Youth, art and city: research and political intervention in social psychology

Jóvenes, arte y ciudad: investigación e intervención en psicología social

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Resumen. En este trabajo se presentan debates sobre cuatro temas que considero importante para entender lo contemporáneo así como algunas posibilidades para la investigación y la intervención en psicología social: 1) la ciudad y sus relaciones con procesos de subjetivación y singularización; 2) la ciudad como soporte para inscripciones estéticas; 3) las tensiones entre los modos de subjetivación y las resistencias engendradas en esta contextura; 4) talleres estéticos como posibilidad de la psicología social intervenir en los caminos de los jóvenes para ver y participar en la ciudad. El entrelazamiento de estos temas se basa en fragmentos recogidos de contextos, situaciones y condiciones diversas: imágenes de intervenciones estéticas y obras de arte que tienen como tema la ciudad, informaciones acerca de un proyecto de investigación-intervención en psicología social con jóvenes, cuyo objetivo era modificar sus relaciones con la ciudad.

Palabras clave. Youth; art; city; aesthetic workshops.

Keywords. Juventud; arte; ciudad; talleres estéticos.

The city: subjectivity and singularity process

Photo 1. “SampaTheCapital”. Work of Henrique Schuckman
A city in black, white and multiple gray tones. The buildings, predominantly tall, are disposed all around the territorial extension to the readers’ image, being in certain moments intercalated by lines of varied dimensions. Artery lines from where it flows, with varied speeds, the vehicles made up with its sounds and smells. Arteries and veins with different thickness to facilitate the oxygenation in the body of the city, characteristic metaphor of the transformation of Paris from the XIX century promoted by Baron Haussmann (Walter Benjamin, 2007) and which inspired urban projects throughout all the next century.

The city in black, white and gray was weaved with dejects gathered in a beach in the south of Brazil by artist Henrique Schuckman. A crack in the middle of the tapestry opens the passage for its own creator, who with his own body cross the city and/or is crossed by it. The buildings around his presence, get volume and assume varied dimensions and curvatures that contrast with the straight condition so like the modernist project that characterizes the avenues and edifications of such city.

“SampaTheCapital” is a work of art which title allows to identify the huge Brazilian city, as it does the presence of its author to introduce movement to the apparent fixedness of concrete and asphalt giving visibility to the process of subjectivity and singularity that are processed there. Subjectivity homogenized engendered by the rhythm and density of the metropolis, by the regulations imposed to the movements that are slowly incorporated and assumed, by space restrictions to meetings with others, each time more circumscribed to privatized contexts. The contemporary city flows with gigabytes speed and at the same time, imprisons its inhabitants in spaces that get smaller, either in the apartments where they live or the vehicles that spend most of their time trying to get from one place to the other. The speed of the city and its expansion contrasting to the traffic jams that imprison the people and make them to be besides many others without meeting each other or even just contacting them.

Subjectivity processes are presented not as a place to emergency of some singularity, but, to the contrary, to its denial. They result from varied conditions, a lot more than then the ones identified on the urbanization plans, in architecture, on the rhythm of the city. Not necessarily deliberated and conscious, the common characteristic of such conditions consists in the tendency to homogenize ways of being and living and to form hierarchy. They institute sensibilities whose differences are ruled on the unequal conditions of possibilities presented to its inhabitants.

The differences on the ways of enjoying what the city offers result, therefore, on the “partition of the sensible” that institute the bodies and the ways of being of its inhabitants and form hierarchy. It is a way of “distribution and redistribution of time and spaces, of places and of identities, this way of framing and re-framing the visible and the invisible that Rancière defined as partition of the sensitive” (Pellejero, 2009, p. 28). Configurated framing in its political dimensions, demanding other politics that contest and transform.

Tensioning the partition of the sensitive is fundamental to the reinvention of the city and the possibilities that are shown to its inhabitants. It’s political action in a way that for Rancière, “…all politics are based on what it can be seen and what can be said, about who has the
ability to see and the quality to say, about the capability of spaces and the possibilities of
time: Politics are, more than anything, a partition of the sensitive of this kind” (Pellejero,
2009, p.25).

