Childhood and Youth in the Flux of the City:
Images, Impressions and Impostures

Lucia Rabello de Castro[1] and Lucia Mello e Souza Lehmann[2]

*Institute of Psychology, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Av. Armando Lombardi 800 s/217, Rio de Janeiro
CEP 22640-000, Brazil
1. E-mail: jobi@infolink.com.br 2. E-mail: llehmann@agentel.com.br*

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ABSTRACT This paper discusses the emergent aspect of image production as a form of identification and social contact in the city. In the de-territorialised city of the turn-of-the-century, where transiency and fragmentation frame subjective experience, images are versatile instruments to convey a sense of recognition of self and others, as well as to foster new forms of citizenship. For children and young people images are interposed in the processes of social inclusion and exclusion. Children and young people are specially disposed to overindulge in image construction by virtue of the ideologically structuring of childhood and youth which are regarded as changing and developing. Images, it is argued, can also lead to a mode of self- and other-deception whenever they stand for ready-made identities created by publicity and market strategies compromising a committed appraisal of subjective possibilities. It can also lead to imposture whenever the basis of social bonds is reduced to "being similar" and social contact becomes whimsical fraternity.

INTRODUCTION

What catches the visitor's eyes in the contemporary urban landscape of big cities, for instance, those of my own country like Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo? For many, the very first impression when arriving here for the first time seems to be of their "excess": the presentation of a diversity encompassing such heterogeneous aspects, which, nevertheless, do not fit into a representable whole. M. Canevacci, anthropologist, has put it (1997) that an urban tour round São Paulo "is simply unconceivable owing to its excess of metropolitanism": the city has developed in such a way that any tour planned to obtain an organized view of the city is senseless. Another visitor, P. Rabinow (1993), though not explicitly commenting on the excess of these cit-

ies, writes as if he's on the verge of a nervous attack: "driving into Rio through the major highway..: reverberating memories of Casablanca; long wide avenues leading to the mottled texture of the city; old cars; long lines of fuming buses; hodge-podge mix of 1970s skyscrapers, shanty towns undatable to a tourist, and palm trees, ample graffiti... Lunch-hour traffic flogged Rios's pitted arteries. Horns blared, cars lurched, hands gesticulated; it felt like New York. Drained, we parked on a small dead-end street abutting one of the many formerly coffee-covered hills punctuating the topography around which modern Rio has expanded and in whose newly wooded groves the syncretic candomblé cult is practised nightly, looked up to see a purple orchid growing on the overhanging tree. Exotic." (p.249-50)

Luckily, these two cities do not seem to head the list of wearing out visitors by the profusion and the amplitude of experiences made available by just driving around. The sensation of dizziness, or as Canevacci refers to São Paulo, the experiencing of the vertigo itself, also accompanies the visitor as he/she first comes to New York, Mexico City, London or other big cities round the world.

What happens, then, if we look, not at the visitor, but at the dwellers of these cities, those people who have to face the everyday traffic-jams, the pollution of buses and cars, the long hours spent to and from work, the hectic day schedule since one wakes up till one goes to bed, the rushing lunch-hour and so on? The excess of the city that calls visitors' attention and sometimes drains them out, imposes itself as a daily and necessary experience on dwellers who are, gradually, familiarized with such a dimension

of city life. However, in the ebb and flow of city life, a feeling of strangement is not seldom. Cosmopolitanism and diversity, exuberance and magnitude boil down to superficiality and anonymity, loss of references and isolation.

The issue that permeates this paper centres round the demands that city life makes upon urban turn-of-the-century subjects, specially children and youth, and how these demands are dealt with in face of the stringencies that affect contemporary conditions of living in a big city. For instance, one of the foremost and pervasive aspects of city life constitutes the technologization of our daily practices, so that human relationships are becoming increasingly mediated by machines: from telephones, cars and underground trains to computers and televisions, a machine-operated world is before us, and while, on the one hand, human capacity is thereby enhanced, on the other, our culture is facing a novel way of how we relate to one another, and what consequences such human-machine relationships are likely to provoke. In a city like Rio de Janeiro, a high number of accidents involving children being run over by cars and bicycles can be observed. In other cities of the world the focus of afflictions turns out to be the amount of time children spend watching tv, so that less and less time is spent on social contacts among children themselves.

