

The power of emblematic places¹

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Abstract: This work reflects on the relation between space and sociality; this way, the sense of the social in our contemporary cities comes from the sense that the space confers in so far as it experiences. The cities are presented as rich scenarios of sensations, situations and experiences, which create the space for sociality. The city is seen as a sensitive space, therefore, essentially rational. The experience of space, with all the charge of sense (where emotions, affections and symbols circulate), in the quotidian allows the understanding of phenomenon such as the sociality in its various forms, the power of the social, as well as the generation of sacred, orgiastic zones, as well as observing the profiles of sociality our post-modern urban world.

Key words: aesthetics, city, sociality, quotidian

Resumen: El trabajo reflexiona sobre la relación entre espacio y socialidad, de esta manera el sentido de lo social en nuestras ciudades contemporáneas devienen del sentido que el espacio otorga en tanto que vivencia. La ciudad se presenta como un rico escenario de sensaciones, situaciones y experiencias, las cuales son el escenario para la socialidad. La ciudad es vista como un espacio sensible, por lo tanto, esencialmente relacional. La vivencia del espacio, con toda su carga de sentido (donde circulan las emociones, los afectos y los símbolos), en lo cotidiano permite comprender fenómenos como la socialidad en sus múltiples formas, la potencia de lo social, así como la generación de zonas sagradas, orgiásticas, así como observar los perfiles de la socialidad en nuestro mundo urbano posmoderno.

Palabras clave: estética, ciudad, socialidad, cotidiano.

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The conjunction of the natural and social is indeed one of post-modernity's distinctive signs. It is possible to illustrate its common interaction when referring to notions such as space, territory, urbanity, localism, which have a growingly important role in the contemporary debate. From the newspaper articles to academic researches, including preoccupations and political or administrative decisions, it is surprising to observe that what I would call the *space thematic* (because of the expression's simplicity) has a predilection place. This thematic is sometimes the expression of a more opportunist than real motivation. Little important is for the issue, for it shows that it is not possible to abstain from it anymore, since it is part of time's specialization.

As for me, I have showed the synergy's fertility existing between "space and sociality" (Maffesoli, 1999). I will not go back in this respect from the structural perspective. On the contrary, it can be relevant to show that through this synergy is expressed, in a contemporary manner, the fact of feeling and resenting in common. All in all, it is about aesthetics (*aistesis*) as a paradigm. Let us return to banality frequently stated by the philosopher F. Jacques: "the world where I am is always a world which I constitute with the other in the most effective manner: this is a common world" (Jacques, 1982: 124)². In this phrase we find the old tomist idea of the *habitus* inherited from the Aristotelian *exis*. I am from a world I constitute. In this sense we must understand that the social construction of reality, which, conversely to what one may often think, is something essentially symbolic. The world where I am is, therefore, a set of references which I share with the others. These references could be of several kinds: constituted by odors —what L. Roubin calls "the preferential odoriferous field"— noises, vegetal and physical textures, also by colors, the list is not obviously limitative. All of these elements construct the womb where those relations made of attractions and repulsions will be born, will grow and will be comforted, all these petty nothings which make up all what I call sociality; all of these little things that can be summarized in the term of "symbolic interactionism".

² In respect to the "preferential odor field" cf. A. Roubin, (1989) *Le champ odorant préférentiel*, Paris, Méridiens Klincksieck.

The space with the banal quality it is known for is a sort of “medium” between nature *versus* culture, entities which occidental tradition has definitely separated. When reflecting on the Japanese notion of *fudo*, A. Berque (1986) talks about *mediation* (*medianza*). I would add the notion of *reliance* (*relianza*), thereby playing with the sense it can be given by means of the romance languages: which links me to the others. Nevertheless in the same manner, thinking in its English signification, what remits us to the trust in the others I can feel, or the confidence that is felt with the others facing something which is exterior for us. Hence, the medium, being mixed, would be the condition of possibility for human existence, from the social existence and natural existence. These would make us say that the “I does not become self-conscious” but in terms of a relation. There is in this perspective a manner to accommodate in both senses; on the one side, I get used to seeing what surrounds me and the others share that environment; and on the other side, I am seen by the physical and social otherness. This double re-inversion of the medium soothes the aesthetical order. The *primum relationis* that is cause and effect of a similar order, thereby that of the interpersonal revelation; yet in the same manner that of the relation with the physical environment, with that *datum* which constitutes the place where I live.