It deals this tensioning of refusal to the intended homogenization, where it can be aimed in
many ways and intensities. This refusal engenders cracks on the relation to the ways of
subjectivity instituted and consists on the condition of possibilities to the emergency of
distinguishing processes, of other relations to the context, who it’s lived with and with
oneself. Condition to the emergency of other cities.

The city as support for aesthetic inscriptions

A city is a lot more than the place where we live, it’s a place that establishes to all and each
as condition and possibility while inhabitants of a space and time that it is/we live in. Velocity
and fugacity, for sure, are characteristics of the relations that are instituted on the city
nowadays and thanks to the increasing concentration of people on urban centers, could be
considered icons of relations to the others, with the varied “known/made”, with its own
existence.

In this scenario, there are voices that constantly are opposed to the alleged homogenization
of sights, to the sensibilities of bodies. Voices which affirm the polyphony condition of all and
any city: although ways of subjectivity institute dominant voices, allegedly unisons, it is
possible to hear the eco of other voices in its ways, on the architectural characteristics, on
the different territorial conditions, on the visual signs that are spread out around different
surfaces, in its sounds, noises, rumors and silences. The tensioning among these many
voices and the dialogic¹ that connotes them are presented as an open field to other senses,
as possibilities to signalization processes fundamental to the reinvention of the lived.

Between these dissonant voices I highlight the ones from usually unknown artists that
transform outdoors, fences and fleeting spaces as the interstices of stop lights in support to
its deeds. The aesthetic inscriptions that is printed on the movement of the city are opposed
to the official dominant voices-ideas, kept in this condition through different mechanisms of
power. These artists introduce, with their art, other voices to the urban polyphony. Voices-
ideas with intensities and intonations that provoke sacred sensibilities and in a certain way
proclaim others possible.

The crossings on big roads, or the fences and aseptic walls that spread out on the urban
scenario are, as the art of the jugglers, graphite designers and other artists, disturbed,

¹ The comprehension of dialogy that presents as base for a proposed discussion supports itself on the contributions
of Bakhtin (2008) The dialogy consists in “Space of fight between social voices (some kind of speech war) in which
centripetal forces (the ones which try to impose central verbaxiological over real plural languages) and centrifugated
forces (the ones who rust continually the centralization tendencies, through several dialogical processes such as
parody and smile of any nature, explicit polemics or blurred, hybridization or reaccessing, the overposition of voices
etc.)” (Faraco, 2003, p.67).
transformed. The placidity of white or gray is disturbed with uncommon images, being those marked by the profusion of colors and signs, as in the case of graphite that are increasingly shown in urban spaces, or with the simplicity of a collage such as the one seen on photo 2.

Photo 2. Wheatpast in the Brazilian city (“Shout”).

The singleness of the aesthetic inscription that is seen on photo 2, contrasts with the characteristics of the contemporary city, with intense flow, with the profusion of information, images and sounds that marks it. It also contrasts with the reiterated orders that aim to discipline the bodies and meek them in relation to the partition of the homologated sensible.

On a surface marked by time, on some other time, white wall, shows the image of an ordering bird, notwithstanding its supposed fragility, the quietness. Shouting, instead of shutting up is the word spoken, evocation to other times in which the ways of the city and its squares were the place by excellence to political action, of contestation, debate. The small and short-lived bird screams lonely and announces, tough its hearing might not happen, the possibility of someone else also scream, to disagree.

Aesthetic inscriptions like the bird that screams and claims that others do it stretches on the space of cities untimely, presenting the pedestrians another possibility of relation to the urban space. They are inscriptions that are counter opposed to the intense flow of the city renewing the sight and showing the eyes of the passing-by, something to be read, heard, to be thought. And for so, some stop is demanded, a slow-down right so then, at the frenetic rhythm that each person self-imposes as an answer to city’s own rhythm. This slow down, even being short lived dislodges, disturb and tension the reiterated movement. It reveals then, the possibility of another rhythm, of dissonance, of difference.

These aesthetic inscriptions that assume the compass of the city as support profane the hierarchy promoted by ways of subjectivity ruled there. To profane, according to Agambem (2007), means to restitute to the use of free men, something that was obstructed to them. And the city is at the same time, a field of possibilities and its denial, a place of free transit to
the ones who present the access credentials to the temples of consumerism or to the ones that answer accordingly to invisible social expectations to how to dress, act, walk, behave. Free transit to the meek bodies and well being financially.

