

Through the Looking Glass

Developing the myth of the villain or hero - A comparative study of the place of children, adolescents and young adults on the streets of Florianopolis (SC/Brazil) and Santa Fe (NM/USA)

Rita de Cácia Oenning da Silva¹

"What sort of things do you remember best? Alice ventured to ask. Oh, things that happened the week after next, the Queen replied in a careless tone. For instance, now, she went on, sticking a large piece of plaster on her finger as she spoke, there's the King's Messenger. He's in prison now, being punished: and the trial doesn't even begin till next Wednesday: and of course the crime comes last of all".

(Lewis Carrol, *Through the Looking Glass*).

1. Introduction

The media announces everyday that the world's largest cities suffer from innumerable security problems, alerting the citizens on how to behave to avoid assaults, robberies at home, on the streets, in traffic jams, during stops at red lights or in any "suspicious" place. To prevent this harm, technological security apparatuses like car and home alarms, locked and remote controlled gates, surveillance cameras and TV sets are evolving and offering greater security to individuals.

It is with great pride that mayors and governors communicate their new security programs, with substantial investments on weapons, new police officers, searches in slums looking for drug dealers, criminals, hooligans, and "outlaws". In the year 2000 in Florianopolis, a large program called "*Tolerância Zero*" (Zero Tolerance) was announced as the most innovative for the security of Santa Catarina's island*. Imported by the secretary of Security and by the mayor of that city after visiting the New York State Office of Public Security, this program is based on a model of total social control in which any suspect on the street can be approached by the police and arrested if not carrying personal identification. In Rio de Janeiro, one of the world's most violent cities, new security strategies are announced everyday. During Carnival, the police invaded slums and poor communities of Rio in order to stop the violence by the drug dealers who were destroying public transportation vehicles and local stores, putting the entire city in panic. It would be necessary to rewrite these words everyday if we were to keep pace

¹ Anthropologist/UFSC (Federal University of Santa Catarina).

* Florianopolis, the capital of the state of Santa Catarina, is an island. (NT)

with the concern with security measures being taken and the violence that comes along with such measures, at risk of becoming outdated in a matter of hours. This is not the goal of this essay.

What I intend here is to show that the need for modern technological apparatuses is not only physical but also ideological, in essence. The discourse on security is followed much more by the feeling of fear than by violence itself. This discourse carries the dominant values from a period in which the myths of heroes and villains were being revised and revalued in the great American narrative. The technological apparatus is only an expression of the materialization of values, ideas and representations, as defined by Luis Dumont (1985, 2000), values that are collectively built and become truths and realities not only in large cities but also in smaller urban centers, and currently arriving at rural areas, spreading like an uncontrollable plague throughout the whole world. We now live in the “era of (in)security”. Individualism, as the modern global value, focuses on the guarantee of the individuals’ rights. However, the violation of these rights is being discussed more than in any other time, demonstrating that the same means that created the apparatus to guarantee one’s rights previously created their violation.

In order to examine our own values and capacity of being both producers and products of truths, I will try to show how the hero and villain myth is renovated through the stories and motivations of children, adolescents and young adults living on the streets and becomes almost a modern lifestyle. These stories reveal some aspects of their imaginary universe, but, in essence, show how these individuals are seen by society as a whole.

Through a comparative analysis of the stories told by those living on the streets of Santa Fe (NM/USA) and Florianopolis (SC/Brazil)², I examine the condition of “homeless or street children”, a phenomenon that became “visible” in the early nineteenth century in several cities around the world, especially in societies with a preponderant capitalist ideology, and try to understand which collective representations put these children in the condition of heroes and/or villains no matter if in their own view or if in the way society treats them. It is my intention in this essay to emphasize how social exclusion categories, which directly interfere in the way children, adolescents and young adults (especially those living on the streets) of any city are seen, treated, and created, be it through the media, legislation, public apparatuses, or academic research³.