Mediation as it is defined by A. Berque, the *reliance* the former induces, is a good instrument to seize the *epistema* change currently undergoing in contemporary societies. Namely and to be brief, it is not about the history of the progressivism which secretes what is in front of the stage, it is not about a world to come, purely “*nuomenal*” what occupies the collective imaginary, on the contrary, of the phenomenal world and their “sensible and concrete components, from where, for instance, in Japanese tradition the importance of the “place” can be observed (*Basho*) for the society’s constitution (Berque, 1986).

This reference to the “place”, characteristic of Japanese immanentism, can be considered for the case of post-modernity, the vector of the social be-together, inasmuch as modernity was for historical dynamics.

But the root aspect of the phenomenal world (besides the fact it is denied, or has been disdained) is the fact that the projection in the future, the search for the next-days will stress the experience that links me to the others. In other words, to the optics (the sight of the remote) characteristic of the progressivism, is opposed the tactile (the touch, what is close) characteristic of the localism. As it can be seen, such hypotheses are not completely unfounded, since from an episteme change we have been convoked to reflect.

We attend, at certain extent, the contraction of time and space. Time becomes space. This has to do with a theme that is not new, since it is once again found in mysticism, what Henry Corbin has distinguished in esotericism in respect to Shoreward, not leaving aside the concept of *kairos* proper to Greek philosophers. The same occurs with scientific reflection, as in Einstein, for him time is not more than dimension of the space, as for a part of the contemporary research in astrophysics.

Finally, ethnologists show that animal rites, and its temporary dynamics, are crystallized in a conformation of the most precise space: all the ecosystem is founded in a similar process (Durand, 1983). From the animal ecosystem to the “topos” charged with emotions (characteristic of social life or spiritual life) there is a red thread which delimits the “nature of the place” (*genus loci*); it is, what makes *time takes a shape*. The linearity of the history settles in so many little stories that work as parameters. In this manner, Nietzsche’s formula in respect to the “figurative diary” of the city where the moment is lived (monuments, squares, special rituals) is illustrative: “one can live here since one lives here”.

A similar perspective of time is, in my opinion, correlative to two essential factors. On the one side, the stressing of the present in the temporary triad; presentism expressed in hedonism, in the search of pleasure here and now, in the exacerbation of the emotional and the senses; on the other side, it will be about the explosion of the image. The imagery invading quotidian life (TV, publicity), political order and even the world of production (of the enterprise culture in the image and likeness of what is given). Numerous are the cases where the content is made relative with the continent (that which contains). All this clearly states a primacy in the shape

of a *mundo imaginalis*. The space is, therefore, a “noetic” nebula; I understand with it the affective flows, aesthetical manifestations, aesthetic movements, to sum up, all this orbit of the senses, the sensual, the colored, the sparkling, of the Dionysian that is also the cultures’ brand. When distinguishing the non-rational aspect of the space, when remembering its “fluid” dimension, the word’s circulation and/or sex circulation, when accepting that culture is naturalized the ecological perspective which culturizes nature is being insisted upon. In this respect, the objective is to remember that that physical “thing” the space is cannot exist but from the multiform discourse which mentions or sees it. In this manner, it is adequate the observation of the culture’s theologian, Paul Tillich, who states: “we do not belong in the world save through a community of men. And we cannot proceed now to discover our soul but using the mirror of the men who look at us” (Michel, 1982: 125). Without being prisoner of the great theological categories, there is no necessity to be a great cleric to observe reversibility between the relation with nature and that which links me to the others. *A fortiori* in the framework of this socialized nature the city is: it is the look, and “the said” by the others can be added, what constitutes me and delimits the territory where we recognize ourselves where we are born, always and once again, together. There is in this reversibility the conjunction of a statics and a dynamics forming what Gilbert Durand called the “anthropological itinerary”.