In the flux of the city new difficulties for other-recognition and acceptance are interposed. How is one going to be recognised when the visible marks of affiliation and origin tend to be obfuscated by the constant need of displacement in the vast and often unknown territory of the contemporary city? How are social encounters going to proceed in accordance with differentiation rules of social position when positions are less and less territorialized, that is, less identifiable on account of where they take place? If so, how can city dwellers, specially children and youth, cope with this? In the flux of the city impressions and images are negotiated for other-recognition, so that they become the fundamental means to make oneself recognized in the midst of strangers. We propose, here, to examine some of the ways that children and youth employ images and impressions of themselves in order to establish identifications and social contact.

We suggest, however, that these images and impressions being so removed from any sense of subjective appraisal and introspection come to be determined by the fads and fashions of contemporary consumer culture. Having been acquired as one acquires new clothes, these images and impressions seem like impostures that subjects play with in order to manage the deterritorializing dimension of city life today.

THE CITY AS A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE OF TIME AND SPACE

The leisurely strolling up and down the streets of the city, the calm and interested observation of items for sale in the shop-windows is reminiscent of a time not long past, but which today has been superseded by less composed and distracted manners. The "flâneur", so well depicted by the French poet Charles Bauderlaire, becomes the focus of Walter Benjamin's study of modernity (1989), as a figure that entertains himself wasting his time in an aimless stroll in the streets of the modern city. The flâneur is also fascinated by the crowds of the cities in which one gets immersed as if "in a reservoir of electric energy". However, the flâneur observes the crowd with ambivalence (Falk, 1997), his detachment and his fascination for it represent the duality between tradition and the advent of modernity. For Benjamin (1989), the sensation of modernity is acquired by the desintegration of the "aura" - the unique quality of things and events - in face of the shocks of modern city life where the multiplicity and the heterogeneity of experiences hinder collective memories and traditions. Elbowing one's way amidst the crowds, the modern subject is dependent on the rationalized and voluntaristic apprehension of reality to organize his perceptions and sensations. Either through the technical innovations in the sphere of labour, or through the technical reproduction in the sphere of arts, the modern subject has to adapt him/herself to these innovations submitting him/herself to the operation of autonomous, uniform and constant technological devices. In this process, what is lost is the autonomy of the subject in his/her unpredictable and unique way of experiencing reality whereby collective and individual elements conjoin to give birth to subjective

experience. Benjamin notes somewhere else (1985) that the desintegration of the aura, as a condition of modern times, gives place to the annhilation of tradition, the locus of which the uniqueness of objects and facts can be apprehended. Disconnected with tradition that is responsible to accommodate the meaning of experience, the emergence of modernity is based on the possibility that reality can be manipulated in accordance with the technical means used to reproduce it. If reproducibility of reality is what counts now, it follows that objects and facts lose their unique and unrepeatable status to become transient.

As Benjamin noted concerning the experience of modernity, transiency becomes paradigmatic of the apprehension of reality, so that it is rather the copy, the reproduction or the image of reality that is offered to the city masses. Long before, Simmel (1971,[1903]) had also observed that city life comprehends a kind of experience where social relationships must be understood as temporally transient and spatially volatile, where reality is in constant flux and can only be apprehended in fragments, not as an organized totality (Frisby, 1992).

Thus, both for Simmel as well as for Benjamin, the city is regarded as the place where permanence and stability give place to what is ephemeral and volatile. For the former, the economy of money and the social division of labour brought about new criteria against which to consider social relationships. Their distinctive and irreducible character is reduced to a quantifiable and calculating dimension. For the latter, the dissolution of tradition along with the process of technologization allows for a different coding of human experience, not unique any longer, but repeatable, reproducible and transient. What seems noteworthy is that both these two authors account for processes that were taking place in the cities in the first half of this century. They were not problematizing, however, the deep changes that affected urban space.