In Santa Fe, the focus of my observations was initially the Outreach, a center founded by the NGO Youth Shelters and Family Services⁴, which opened on weekdays and constituted a

² The comparative analysis was possible due to conversations I had with Kurt Shaw, Executive Coordinator of Shine-a-light, *La Red Internacional pro Niños de la Calle*, which financed my trip to New Mexico where I could understand the reality of the streets in Santa Fe. From these conversations, which began in 2000 during Kurt’s first visit to Florianopolis, we maintained frequent contacts in order to understand and examine the situation of homeless children, a phenomenon essentially present in the world’s largest cities.

³ It is important to clarify that the theories on social exclusion are not suitable for understanding this group since I do not view these individuals as being socially excluded, but rather, as individuals who develop themselves and are developed within a same social order in which exclusion results from the creation of collective social categories that become prevalent.

⁴ This project was idealized by Naomi Woodspring, inspired by the experience with her daughter who was beginning to

partnership between the NGO and governmental institutions (state and local governments). This center is opened from 8am to 4pm, Monday through Friday, and is a place where homeless adolescents and young adults go to take a shower, get their clothes washed, have something to eat, get some food to eat later at night or on weekends, and most importantly, meet friends, talk, and in some way, build a network of relationships. The second observation setting in Santa Fe was at La Plaza, located in the touristy and commercial side of the town. In this place, young adults meet almost everyday and hang around in several groups.

In Florianopolis, my observation extended throughout some of the peripheral neighborhoods where these street children and their families lived, and in several other places downtown (Praça XV, Calçadão Felipe Schmidt, Rodoviária, Terminal Urbano, Alfândega, Camelódromo, Aterro da Baía Sul), where these children met everyday with their relatives, friends, and families.

2. Putting into context

2.1 Santa Fe

Santa Fe is a touristy North-American town located in the southern USA. It is the capital of the state of New Mexico, taken from Mexico during the war between the two countries in 1846. It is a city with high living expenses, with a significant internal migration from the American upper class, and where few possibilities of employment exist outside the tourism and commerce industries.

For those with little knowledge of American diversity, Santa Fe is a city that can surprise a first-time visitor with its adobe-based architecture, a typically indigenous technique, with houses having two floors at the most, except for the sky-scrapers; a combination that makes the city even more exotic and attractive. In addition, the presence of flowers and trees typical to deserts calls one's attention during the summer. But I believe the most attractive to an anthropologist are the groups that meet on the streets of Santa Fe; a mix of indigenous people (many are very skilled artisans), Mexicans, and other Latin groups (from Guatemala, El Salvador, Brazil, Chile, and other countries), combining the English and Spanish languages. These groups contrast with exotic groups of the New Age - new-hippies, upper-class Americans that incorporated the aesthetics and life style of the 1960's hippies with some modifications. There is also a strong UFO culture - several groups believe in the existence of extra-terrestrial life, and as a result, there is a large commerce of artifacts with images and referrals to these imaginary

stay longer and longer on the streets. Understanding the daughter's desire to go to the streets, Naomi did not rebel against her. Instead, she chose to learn from her daughter's experience what was like to live on the streets. As a result, in 1997, she and Jack Humphries founded Outreach, in which they initially offered daily assistance to the homeless, gave away condoms, food, and clothing. Later, in 2000, they were able to buy a building where the youngsters could shower, get food, condoms, legal services (through private partnerships), medical assistance, as well as access to a kitchen, clothing, tents, sleeping bags and other items donated by individuals and governmental and non-governmental institutions.

creatures.

The relationship with the local population born in the city since the takeover of the territory by the Americans is characterized by a social-economic inequality status, typical of the imperialistic relations of America. According to Shaw (2002), "Currently, the original inhabitants of the state, Indians and Hispanics, have become socially excluded and impoverished, whilst the white migrants control the economy and run the government in association with elite sectors of the Latin population".

Because of Santa Fe's being a touristy town and bordering Mexico, many poor Mexican families come to the city searching for jobs and end up living in impoverished neighborhoods, increasing the number of men on the streets (especially in the Department of Labor Park, a local square), offering their services as a means to support their families that live Santa Fe or still in Mexico.