Even if these could seem paradoxical, it is convenient to insist on this communicational dimension, inter-subjective of the contemporary space, to express it in other terms, insisting on the fact that its cultural architecture is as important as its physical architecture. Or at least, between them a constant and fertile reversibility exists. A prophetic essay by George Simmel has, in this respect, an instructive title: *the metropolis and mental life* (*Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben*). It is a well known, frequently analyzed text, let us remember however, something he insists on is the importance that has what he calls “intensification of the nerves’ lives” (*Die Steigerung des nervenlebens*) and on the relevance of the interaction which makes life an “extra-personal” reality. Likewise, in another essay, *the bridge and the door* (*Brücke und Tür*), he also distinguishes urban nature’s ambivalence,

symbolized by the bridge and the door which can either open and close, join or separate. This ambivalence, if it can be said so, is structural, since the opening and lock is what allows feeling intensely the set of emotions, affections correlative to this “life of nerves” (Simmel, 1983);³ Since on the one side it is dynamic and offers the city the development that is known, and on the other, constitutes an “aesthetical door” which joins and separates. It can be better distinguished the city’s communicational quality. And it is in this sense that I refer to prophetic, for this quality has been considerably incremented with the state-of-the-art technological development. It can even be said that if only the “physical” characters of the megalopolis are observed, we are at risk of not being attentive but to a sort of gregarious solitude which would constitute it, when in reality there is a multiplicity of networks which generate the symbolic order with subtle yet solid channels. This is what we call *subterranean centrality*.

Nevertheless, a double movement in the elaboration of this subterranean centrality can be observed. It is convenient, therefore, to analyze in detail this process with a double distension. It is true that the characteristic in this sociality is being able to be supported on the first ambivalence element pointed by Simmel: the door metaphor. At least at a first approach, it deals with the closure which will prevail. Communication is basically proxemic. Communication becomes communion. Hence, the effervescence of these urban “tribes”, with centers of interest rather diverse, nonetheless they are closed in themselves. Not extended-towards (extension), progressivisms, unhindered development, and politics; but in laid-in (intention): what the group narcissism secretes with multiple effects. Numerous are the surveys which make this phenomenon distinguishable. And if it is not reduced to the single sphere of the family, I also agree on saying that what is sought is “home’s warmth”. Perhaps the undeniable attraction exercised by the monastic life could be even explained in this manner. *Paradisus claustris*.

³ I have already analyzed these texts in Maffesoli *Logique de la domination*, 1976.

When jointly showing this is something seldom thought of as an alternative project of life, Christianity sociology, elaborated by Danièle Hervieu Léger, stresses that abbeys' frequentation is an important moment in the search for "interior peace" or other spiritual compensation. The problem can be extended, hence showing that the cluster nostalgia, seclusion practices, desert escapes, group marches into the lonely of the wild, ascetic exercises and other spiritual trainings, makes us straightforwardly approach the problem of contemporary religiousness, essentially syncretistic; nevertheless it mainly allows distinguishing that this religiousness "is tribal", and that it lays, at a certain time, upon the sharing of a real or symbolic *territory* (Kaufmann, 1988; Hervieu, 1986: 11). This territory is, in the subject, cause and effect of the communication-communion.

In this manner, it could be said that the megalopolis is constituted by a series of "emblematic places" in the *religiological* sense of the term, where diverse cults are performed with a high aesthetical-ethical coefficient. These could be the cults of the body, sex, image, friendship, "feasting", sport... the list is infinite. The common factor is where the cult takes place. The place becomes a loop. A Rilke's formula summarizes well this proposal: "the space of the celebration" (*Raum des Rühmung*). A celebration that offers the religious its original dimension of reliance; this can be a technical celebration (science and technology museums), cultural (large polyvalent cultural spaces), ludic-erotic (large night clubs), consumerist (commercial centers), sporting (large stadia and this sort of events), religious (massive cathedrals and churches), intellectual (universities' lecture rooms), political (meetings), commemorative (monuments, etc.). Ecce the emblematic places where quotidian banality comes to be repaid, be it directly by means of an intervened television. They are physical spaces with a heavy erotic charge, and it is not just because, as a matter of fact, that some places taking this logic to the extreme, become famous places to "score", where it is played, contemporarily, the sacred prostitution, this hierodule of ancient memory which comforted the feeling that had of itself. Spaces of the celebration made for and by initiated: hence in the etymological sense of the term, they are spaces where the *mysteries* are celebrated. One gathers, recognizes the other, thus one knows oneself.