Profaning ways of seeing, saying, and hearing the/to the city, the aesthetic inscriptions that spread there, resist the visibilities, the sayings and hierarchy sensibilities, contributing in this manner, on a bigger or lesser degree, to the reinvention of the own city, and, at the same time, of its craftsman and the people with who these aesthetic inscriptions are disposed to dialogue.

The tensions between the ways of subjectivity and resistances engendered in this contexture

On the drift of images, sounds, lights, time and spaces that characterizes the contemporary city, marked singularities are constituted by the intensity that connotes them. These are plural people, inhabitants and inhabited by the sincretic cultural soup of the city, constituted by ways of subjectivity hegemonic, but to these could daily come and resist, with different intensities in partnership with many others or in apparent isolation. People-bird that scream lonely, in allusion to the wheatpast on photo 2, or gathered people and many others mobilized by numerous interests, compounding connectives with varied characteristics and different duration.

Protagonists and expectants of political strategies of confrontation usually visualize the lack of political practice nowadays, the apathy of the young people, the consumerism passivity. Resenting of today from the nostalgic reference of social movements of the 60’s and 70’s of the past century, affirming unconcern of young people to politics or even their vanishing of the political scenario.

But much is happening on the contemporary scenario and the young are taking action on these movements, being actions of bigger visibility like Occupy Wall street, Movimiento 15-M and Spanish revolution, being actions such as the urban inscriptions that are spread out on city walls. Considering one or another case, of kinds of fights (Foucault, 1995), being, against forms of domination, exploration or against subjectivity or submission. And in being fights, these actions consist in resistance, not in a sense of keeping what is set facing the possibility of change, but just its opposite: they face to the norms and naturalized, instituting cracks (like the one tapestry in photo 1) on the supposed harmony that denies the institute conditions on inequality.

The diversity of nuances is a characteristic of these resistances. Some are oriented by a project to be defined according to the oppositions to the capitalist logic characteristic of political fights that marked the XX century. Adding to these resistances, others are oriented by an intention not necessarily opposite, but fundamentally disturbing: Resistances that
oppose to the ways of seeing, hearing, feeling and thinking hegemonic that oppose each other, yet in a subtle way, the partition of the sensitive homologated.

The provocation and dislodging that such resistances promote are conditions of affirmation of its own power, in a way that the cracks opened by them, seem possible to open to a condition of many senses and plural to its own reality and ways of being, as well as the possibilities of its reinvention. We name these actions as reXistances (Zanella et.al., 2013) to clearly detach the inventive dimension that connotes them and the existences that can be reinvented from their effects. The dislocations of ways of seeing and living, the provocation to peoples’ indifferences in the relation to the city, the disturbances to instituted order connote politicially these actions.

The effects of these reXistances are difficult to precise, and not seldom, can be seen some time after its emergency. Example of this are some movements and distinctive aesthetic actions that had as scenario the last period of the Soviet empire, recognized in the analyzes made by Yurchak (2008) as, in a certain way, co-responsible for its decline. Quoted by the author as provoking, the aesthetic actions of these artists, especially the ones auto-denominated Necrorealists, focus of his analyzes, provoked ways of seeing, acting, and living without aligning to opposing practices of the system. Its protagonists affirmed the disinterest for politics, although the political effects of their actions were evident.

Yurchak argues that the conception of political resistance as opposing reaction to power is inadequate to concept the actions of young members of Necrorealism which, around the 80’s, encrypted their absurd aesthetic in the city of Leningrado. The actions of these youth, nonetheless, are recognized and affirmed by the author as political actions investing in alternate ways of life: “The Necrorealists demonstrated, provocatively and spectacularly, the ability of such groups of Young people to inhabit these spaces and to create within them alternative subjectivities and forms of life that were profoundly non-soviet, undermining the hegemony of the Soviet political sphere” (Yurchak, 2008, p.215).