Cities have become gigantic in the course of this century. For instance, the city of São Paulo which counted 239,820 inhabitants in the beginning of the century [1], in 1996 counted 9,839,06 inhabitants [2]. Contemporary cities extend beyond the horizon. Everywhere we look, the city spreads away beyond the possibility of our vision. But it is not only the gigantic size of cities that makes city life more complex and inhospitable, making it more difficult to find orientation in such a space.

Urban space, as H. Lefebvre has argued (1974), has become a "space of differences" where the logic of appropriation of such a space has become discontinuous and contradictory. For, on the one hand, space can be considered the construction of daily social practices, such as those of the family and the neighbourhood taking place at home and in its vicinities. On the other hand, space can be the result of distant and far-fetched decisions and power strategies, emanating from the rationalizing action of the state and the logic of capitalism. From the social reformers and the pre-urbanists of the beginning of this century to the urbanists and city planners of mid-XXth century, the city has been regarded as liable to strategical planning and administration. This means that for city dwellers the spatiality of the city becomes the result of multiple endeavours, including its re-designing and engineering by bureaucrats and state strategists which impose their own abstract ideas of social organization. Apart from that, Lefebvre also cautions about the pervading role of capital in re-creating urban spatiality according to criteria of economic advantage for certain interest groups. More recently (Soya, 1993 ; Santos, 1996; Smith, 1992), it has been argued that differences have been aggravated in the process of late capitalism, where space has been captured in recently created information nets over and above nations by the mechanisms of internationalized capital.

One consequence of such multiple and different scales of spatiality is that changes in urban spatiality provoke a constant demand for city dwellers to reconstruct imaginarily their city. Narratives of the city which can accommodate the changing relations between subjects and their living space become quickly out-of-date before the avalanche of changes that from day to night can modify the face of a whole district. For instance, the implantation of a number of schools in one of the districts of the city of São Paulo (Lima, 1989) was, after a long process, decided upon political criteria which resulted in distributing the amount of resources in as many

localities as possible. This meant that school buidings had to be provisional being reduced to mere classrooms with no other space planned for recreation or other activities. The consequences upon the morale of teachers and pupils were enormous, with significantly negative impact on pupils' learning.

The enormous growth in the size of the cities, the multiple and contradictory ways in which the appropriation of its spatiality is determined, bring forth a much more fragmented perspective on contemporary city life. What is dissolved in this process of fragmentation is an urban conscience, the result of an imaginary apprehension of the city as a nucleated whole (the centre of the city representing its productive and fundamental part) whose parts spread out. Less and less apprehended as a totality, the city can only be imaginarily constructed from a locally-based perspective. Urban fragmentation exposes and makes conspicuous, over and above the totality of the city, the local, bringing about the defense of demarcated territories and identities. The defense of the "local" often stands in opposition to a view which emphasizes an ampler and more universalistic outlook on human relationships and social interaction.

Circulation in the City: Encoding Transiency and Fragmentation

The experience of city dwellers in-the-turn-of-the-century is imbued with the search for the new which becomes emblematic of the modern (Jameson, 1996). As argued above, the coding of experience is framed within the turning away from memorable tradition. To relinquish tradition gives way to encoding experience as it is produced, and how it is produced, to the effect that transiency becomes normative about the interpretation of events. Besides, the experience of city life today takes place in a fragmented social spatiality where the city is much less apprehended like a body operating organically through its differents parts and organs, and more from a locally-based perspective which disregards the ampler insertion of the part in a totality.

Displacements in the city, the going to and from somewhere, the moving around, seem to constitute an important means to obtain a view of the different parts that compose the city. How-

ever, displacements are part and parcel of conflicts among social groups in the use and the appropriation of urban space. Therefore, different social groups are entitled to different possibilities of moving round the city. For instance, children are specially jeopardized in this respect, as they are much more allocated to certain spaces than can choose by themselves where they want to be and move. Graffiti all over the walls of the city of Rio de Janeiro can highlight the significance of the invisibility of children in urban space. One of these graffiti kids interviewed by a news reporter says: "to dirt the walls with graffiti means, ultimately, to put one's marks in a nice place and the higher and the more visible, the better". Thus, to see "one's marks in a nice place" can be understood as a complaint about the place of confinement where children and youth are usually put - schools and homes; it can also be understood as a repudiation of this status quo by deliberately planting oneself ("one's marks") where one is not expected to be, and should not be. For children and youth, free circulation in urban spatiality becomes problematic.