We must well specify that these emblematic places (of course it would be easy to find more places like these) are nothing but expressions in capital letters of a text which was written in small letters in the quotidian. Indeed, as numerous punctuations in such a text, the city is spread in a multiplicity of small “emblematic places”, which have the same function in the elaboration of the “mysteries of communication-communion” as neighborhood’s bars, the small grocery stores in the corner where one can play domino or cards, the neighborhood’s small squares, public benches on the pedestrian zones, the squares or public open spaces, the “neighborhood’s ambulant seller” or the street with stores where community meets. Not leaving aside, of course, those specific places which could be the gymnasiums, where one builds one’s body in common, those places of political reunions, where society’s collective future and individual political careers are elaborated, the places of the non-profit organizations and all the clubs of ideological, religious and friendly encounters, where one goes to “touch”, rather euphemistically, that other with which one makes the world where one lives. In all of these laboratories the mysterious alchemy of sociality is elaborated. Perhaps it is a paradox to say that in these places one acquires an extra of being or, in the rough sense of the term, one takes part in that vast set that is, to retake an expression of Durkheim, the social divine; a participation in the very core of the quotidian, to an *immanent transcendence*, cause and effect of every community.

The totality of these territories, which we still need to comprehend in the ethological sense, these “emblematic places”, these places and spaces of sociality, are modeled by common affections and emotions, they are consolidated by the cultural and spiritual foundation; to sum up, they exist by and for the tribes which chose to abide there. Linked to the latter, its greater or lesser capacity to largely express (being the expression of) a community or the communities which inhabit it is what makes a space, a lived space. Thus, this observation of Paul Valéry’s in his work *Eupalinos*.

Since you are so sensitive to architecture effects, you have not observed, when walking around this city, that among all the buildings which inhabit it, there are some which are mute, and there are some others which speak; and finally some other... sing... here, they-say, the merchants gather. Here judges deliberate. Here the captive moan. Here the aficionados open their veins... (Oeuvres, Pléiade, T. II, p. 93).

Beyond its little conventional aspect, it is enough to update and extrapolate the examples given, and stress the words of the city, the singings of the stone which indicate what the emotionally lived places are. To make reference to a beautiful expression, they become “known-places”. Places which are invested, rather announced places somehow marked where one sketches one’s presence. Hence, we find graffiti or urban “drawings” which in a tragic and ephemeral manner delimit the territory of a tribe, or indicate their fugitive passage (Baudrillard, 1976; Deville, 1986). In the framework of these new jungles those postmodern megalopolises are, it is in this case traces and footprints which the explorer of sociality can follow in all certainty, we refer to reliable indications of a symbolical order (crystallization of a space-time) already constituted or in gestation.

In order to return to the door metaphor, that of the cloister, it can be said that a group is constituted from a place. This can be errant, and in this respect the tribe’s image is clarifying. It can be added that our contemporary cities can be a juxtaposition of these tribal places. In the psycho-geographical branch, in the 1970’s, the situationists had clearly stressed such juxtaposition. The “situations” generated in the interior of a determined small group, or between these groups and other individuals in there, were determinant for the swift transit from a place to another. It was the environment of this or that place, its texture, the fact they were “mute “or “speaking” what assured the quality of the “inter-subjective situation”. This branch, inherited from surrealism, accentuated the reversibility existing between the human assembly and that of the stone.

Such ludic practices are certainly paroxysmal, they were in other places considered as laboratory practices, but at the time, when insisting on the aesthetical dimension of life, on the fact of living the art of the quotidian, these practices were premonitory of the error-wandering through a succession of characteristic places of the contemporary sociality. Here we find a paradox which we must consider straightforward: that of a dynamical enrooting. *One completely belongs in a determined place, but never in a permanent manner.*

Heidegger proposes a notion that can clarify our proposal. It is the *Erörterung* term that can be translated as “situation” or as “assignation to a place”. “What we call a place is what seems to be the essential in the thing” (Heidegger 1962: 145). Avoiding an exegesis of the text as well as being amazed by its gothic expression, it can be recognized in the “location” the space-time crystallization which I hereby refer to, or yet the reversibility between a place and those who occupy it. Either by means of the large quotidian “emblematic places”, or the small quotidian “emblematic places”, unintentionally or not, a series of locations, a series of situations which draw an imaginary geography, which allow me to accommodate myself (in the optical sense) with the physical environment I was given, and at the same time I construct in a symbolical manner. It is this incessant traveling (carriage) through the multiple spaces what constitutes, undoubtedly, the characteristic of a contemporary city. Such a traveling always lies on a unification point, always carried out in relation with the others. Always in the *primum relationis*. The location is lived with the others. This latter confers it its religious charge, thus making of it a sacred place.