**Aesthetic workshops as possibilities of social psychology to intervening in the ways of young people to see and participate in the city**

The aesthetic inscriptions in the city can engender, on the people that are able to dialogue with these or create them, changes on the ways of seeing the city, and so, to inhabit there. These changes, mediated by art, are inexorably connected to the reflection process arisen from broaden ethical and political questions, forasmuch tensioning the partition of the sensitive and contributing to the affirmation of potency of all and each one as inventors of reinvention processes of singular and plural existence. Arising from there, the importance of assuming these aesthetic inscriptions as evidence, for research and interventions, in social psychology.
Beginning from acknowledging the importance of possible effects of aesthetic inscriptions and its potency to the reinvention of visibilities and saying abilities, these are presented as focus on the workshops proposed to young people on the project-intervention entitled “ArteUrbe: Aesthetic workshops with the young from/in the city”.

The project ArteUrbe assumes the city as the bearing axle of activities and proposed discussions. With the mediation from varied artistic-visual languages - photography, graphite, stencil, wheatpast, videos - the workshops aim to question the relations of the young with the city and the urban communication that constitute them as part of the city and its movements. Aim, yet, engender changes in these same relations, creating possibilities to the emergency of singularization processes.

The aesthetic workshops have been offered since 2010 to adolescents aged 14 to 19 years old, residing on the city of Florianopolis/SC. Up until now, 08 editions were held with different young groups, every project edition with a variable number of meetings (between 6 and 12) depending on the condition of the place where it is held, the possibilities of participation of the young and the staff in charge. The frequency of the meetings is weekly and between the editions of the project there is a break of at least three months, this time being necessary to evaluate what was done, rethinking the activities and setting forth the next edition.

The young participants of the workshops reside, in its majority, in social-economic less assisted regions and in certain ways forgotten by the government. In the last editions of the project, it was opted towards a partnership with some CRAS (Reference Center in Social Assistance) in the city and make way to access to the workshops to the young members of families which are targets from social assistance politics.

The option towards this public because of their restrict access to activities involving art out of circuits of formal schooling. It was also considered the importance of discussing the relations between art and life with these young people, its participation with the context in which they live in and the possibilities to intervene there.

The workshops are organized in a way to allow the ones who take part: The appreciation of aesthetic inscriptions made in different Brazilian cities and abroad; knowledge of the characteristic techniques from these different artistic languages; the experimentation. Aesthetic appreciation is fundamental to the transformation of the look, to tension the ways of disciplined seeing, formatted and openness to other glances, alert to details, to angles, the multiplicity of reality which allows for varied clips and its endless possibilities of combination and reinvention. The acknowledge of the techniques, in this manner, is condition of possibilities for creation in worked artistic languages, which is encouraged in experiment such as sprays, photographic cameras, gum and other materials. The blend of appreciation, knowledge, and experimentation is processed, during the workshops, in movements forward and backwards, questioning the visible, talked about and thinkable.

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2 Gum is a kind of glue made with wheat flour utilized in works like the one on photo 2.
Considering in turn, the aim of the project, as well as the appreciation, the knowledge of techniques and experimentation, assume the city as subject. This is also presented on the activities that focus on the dynamics of relations among the participants and with the coordinator of the workshops.

These other activities are relied on contributions in the area of social psychology that consider the possibility of thinking the group practices “as gadgets — singular combinations and heterogenic components — that open certain fields of visibility and sayability, at the same time they obscure analog fields” (Rodrigues, 1999, p.162). The visibility and sayability that is aimed to invest in aesthetic workshops are from other voices, discordant in relation to forms of seeing and living instituted; voices that concern the possibility of diverse relations with the city, with others and with oneself; that contribute to the invention of singular ways of being, with the come to be.

Photo 3. Graphite produced by young participants in one of the editions of Project ArteUrbe.

Photo 3 shows the graphite produced by the young that took part on the 6th edition of Aesthetic Workshops. It can be seen in the city produced by these young teenagers, traces of the reference city, the city in which they live in: Nature, edifications, asphalt, water… But it is not about a reference image, of a mere sight. The image refracts the city lived expressing the tension between voices/images of the island-paradise, with its green mountains and abundant water, and voices/images of the uprising urbanization, disorganized, of the disregard with natural patrimony. The tarmac on the beach front; the cloistered buildings, falling apart; very few stereotyped houses and asphyxiated by the buildings, in a chronic of

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3 A gadget is composed by “lines of visibility, lines of enunciation, force lines, lines of subjectivity, rupture lines, of cracks, of fracture that blend and cross each other, while reminding through variations or even mutations of disposition” (Deleuze, 1990,p.157)

4 The notion that every sign reflects and refracts reality is presented by Bakhtin/Voloshinov. To the authors, “A sign doesn’t exist only as part of reality; it also reflects and refracts another. It can obscure this reality, be faithful, or have it as a specific way of seeing, etc. Every sign is subject to ideological evaluation criteria (this is: if it is true, false, right, justified, good, etc.” (1990, p.32).
an announced death. In the graphite produced by these young teens, the profusion of image colors contrast with the vision, in a certain way apocalyptical of a city that sinks: literally or metaphorically, the city in question goes slowly down, and possibly this situation presents itself as an answer to the hunger from real state corporations, global weather changes and its implications in this matter.