To move around in the city makes it possible to experience the "new" that the city provides, and to gain knowledge of unknown territories what becomes a crucial conquest for many young boys and girls. A new form of social participation and citizenship seems to emerge in the collective rejoicing and get-together of shopping centres (Maffesoli, 1997; Canclini, 1996) which have become the city monuments (Calligaris, 1994). Circulation of people also engender the circulation of experiences in the vast territory of the city, so that a process of appropriation of what circulates also takes place engendering hybridization processes. Therefore, the encoding of disparate, incongruous and different experiences - in the vast territory of the city, as "a space of differences" - can stir up the disposition of social groups to make such experiences more similar to their own. This is what happens, for instance, with songs and rhythms originated in poorer and disadvantaged areas of town sung by lower-class youth, and with a clear political message against the élites. By being appropriated by big music entrepeneurs and once becoming a fad, they are easily introduced into sophisticated bars and night clubs of the well-off youth. The

important point here is where these songs are played: in a totally different site from where they originated, they lose their provoking political message and become domesticated in the self-satisfied and self-indulgent atmosphere of well-to-do youth.

Circulating in the City: Images and Impressions

A young football player, with an ascendingly notorious professional career, appears with his head shaved. The same situation is very soon repeated with other football-players, as if a game was being played. After a while, "skin-heads" become a phenomenon among young people, especially males. Everywhere, shaved heads can be noted from schoolboys to university students. An image is born! What makes these youngsters adopt such an image? To look like Ronaldinho, the football player we are talking about, "borrowing" his conspicuous personal mark, the "skin-head", allows these young people to be like him, by identifying themselves with him as a successful and competent football player, at the same time that they remain themselves (Falk, 1994). Ronaldinho's shaved head becomes a sign for the desirable and desired status that he has achieved - fame, wealth, prestige, and so on. In a way, the image that he emblematically projects with his shaved head is appropriated by boys and by male youth of whatever age to signify an aspect of individual self-construction through an identification with symbols of success and prestige. The "borrowed" image also allows the individual a certain euphoria in experiencing a kind of self-fulfilment by introjecting something good. The circulation of this image in the city points, yet, at another direction. For boys and male youth, it concerns communicating to one another the new status thus acquired.

The pace at which things happen in the city, where a constant renewal of experiences is produced, the crowds and the masses moving about, one elbowing one's way among strangers, looking without seeing and being together without really encountering, makes the artificial more real than the real. In the constant flux of city life, the empire of images has been implanted: "the city as a labyrinth of images", says Certeau (1993). Transient and ephemeral reality, and its repro-

ducible counterpart represented by the image, is intensified giving place to the ever new. Constant metamorphosis brings about new lifestyles based on the consumption of new products and experiences which altogether define who one is. Thus, the aestheticization of everyday life, with its proliferation of signs and images, intervenes in the processes of self-definition, self-construction and self-recognition by making social identities flexible and disposable. As Featherstone (1994) put it: "These signs, which are de-contextualised from tradition or subcultural ordering, are played with in a superficial way, with people revelling in the fact that they are artificial, opaque and 'depthless' in the sense that they cannot be de-coded to offer access to some revelatory meaning or fundamental sense of truth." (p.100)

As childhood and youth have for long been considered the ages of growth and development, where change is paradigmatic, no wonder that children and youth have been swept away by contemporary cultural dynamisms that engender evolving, transient and ephemeral aspects of social reality. Children and youth are prone, then, to overindulge in image construction by producing transformations of the body, clothes, hairstyle and overall appearance.