In this respect there is still the need to remember that traditionally each territory, each country had its “local god”. It is the *numen loci*. The pregnancy, in a given territory, of the “local god” had been proved at the extent that the foreigners living there adopted that god. Thereby we see, in a paroxysmal manner, that the divinity of the place works as societal foundation. The god occupies the field before man, he “informs him”, hence, on the manner in which he must behave here and now, how to live and think. We find such perspective, even a slightly profane, in the idea of the *genius loci*.

The nature of the inspiring place of the artist, the poet, or the common man. What is true is that avoiding the anteriority problem —on who is the first: whether the local god or men—, we can agree on the “spiritual” force united to a place. The important neighborhoods in the city (historical, bohemian, traditional, and fashionable) are at the time a place and a spirit, and just for the sake of it a multitude of names with evocative charms: Quartier Latin in Paris, Shinjuku in Tokyo, Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro, Manhattan in New York, Kreuzberg in Berlin, Trastevere in Rome, etcetera. The list of the “emblematic places” is long, where one can go into in a phantasmatic or physical manner. And in the echo we find something similar in all of these “emblematic places” which find a niche in the bosom of the large megalopolis, as matrix shelters where one can live, wander, spend time with the others. Each one of these small emblematic-places can be used as a noun; each one becomes a “famous place” known by a large or small number of initiates.

This is the lesson of the nature of the place: stressing the ethos linked to the space. By means of the little rituals of the quotidian existence, as it concerns to the large events in public life, one is the world which is shared by the others. Emotional world, affective world which gives all its meaning and all its force to the expression: *ethics of the aesthetics*.

There is an irrepressible relation-union between aesthetical pleasure (common emotion) and physical and social harmony. Public architecture: the monuments that “talk” or “sing”, private architecture: “the man lives in the poet”, creates faith. There are times where this conjunction is more evident, more affirmed, and these produces the architectural works or these more harmonious urban ensembles which have survived to time devastations and men’s fury. There are other times when this conjunction is more discreet, even secret, which offers ephemeral sketches (graffiti, drawings), unoriginal productions, re-appropriation, and the recovery of the existing works. It is enough to see this model of the genre that Rome is, in order to realize that the superposition of the styles, the fact of “occupying the abandoned places” presents an important interest.

It is not of my competence to analyze this swing and the respective works it generates; it is convenient, on the contrary, to observe that in each one of these examples, the inscription is a real collective memory. I have already said it: the space is the time which crystallizes; this could be complemented when observing that this crystallization is cause and effect of a particular community. This has been seen by Maurice Halbwachs, who undoubtedly was the greatest “symbolist” of the Durkheim followers. In this manner, he performs an observation on the groups which “draw at a certain extent their shape on the floor and find their collective recollections in the spatial framework so defined; in other terms, there many a fashions to represent the space as groups existing” (Halbwachs, 1950: 166; Namer, 1987). And here in some words, well defined the social space/physical space and the production of the “we” which is correlative to it. Let us have in mind that the “form” confines, limits, it is in at a certain extent the shell, the protective wrap under the shelter where sociality comforts; and it can be pointed out than in the indifference of the contemporary megalopolises we attend the multiplication of these “doors”, signalizing the postmodern tribes’ territories. They are places where it is possible to recognize oneself at the time that one is identified with the others, places where, disregarding future control, one adjusts one’s present, finally places where this sort of interstitial liberty in direct contact with what is close and concrete is elaborated. All of these things which make the lived space, not the shelter of a cold and immovable individualism any longer, but the base upon which these excursions set off, these “departures” which from end to end construct the sphere of the new sociality.