The transformation of the visible, conversed and thought that is aimed to promote with the aesthetic workshops, important saying, it is not only processed with the young participants. The team involved in the project is also affected on the intensity of the meetings with these young people, being the involvement with the pillar project on formation in social psychology proposed to graduates and pos-graduated that takes part on the project of research-intervention.

The team responsible by the workshops is composed, besides the coordinator, students of graduation and post-graduation in psychology. The participation of post-graduation students is eventual, meanwhile the graduates are fundamental to the development of the project. Being in the condition of auxiliaries in the research, extension scholarship students and internships in final phases of the course, are involved in all activities referred to the project, specially, coordinating the workshops. Weekly orientations follow and invest in their possibilities of research-intervening with the young, constituting support to the actions and their formation as social psychologists. The exotopic position that the aesthetic workshops provoke in relation to the city tension the relations of these students with the city and, so important as, the relations of these with the young on the process of research-intervene. This is why the research-intervention such as proposal is based on the axiom of making oneself look within, the self-observing at the same time that observes (Canevacci, 2001) as fundamental resource to the process of reinvention of research-intervene and from the own researcher/social psychologist.

The research-intervention, in this perspective, is not oriented through pre-fixated ways and monopoly: journeys are delineated, however continually re-dimensioned and trespassed, which allows for living it as a happening, as “an evident rupture – the emergency to a singularity – and, at the same time, a rupture of evidences” (Fonseca et al., 2006, p.656). This rupture is processed in a meeting with the other that provokes the discovery in relation to oneself and imposes the evidence of diversity on ways of thinking, feeling, acting. To live the research-intervention as a happening and researching the event of life implies, then, in hybridization of emotion and reason, intuition and cognition, science, art and life in a movement of meeting with the other and oneself as resource to recognize the difference and the potential of possibility to defer.

This meeting with the other on the process of research-intervene, whereon, is not necessarily tranquil, cause marked by tension between several social voices, from diverse

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5 The coordinator of ArteUrbe, author of this work, guides students in graduation, masters degree and doctorship in psychology at UFSC.

6 Discussions about the relation of mutual constitution between rearcher and subjects with what is researched are found in Costa e Coimbra (2008), Zanella (2008).
time and spaces: Researcher and others which research-intervene constitute mutually, reinvent themselves and reinvent the context that inhabit and the ways that live therein an intense movement of mutual affections. The knowledge that may arise from there, as Bakhtin (2003, p.400), “it can only be dialogic” and, in this condition, open to other words that may counter-work, agree, disagree, partially agree...

Final Considerations

The aesthetic inscriptions in the city are fleeting interventions that tension and resist to the partition of the homologated sensitive. They do not ask for permission to be and affirm in public spaces, and its presence provoke, with more or less intensity, the visible, the conversation, the thinkable in relation to the city and its territorial belongings. They are attractors provoking the passer-by a diverse posture in relation to its dynamics: to listen to other voices, dissonant and in its support, to assume the condition of protagonist in the city, co-responsible for its reinvention.

It is the power of these inscriptions that takes us to assume them as axle of our interventions and research in social psychology. Investing with the young on reading and appreciation of these inscriptions, in the knowledge of techniques to its realization and experimentation, are tools for discussions about ethical questions and politics that regulate the relations with the city. And assuming them as focus of the debate, is possible to invest on the possibilities of modification of these relations and the ways of life that are processed there.

It is about a possibility for psychology that projects on the social as constituted by and constitutive of tensions between several social voices, tensions that constitute each person and its relations established with others, with themselves, with the city. Concrete possibility, and tool to invention of others possible, given the ethic condition, aesthetic and political of these inscriptions and its unpredictable effects.

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