The process of image production makes the surface meaningful instead of being based on the expectation that meaning is to emerge from depth and reflexion. Rather, it is the immediate, what is given before the eyes that comes to acquire a significant dimension in providing the impressions about oneself round the city. As one young woman of fifteen explains about the multiple impressions of herself that she is able to convey to others: "It all depends on whom my boy-friend is. If he is a skatist, and then loves sport, I become careless about my clothes, as he does with his own. Skatists never have a haircut, they don't shave. However, if I go out with a rapper, then it is different. I even change the way I dance. The colour of the clothes also matter when I go out with rappers." Therefore, how one looks and the images thus conveyed based on such external signs become the foremost aspect of social identification. Round the city, impressions are bound to be multiple and mutable, contingent upon the circumstances, so that

identifications are necessarily transient and sur-face-centred, that is, they are not supposed to reveal or allude to any deep inner trait, but can be taken for just what they stand for. To go around in the vast and unknown territory of the city, to adventure oneself in social contacts not yet at-tempted, to search for novel experiences and emotions in whatever recondite places the city provides, demands that one is attentive to the impressions conveyed by the most outward signs of personal distinction: clothes, hairstyle, gestures, gait, external hygiene, and overall appearance. Images then communicate about oneself.

Writing now while our World Football Cup is being played can be highlighting about the power that images can exert in the process of communication where everyone else around the city is one's passive and mute interlocutor. Bra-zilian participation in the World Football Cup has been long-dated since 1930. Besides, Brazil has won it four times. Football in Brazil is by far the best known and most popular sports - across all socio-economic segments. By and large, World Football Cups engender national como- tion, as in cities, banks and commerce close down, pub-lic transport stops, when the Brazilian team is playing. In this year's Cup national comotion has been even more externalized through visible signs and images. For the first time, flags, caps, t-shirts, home adornments and necklaces with the colours of the Brazilian flag are put on bodies and on cars that circulate in the streets. Wher-ever you go in the city, on the days when Brazil is playing, the city transforms itself: dustmen, sweeping the streets, can be seen doing their job wrapped up in an enormous Brazilian flag; chil-dren and youth go around with their faces painted yellow and green (which are the colours of the Brazilian flag) and with stickers of football mo-tives on their bodies. Children and youth, spe-cially, have been the foremost players of such a dramatization of nationalistic upsurge. They can be seen ostentatiously wearing yellow and green t-shirts and caps around town. These stand for images that signify the playful identification of "being Brazilian" whereby a collective adhesion to the nationalistic values of sports is once more legitimated.

In an important sense, this is perhaps the only way that children and youth have to partici-pate inventing a new form of citizenship (Canclini, 1995), defined by the sharing of certain tastes in relation to sports or artistic expressions by a group of people, once political participation, strictly speaking, is not permitted to them. There-fore, the show-off of outward signs of national identification means to assume, in a very con-spicuous manner, their place as citizens in the social order organized round symbolic experi-ences of participation and inclusion.

Circulation in the City: Images for Inclusion and Images for Exclusion

The territory of the city can be described as the geographical actualization of power differ-ences among social groups ever unbalanced by the conflicting strategies to displace and blur the hegemonic definitions of boundaries, sites and positions (see Wacquant, 1994). The appro-priation of urban spatiality, specially the easi-ness and the amplitude with which one can cir-culate in vast space of the city, reflects the un-equal power status of social groups, whereby gender, age and economic status criteria are fun-damental to define individuals' possibilities (Castro, 1998). In the de-territorialized map of the city, where traditional references lose their meaning, where fragmentation dissolves the bonds to an imaginary ampler whole, the quest for visibility becomes an issue. In some sense, becoming visible means becoming powerful. As J.L.Borges, the novelist put it, esse ist percipi, "to exist is to be seen".

Children and youth, as social categories, are bound to be jeopardized in relationship to the restrictions and prohibitions of circulating more freely in urban "public" space. As argued above, the social construction of childhood and youth in modern times has been imbricated in the proc-ess of geographical seclusion of these social categories in schools, nurseries and homes, and out of public urban space, like the streets. Nev-ertheless, even if childhood and youth are bound to suffer from more severe restrictions as to where they should be and move in the city, constant struggles can be noted that suggest a dynamic re-creation of geographical sites and boundaries, a process of re-territorialization of the city. In many countries like Brazil, for instance, streets

have become the "homes" of a large number of children and adolescents who are attracted and allured by the variety of experiences and the freedom of the streets (Vogel, 1981), and because their family homes have ceased to be the place where they feel protected and maintained physically and emotionally. It can be observed that many of these children have resisted state and non-state educational efforts and measures to send them back home or keep them in institutions highlighting complex manoeuvres whereby children and youth, as social groups, resist more powerful strategies to define where they should stay and move around. Other examples of these resistance manoeuvres can be found in truant behaviour, graffiti inscriptions and transgressive behaviour.

