adolescents in our group declared that they were fond of shopping. Irrespective of age, socio-cultural experience and gender, children and adolescents said that shopping was a

pleasurable activity, some said that they were even "crazy about shopping". When asked what they bought when they went shopping, many answered that "anything would do", that any object would satisfy them, as long as it meant a new acquisition. Boys and girls were equally prone to shopping. There was a clear relationship between such consumptory habits and a preoccupation with bodily appearance, which again used to be associated with feminine attributes. Boys said that they wished to look good, to be smart and to be fashioable. Bodily appearance seemed as important for boys as for girls to construct their self image. As Bocock (1993 : 102) put it :

> "men become as much a part of modern consumerism as women. Their construction of a sense of who they are is accomplished as much through style, clothing, body image and the right look as women's. This type of consumption is not so much a trivial extra on top of 'real life' as a means of establishing an identity".

Therefore, the objectified world of consumption, the "culture of things", as Simmel (op. cit.) put it, not only maintained clear gendered identificatory referents, but also fostered an effacement of gender specific identifications through certain activities such as, shopping and machine(computer)-operation. Both these activities unravel the perhaps androgynous -in the sense of being gender non-specific- character of contemporary culture; at least in respect to specific realms. First of all, being computer literate entails mastering a certain kind of rationalitiy (Broughton, 1985) whose invisible pedagogy aims at reinforcing the cognitive mode appropriate to functioning within bureaucratic organizations. Men and women, boys and girls, are subjected to the social practice whereby the subject is enticed to produce and consume a form of thinking and being that supports advances in the regulation of public life (Broughton, 1985). This form of thinking and being encompasses social values and ideologies such as individualism, voluntarism, instrumentalism and utilitarianism. Secondly, shopping constitutes the activity whereby men and women, girls and boys acquire the material signs of social standing in our contemporary culture: it is then not

surprizing that bodily appearance and look become so important in this visual culture of the late twentieth century. To go shopping also meant to be able to amuse oneself in the newly designed shopping centres, strolling around, looking at shop windows and getting together in a new form of sociability that Maffesoli (1987) calls affectual and transitory, as people simply get together to experience various kinds of intense but non-residual emotions. Therefore, shopping also entails a "tribalized" form of being together, a new form of behaving and feeling, where there can be detected a horror towards the emptiness. This *horror vacui* manifests itself, for instance, in the non-stop music in shops, streets and telephone calls (when there is no talk going on), or in the placement of television sets in cafes, hospitals, waiting-rooms and so on.

To sum up, one can envisage a "new sensitivity" being produced by both modern consumerism and technological socialization. Such a new mode of experiencing the material and the social reality seems to be based upon the pregnancy that "things" have acquired in the modern urban scenery. Such a protrusive dimension of objects denotes the overmastering pleasurable effects of the gaze. Therefore, for the subject him/herself, the exhibition of certain traces is also required as a mode of sef-recognition. In this process, boys and girls are constantly moved by the display of the adequate markers of social distinction - the clothes, the gait, the outer way of looking and behaving. Thus, the body becomes an object of exhibition . On the other hand, machines have gradually, but inexorably, substituted human social contact in modern daily practices. They have become part of the "natural landscape". Daily survival in the urban environment, for boys and girls, alike, depends on being able to significantly **identify with the machine-world, to overcome the reticent feeling towards non-human, human-like, objects, and finally, to indulge gratification and pleasure in the use of machines.**

## II

### *Spatialization and Gender Identity*

In this section some indications are given in order to establish a relationship between the use

of space in contemporary urban cities and gender identities. Space has raised a diversity of questions in contemporary social theory (Soja, 1993; Shields, 1992; Smith, 1992; Augé, 1994; Zukin, 1992) and has become an important element in the discussion of modes of subjectivation in contemporary culture.

An important differential was observed between boys and girls when they talked about their general daily activities. For girls, spatial reference entiality was understood on a relational basis. This means that girls talked of places in reference to the people whom they could meet there. Spatialized cognitive maps of home and surroundings acquired, for girls, a relational value, since they became discriminate and topo-logically-relevant as long as they enshrined social relationships. Therefore, it is to be expected that for girls the distinction between home and "not-home" becomes specially significant. Home is the place of *identity*, in the sense employed by Augé (1994), where history and social memory provide the most important clues for identification. "Not-home" encompasses different elements, such as clubs, churches, relatives' homes, the school, the cinema, but they are signified in discourse with the constant indication that concrete or imaginary social relationships make these places worthy of mentioning.

On the other hand, for boys spatial referentiality was contextualized in discourse with a variety of functions. It could simply signify a way to somewhere else, the latter conceived as the main objective, for instance, going dancing somewhere, or, watching a football match in a certain place. Here the construction of space is characterized by mastering the often unknown and fragmented map of the urban landscape in order to achieve certain objectives, like amusing oneself. Once space is conceived in this way, it also comes to coerce boys' actions and behaviours into the demonstration of qualities, such as, courage, curiosity, animosity and transgression. Spatial referentiality could also be associated with the creation of a condition of mobility which was important to denote a sense of autonomy and independence. Thus, for boys spatial referentiality tended to be more heterogeneous in function, at the same time that different places seemed to cohere in a picture of

topological equivalence. In this sense, one place is not better than the other, but what appeared as relevant in boys' discourse, was their capacity to master the differential aspects and conditions of territoriality, which, in their turn, also coerce boys into acting in certain ways. Boys tended to be more mobile, talking about their goings and comings in the city, easily gettting acquainted with places and people, making home and the street boundaries more permeable.