Despite the large number of poor Mexican and indigenous families in the region, it is uncommon to find children descendant of these groups on the streets of Santa Fe either working to help their families or begging (as would be the case in any Brazilian city that hosts poor migrants) or sleeping on the streets, away from their families. The Mexican family dynamics has its values strengthened with immigration, which makes members remain together as families even under poverty conditions. So, does the "homeless children" phenomenon exist in this city? Yes, but these children are not exactly 0 to 10 years old⁵. They are usually adolescents and young adults, most of them surprisingly coming from the American upper-class, and, according to some informants, many coming from bordering cities and states⁶. This fact is quite surprising if contrasted to the reality in South and Central American countries, where the number of children between 5 and 11/12 that live on the streets is very significant.

While observing Santa Fe's "homeless children" that came to Outreach and met at La Plaza, one can notice that these kids look much more like the members of urban tribes⁷, as we know from Brazilian cities, than with "homeless children" per se. But some do, even if only temporarily, live on the streets; a condition in which during winter, with snow and low temperature, constitutes a great challenge. I found quite exotic that some of these youngsters wore fashionable clothes, carried cell phones, drove cars, and had email - items that normally only upper-middle-class Brazilian kids that live or are supported by their parents have. It was possible to recognize how these kids formed distinct groups with unique codes and body aesthetics, specific clothing and greetings. Especially when they were together, it was quite clear

⁵ The only kid I met who wandered everyday on the streets of Santa Fe was Matt, a boy about 5 years old. Together with his older sister Chris, who was 13 years old, he came downtown and to Outreach in the afternoon while their parents worked during the day. They stayed there, talking, drawing, painting, and when their parents' shift ended, they would meet them and go home together. Chris and Matt are from a working family that cannot afford to pay someone to take care of them, a common case. So their parents take them downtown, close to where they work, and the kids figure out something to do in the afternoon. Chris has become close to the streets' groups and is gradually identifying with them.

⁶ Information provided by the kids, Kurt Shaw, and taken from Outreach's map in which the place from which each kid came from is indicated.

⁷ In summary, an urban tribe is characterized by the fact that its members behave in accordance to the group's values, by a unique clothing style and by codes linked to the group's philosophy.

how the street experience was linked to a group's identity. It could be easily noticed that there were groups based on support and identification, which opposed one another or joined together in some occasions. Some groups even seemed "naïve" to the eyes of an anthropologist that have worked with the homeless in Brazil; children that expressed in their eyes the concern with surviving on the streets. This condition wasn't the case in Santa Fe. With a rebel aesthetics, they wear torn but clean or intentionally dirty clothes, have organized uncombed hair styles, wear pants and shirts larger than their bodies, and walk in a style typical of those who live on the streets. However, they do not actually have truly dirty and torn clothes like those worn by most kids that live in the streets of Brazil. In some ways, it seemed the concern of Santa Fe's kids was in *looking* as if they were in fact "street rebels".

Among the kids I talked to, the most common narratives were adventures. They talked about trips they made, since it was quite common for them to go alone or in groups to other American towns. Their experience in going from one state to another shows how frequent traveling is for these kids. In their stories, the pride of being travelers or of risking their lives on the streets was evident. "(...) they say they live on the streets to look for adventure, to find a meaning to life, because it is fun." (Shaw, 2002)

In a very intriguing seminar presented by Kurt Shaw in Recife, the researcher reminded that many of these children are fleeing from abuse at home and often from rape. Others are on the run from "invisibility", which is to say, from being left alone in their homes all day long because their parents are working and don't pay any attention to them. They head to the streets to meet friends or to escape from being mistreated at home. For this reason, such adolescents are known as "runaways" in the hegemonic and academic discourses, rather than "homeless children", even if in many cases, based on the Latin American experience, they are classified as "street kids". Shaw, who works with these kids everyday, reminds also that there's a sort of prestige in living on the streets, meaning that in the eyes of their peers, these kids (runaways) "are more genuine, honest, and harsh; individuals worth imitating". (Shaw, 2002)

The involvement of these kids with drugs is closely related to consumption; however, several kids work as liaisons between drug dealers and upper-class youngsters, who do not have easy access to the dealers because of ethnical and social segregation. This is one of the ways to earn some money on the streets, but others beg, work, or receive money from relatives and friends. They usually live in tents in the mountains but come downtown almost everyday to find basic supplies for the day.