Indeed, if modernity can be characterized by the assignation to a residence; it is, if one belongs in a profession, gender, ideology, group, all in all, one has an identity and a direction, all these things determine a rational, mechanical, finalized *social*, it is also surprising to confirm that sociality is much more confusing, heterogeneous, and mobile.

Sexual indifference, ideological syncretism and professional mobility delimit a new spirit of the time. In function to this we must reconsider the vagabond space of the postmodern tribes. Here the already evoked metaphor of the “bridge and door” can be retaken (Simmel). If at first, the “door” dominates, it is, if this is the one privileged (fusional aggregation thanks to and in the core of a space) —either in a large space with great reference or a lived place of height—, it is also true that at a second time we attend this model’s explosion. The “bridge” is generalized. In this respect the megalopolis becomes an immense and perpetual place of height. In function of the fashions, desires, needs, without forgetting the needs of work, spare and consumption times, it could be found, in every time, a “space of celebration”. Science fiction novels and comic strips make the planet or any city appear surrounded by a luminous aura, with the aim to stress its power or exceptionality; well now, to carry this image, it can be said that the same occurs with the postmodern city. It does not obey any longer to a nocturnal-diurnal rhythm with well-defined functions, on the contrary it is in constant activity; hence the aura surrounding it and where one constantly bathes. This has to do in particular with the fact that whether the tribes were comforted with the lock: a search for the cloister, a taste for secrecy, uniformity of dressing and way of life, people (*person*) who constitute them; as for them, they flow from group to group with the intention of exercising the plurality of their masks. From here the multiform agitation which deeply moves such urban life. Networks are born, die, intermingle, the relationships permeate, fade or disappear; to summarize, an aesthetical environment tends to prevail, concentrated here or there in function of the masses’ versatility.

Certainly, the large contemporary megalopolises express in the best manner, for the best and worst, these constant aura and agitation. However, the values they carry pollute the whole of the planet, through imposed televisions. Hence, the megalopolis as a succession of union spaces, i.e., as global and permanent “place of height”, it becomes the reference pole, and for the social observer, a laboratory of the transit of social structuring.

There are some cities the ones which still have the role Paris, London, Berlin had during modern ages. It could be New York, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, and Tokyo. The latter in particular knows how to join the aesthetical function I hereby refer to —to crystallize common emotions— and the exacerbated fascination by means of the state-of-the-art technology. A detour in this labyrinth shows well the synergy between groups, mass and the environment working as container. Numerous the situations, experiences and bustles are those which never cease to amaze the regularity sense highly appreciated by the Cartesian spirits, this makes us consider that a city is similar in a certain manner to the ideal of the urban and social aggregation-structuring of the post-modernity which is being born.

It is useless to return to the specific multi-polarity of the Tokyo megalopolis, such as Shinjuku, Ginza, Asakusa, which are like one of many punctuations constituting the strong points of an urban nebula. Each one of these names remits us to a precise signification; it is correlative of such type of specificity and lifestyles, and it wakes specific memories connected to architectural ordering. Summarizing, everything being united, the nebula referred to is molded from particular spatial memories.

One of them is particularly detectable, it is *effervescence*, a notion scarcely exploited by Durkheim who showed its essential and founding aspect of every social structuring (Durkheim, 1991; Debord, 1988). I would add that whichever the manifestation is —ambulant, commercial and even productive—, there is always something ludic in the quotidian effervescence. Ludic diffuse in the three examples I have quoted, ludic concentrated by the specific groupings which could be sport, music and other leisure activities.

Applying in this respect a scheme proposed by Guy Debord for the spectacle (diffused, concentrated, integrated), I would say that megalopolis, and as far as it concerns me, Tokyo has all the characteristics of an “integrated ludicism”, as the agitation, effervescence, the profusion of images, noises, activities, trickling in a certain manner a ludic “aura”, an environment exciting sensitivity; the exacerbation of the phenomena, of the brilliance of the things, of the superficiality that produces a sort of collective aesthetical shiver from which it is easy to escape.