What is, one should ask (Rhode, 1992), the cultural meaning of these gender-linked differences, so that such a dichotomous way of considering gender does not contribute to further reinforce different, and usually unequal, social roles and responsibilities? Or still, are there any differences among women themselves, on the one hand, and among men, on the other hand? The question of space has been given considerable attention concerning the issue of social or spatial identity, since some studies have pointed out (Augé, 1994; Zukin, 1993) how postmodern landscapes not only map culture and power, but also the opposition of markets and places, the latter being understood as the spatial forms that anchor people to the social world providing the basis of an identity. Thus, space has been regarded as an aspect that structures society as well as biographical trajectories (Gregory and Urry, 1985). As we have noted, urban landscape and the spaces and places constituting such a landscape are impregnated with gender differences. For girls, *places* are identifiable and discursively contextualized as sites of affect and relationships, whereas for boys what becomes important is the attempt to *overcome spaces*, an assignment of full status and importance to the transit, rather than the place. Moreover, it has been noted that boys show a compliance to this "transitional" kind of sociability. Therefore, a further qualification has to be made on that account, that allows for boys' *different* ways of social relationships. The significant point to make must focus, then, on the way that the territorialization of the urban landscape acquires different values related to gender. Therefore, it is noteworthy the relationship between the relevance of places and space, and how social life is organized, and also, how cultural knowledge is validated and gender power relationships negotiated and

consolidated. If we consider space and place as not separate from the material realm of objects, events and relations, which are not given, but produced within, and as part of social relations (Smith, 1992), then gender differences in the production of social space can be understood as part of an ampler *politics of scale construction* (Smith, 1992) whereby different genders validate their subject positions vis-à-vis others, establish boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, and define criteria of sameness and difference.

## CONCLUSION

Some issues concerning the relationship between consumer culture and gender in the Brazilian context have been explored in this paper. Consumer culture has been used here as a tag for wide cultural and historical transformations that have affected Western societies in the second half of the twentieth century. Contemporary consumer culture does pose important questions related to how children and adolescents construct their gender identities. In a significant sense consumer culture provides stabilizations, in the form of cultural objecti-fication, that help to anchor gender-specific identifications. On the other hand, consumer culture tends to efface gender-related specificities providing a certain diffusion of gender-specific identification patterns. In this sense, consumer culture provides anchorage for androgynous identifications that co-exist with the former gender-specific identifications. Thus, it seems that by and large, identification processes in consumer culture do not tend to cohere into a homogeneous pattern which is conducive to univocal gendered identifications, but are characterized by a more heterogeneous foundation. What is needed, then, is a perspective on identity or identification processes that does not entail a unitary, single and fixed view of the subject, but one which allows for an account of subjectivity that is conceived as a heterogeneous and incomplete process. If so, "subjectivities can be considered multiplicities" rather than unities (Flax, 1993), fluid rather than solid, contextual rather than universal and process-oriented rather than topographical.

From a distinct angle of analysis contemporary consumer culture has brought space to the forefront of debates. As Jameson (1988) has argued, contemporary culture is "increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic" than time. As such, social space is the result of interweaving social processes where everyday life is produced via the continuous struggle of social groups to define their self- and other- constituting boundaries. As Lefebvre ( 1981) has argued, the city is a space of differences. Gender-linked trajectories are part and parcel of an ampler process of establishing difference and sameness, whereby children and adolescents - boys and girls, in this case, become inserted in *positioned* instances which tend to reproduce unequal access to knowledge and power. In our study, different kinds of spatial experience were validated for boys and girls stipulating not only different mappings of the city, but also different attitudes towards the social and material reality. It is not coincidental that girls' mappings attribute a central value to home; women's ordeals have kept them for a long time inside the homes in the domestic duties. For girls, then, the territoriality of the city does not constitute in itself an object of exploration or mastering, so that a certain limitation concerning their mobility inside the city is bound to take place. Being more restricted, girls are jeopardized concerning the multiplicity and richness of the experiences to which they may have access. Boys' enhanced mobility in the spatiality of the city provides them with an ampler access to a variety of experiences, as well as risks, for if, on one side of the coin, lies the boldness to confront the unknown, on the other side lies the easiness to take unnecessary risks and expose one's life. What is to be remarked is that the territoriality of the city remains an object, *par excellence*, to further investigate the gendered appropriation of space and place in our contemporary time and how such a process entails the reproduction and the transformations of cultural practices concerning work, leisure and so forth.

However, as Meyrowitz (1985) has correctly remarked, "unlike tribes with special huts and sacred places ... our culture is becoming essentially placeless" (p.317), and therefore where one is has less to do with who one is, because where one is has little to do with a kind of embedding experience which gives sense to one's being in

the world. If Meyrowitz insights are right, then it can be a task to unravel the possible consequences that this placeless world has for boys and girls alike in their identification processes.

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