A fundamental aspect as to how possibilities of circulation in the city can be enhanced has to do with the negotiation of images and impressions. Young people are quite meticulous about outward appearance realizing how images are important as an instrument which will allow them transit in certain urban spaces. Thus, body appearance, personal hygiene, clothes and so on, project images that can include or exclude children and young people from the circuit of certain city experiences. Maia (1997), for instance, discusses how lower class youth are extremely anxious about their looks, as they realize how these images are central for them being either identified or not with their well-to-do counterparts, and therefore, allowed or not to enter in sophisticated urban sites, like shopping centres. She comments on the strict separation that these young people make between clothes to wear at home, and clothes to go out. The latter have to be clean and fashionable, as both these signifiers necessarily imply another one: wealth.

The moving around the city, then, actualizes a dynamic process of self-presentation and other-recognition through the continuous negotiation of images and impressions whose aim and consequences determine subjects' position, insertion and inclusion in certain areas of social participation. Therefore, it can be suggested that the re-designing of urban spatiality, the process of re-territorialization of the city, is dependent on the struggles of social inclusion and exclusion processes.

From the point of view of the subject, child or young person, this means a demand for belonging to a group, and a desire to identify with and feel part of, and included in, a group of peers. To feel oneself as part of a group generates a feeling of rejoicing and pleasure over the abandonment of clearcut self/other boundaries, as if there was an orgiastic pleasure to lose oneself in the protection of the group. It also means to feel recognized as different from other social groups. In the city, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion tends to become spatial, defining territories and sites, and sometimes carried out with a virulence that can engender violent behaviour among groups of youngsters. Thus, to be included entails the showing off of visible and emblematic signs of the group, which define in a clearcut way who is in, and who is out. Outward signs can be accompanied by an intense rejection and hostility towards the outsiders. Inclusion, in this sense, seals a sectarian pact against the outgroup based on a presupposed oneness and sameness of the in-group: "we are all one and the same". Aduan (1997) comments on this process of urban apartheid between well-off and street children in the Brazilian urban scenario. Therefore, for well-off children, the city becomes divided between those places where it is safe to be and to go, inhabited by "good and honest people" and those unsafe places where poor people live. On the other hand, for poor kids of the city periphery, better-off children are called mauricinhos - a pejorative nickname which means a mixture of a spoilt and an affected child - who are supposed to inhabit places where pleasure and excitement prevail, something like a Disneyland, where poor kids are not entitled to go.

Consumption patterns and lifestyles also mediate the establishment of images of inclusion and exclusion, in that they serve to construct and define collective images of the child and of the young person (Bocock, 1993). Thus, for instance, the definitional status of "the adolescent" ascertains certain prerogatives of social conduct for those who can be recognized as included in this group (the age criterion being of importance, in this respect) and can subjectively recognize themselves as part of this group. This entitles those in the so called group of "adolescents" to overact in accordance to those social images and

expectations, thereby legitimating a supposedly totalitarian and monolithic image of adolescence. For this reason, many young people who cannot feel they fit into such collective images, do not recognize themselves as "adolescents". This happens mostly with Brazilian youngsters of lower social status who cannot share those consumption patterns and lifestyles usually articulated with the construction of social images of adolescence. On the other hand, this self exclusion from a social group where one does not fit into, is not only negative, i.e. not to recognize oneself as an adolescent, but, most importantly, can lead to the affirmative and assertive definition of new identifications. Thus, negative identifications can stir up the demand to make visible other social groups whose emblematic and symbolic bases of identification can be different. For instance, those young people who are out of school, those who are Blacks, those who do not have families and live in the streets.

The dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion is materialized in the constant invention and play of symbols and images that make it possible for social groups to become visible in the fragmented and ever-changing city life. The flux of the city, with its contemporary qualification of transiency and fragmentation, provides an optimal medium for the experimentation with images and impressions. What this process entails is, necessarily, the distancing from original, stable and more permanent versions of subjective and collective experiencing. The construction of group and self-identifications is constantly changing and has become ephemeral and multiple. The issue that must be considered then is that the production of images and impressions, as a means of social contact and social identification in the conditions of urban contemporary spatiality, is not neutral, either with respect to the kind of social bond that is fostered along this process, or to the model of subjectivity that it legitimates.