This shiver at the time collective and particularized, which makes the city a “place of height”, global and complex, receptacle of an infinity of impulsions, of a multiplicity of motivations, it works as a alchemical crucible and transforms them into a specific atmosphere, which on its own generates other atmospheres. Here there is an endless movement whose denouement is not easy to foretell. As for me, I would see in this theatricalism the expression of what I have called duplicity (*La Conquête du présent*, 1979), a form of anthropological astuteness which is adorned with brilliant masks in order to resist multiple attacks from diverse powers. We have here a curious, traditional practice, which would find in post-modernity a new youth. Philippe Pons justly makes the link between the ludic of the old Edo and that which wanders in the contemporary Tokyo, he sees there the “runaway of the social pressures (that of the Shogun power and later, nowadays, the triumphant productivism)” (Pons, 1988: 21). This has to do with one of the most fertile theoretical perspectives. The fact that the spirit of the pleasures would be commercialized, recovered by the multiple tricks-swindles which we know, etcetera, all of this can certainly lead us to a compensating function of an irrepressible want-live permeating the social body, and that is never extinguished. It is this second perspective what has constituted my work hypothesis for many years. In this respect, this allows me to take into account the emotional charge linked to what I call the inutilitarian being-together, such as wandering in a large store, attending a football match or a Sumo wrestle, idling with no objective in a commercial street (even if there is a legitimation of some kind of purchase), drinking and talking in group when the day finishes. All this has an undeniable “reliance” function. There is there a multiplicity of real or phantasmic runways among the people constituting this protoplasmic community that, in a systole-diastole movement, groups and disintegrates in a series of spaces where this or that specific minor god is celebrated. This could be an anodyne or distinguished product; this could be an exceptional situation; a splendidous showcase; a group of musicians; an altercation; a public comedian; it is of no importance, the minor deity in question creates a space of religiosity. The content has no importance; it is both continent-container so all of this becomes interesting.

The city is sensitive, it is essentially rational. Its meeting places, its odors, and its noises are constitutive of this quotidian theatricalism which makes this, in the rough term, an animated object, a materiality provided with life. The fact that things' materiality is a permanent sign has been often emphasized. There is something to insist on, this "culture of the street" is the result of a short circuit between the objective and subjective. When one is before the Hachiko dog statue in the Shibuya neighborhood in Tokyo, rather consciously, its fidelity sign is perceived as an amorous encounter. Saint Michel fountain in Paris will evoke the communion in the revolt. "Number 9 Block" in Ipanema in Rio de Janeiro will refer to the beach's hedonist sociality, and the fact that a date takes place there will be a "sign" in that sense (Sansot, 1988: 21; Pons, 1988: 207 and 341). In each one of these cases, what takes place is the urban imaginary that, at a certain extent, overcomes the diverse social actors, working as matrix bath. This urban space is determined will be disseminated in a multiplicity of small reference places, of these small "emblematic places" with tribal use. Sometimes one of them becomes emblematic and gathers more than an urban constellation, becoming a first-order star. However, it is the set what makes sense, it is the set what delimits the social imaginary, it is the set what makes the city the "place of height", and the city is privileged by the integrated aesthetics.

Simmel refers to this as "extrapersonal civilization". He shows, for the modern city, how monuments, teaching places, the acquired and controlled technique or the "visible" institutions of the State are the "concrete mark" of the spirit made impersonal. A similar development has accelerated in what is related to postmodern city, and what I call "disindividualization" has noticeably increased. Yet at the same time, it can be said that the encircling aspect correlative to the individuals' weakening does not stop comforting the body's spirit, it returns the communitarian spirit its meaning.

It can be added that urban theatricalism, through several manifestations, or what is more, the social imaginary, thanks to its diverse punctuations, is the very same that secures social continuity. A society can only last if it has a strong feeling about itself. There are moments where this feeling is elaborated when making History, looking at the future, making projects. There are other moments where it is the space what secures this role. The space lived in common, the space where emotions flow, the affections and the symbols, the space where the collective memory is written, the space, finally, which allows identification (Simmel, 1983: 149). In this manner, participating with the rest moving, I become one thing among the rest, a *subjective object*, i.e. *volens nolens*, I coexist in an assembly where everything forms a body: I coexist of course with the rest who constitute me for what I am, but also coexist with this multiplicity of objects without which contemporary existence would not be conceivable. All that induces a sort of specific solidarity: it is not any longer the historical development where the postmodern *ethos* is molded, but in the re-appropriated nature, in the shared space, in the collective participation in the world of the objects. A sort of *mystical materialism*, if there is such a thing.

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