Final Considerations: Images or Impostures?

The subtitle above is not meant to give a negative overtone to contemporary urban experience as many nostalgic critics of our days (Lauwe, 1991) have in a competent way tried to demonstrate. The negative status of the simul-

ational tendencies of contemporary time has indeed been very often discussed (Baudrillard, 1981;1983; Lipovetsky, 1983). Rather, the provocation of the subtitle stands at most as a cautionary note against the dissolution of criticism today. For us, it seems important to reflect upon the conditions of our present time with a view of history not as a fate, but as the consequence of human choice which can be modified. As Blanqui argued (quoted in Abensour, 1990), "it is not because things have followed this course, that they couldn't be otherwise."(p.276) In this sense, one must have criteria to evaluate what is good, and what is bad, or else, the consumated fact will impinge on us as the best course of action, just because it happened so.

Consumption culture, the fragmented spatiality of the city life and abandonment of tradition in contemporary times have provided the conditions for a different kind of subjective experience whereby sense and meaning can be derived by inspecting the surface rather than reaching for the essence. Identification processes based on image production become contingent upon circumstances, and therefore, much more discontinuous and changing. Contrarily, identification processes based on the notion of essence foresee a much more stable and continuous model of subjective experience. Accounting for the core of one's identity, was to some extent, a predicament, since it channeled individual's project and investments in one definite direction. On the other hand, the discontinuous and volatile identifications based on image and impressions enhance, then, a much more disengaged attitude towards the consequences of one's own actions. In some sense, this type of subjective experience can prevent subjects from making deep-seated commitments and favour an unconsequential and light-hearted disposition towards social action.

In this respect, Kellner writes (1992), "on one hand, this increases one's freedom to play with one's identity and to change one's life dramatically, while, on the other hand, it can lead to a totally fragmented, disjointed life, subject to the whims of fashion and the subtle indoctrinations of advertising and popular culture..." (p.174) In this excerpt, Kellner cautions against the easy

and seemingly unproblematic experimentation that is available today for individuals to change and experiment with their identities. Actually, subjects may feel that they are in control of this process, but they are prey to the "contemporary orgy of commodification, fragmentation and image production" (Kellner, *op.cit.*). The same cautionary remark is given by Rolnik (1997) and Sarlo (1994) when they point out the tantalizing effect of market and advertising strategies to create "ready-made" identities that can be soon discarded.

Images, on account of being versatile, can easily communicate to others ideas, feelings and emotions. In the de-territorialized city of today, images can be useful instruments to construe a sense of recognition of self and other, a sense of belonging and new forms of social identification and participation.

However, images can also be providential impostures in a world saturated by signs, by symbols, by information, by velocity, by multiplicity and discontinuity, and where any lack (of meaning, of intelligibility) is felt as unbearable. The ad libitum production of images for self identification and recognition can, in fact, lead to impostures when a serious appraisal of subjective possibilities is compromised by a subordinate and aquiescent attitude that smooths out the feeling of being an outsider. On the other hand, affiliations and social inclusion based on external/visual similarity that images can secure, seem fragile since they do not resist the tension and conflicts inherent in social interaction. They are oblivious of long-established values, such as egalitarianism and solidarity, that seem to be fundamental notions for overcoming differences and antagonism among individuals.

Coming to terms with the complexity and heterogeneity of subjective experience in contemporary times entails facing a difficult task where very often clarity and intelligibility are missing. For children and youth these are hard times to be faced, specially when both entertainment and educational practices are permeated with image production. These are hard times to be faced too when an indiscriminate positive emphasis is given to the changing and transient aspect of our culture as if change by itself could be taken, as it were, for progress.

NOTES

1. Sinopse do Recenseamento de 31/12/1900, Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatistics.
2. Contagem da Populacao de 1996, Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatistica
3. O Globo, jan. 6th 1998, p.18.

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