2.2 Florianopolis

Florianopolis, like Santa Fe, is a touristy city, located in southern Brazil. Colonized by the eighteenth century immigrants from the Azores Islands, Florianopolis has today only a few of the indigenous groups that inhabited its lands (only three small Guarani communities). It is one of the main points of migration of the region, as Joinville is, having received several migrating

groups in past years. Despite being the state's capital, it used to be a small town, almost provincial, with a small population until the 1950's, but it has grown immensely in the last few decades due to the creation of public services (a federal University, Eletrosul) and most importantly, due to the recent migration motivated by tourism advertising. The migration due to tourism was initially from those coming from Argentina (1970's and 80's) and in-state cities and, more recently (late 1990's and 2000), from those coming from states such as Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, hoping to find the quality of life lost in the large cities of these states⁸. Known as the "*Ilha da Magia*" ("Island of Magic"), Florianopolis is the focal point of the upper-medium-class migration in search for the advertised natural beauties of the island. The Island however, has problems in public transportation, running water and sewers, and water resources, specially during summer when the population more than doubles as a result of tourists, causing a major impact in the daily lives of those who live there and the ecosystem.

As opposed to the youngsters of Santa Fe, the homeless kids of Florianopolis come from poor families, some having migrated from nearby cities (Lages, Rancho Queimado, Chapecó, Caçador) and others having come from families that live in poor communities of the region. Their ages also differ since the adolescents that live on the streets of Florianopolis have come to the streets at an earlier age - usually when they are 9 to 10 years of age, some of them begin not returning home everyday. Many of them may seem to be children, despite being 19-20 years old. Living on the streets for so long, using drugs like glue, which they say help in bearing with hunger and cold, several of these young adults remain the size of children, despite the hair on their chests, faces and legs.

The number of children that work, beg, or sleep on the streets has risen dramatically as a result of migration and there is currently a strong campaign in the city, largely by public services, to get these kids out of the streets, sending them home and to school⁹. Like their parents, these kids are attracted by the possibilities a large city can offer in informal employment and by the visibility that downtown brings them, either by begging, working, or meeting other people.

The children living on the streets can be divided into two groups: those who return home everyday and those who sleep on the streets. In the former group, the majority consists of children that go downtown to work or beg. In the latter group, the majority consists of what is currently known as "homeless children" who do not always sleep on the streets. It is important to emphasize that there is a crucial difference in the way these two groups see each other and are seen by population in general.

⁸ Paradoxically, with the rising levels of migration of those coming from larger cities seeking and greater quality of life, Florianopolis has become a city with increasing levels of urban violence; lacking efficient water resources, running water and sewers, suffering degradation of its ecosystem, reducing its prestige as a wonderful and peaceful city.

⁹ Regarding this campaign, it is worthwhile to mention that sometimes it consists not of an effort to give these children a better education, but of a mechanism to get these children off the streets during vacation (tourism) season. There are several reports on homeless children and adults being beaten on the streets, taken away by the police and abandoned in nearby cities. This "social cleaning" is a well-known strategy applied by public administrators who want to impress the tourists and visitors with their "competence".

The logic of the honest worker capable of supporting his family maintains many children connected to their families, as is the case with the Mexican immigrants in Santa Fe. However, in this case kids are usually the ones bringing home most of the family's income. Mainly because of the fact that they are children, they are able to call upon other's pity, thus selling their products faster ¹⁰.

On the other hand, the kids that sleep more often on the streets have their own subjectivity, which is uniquely differentiated by the courage they must have (and demonstrate) in this environment. The unattractive, cold, and rainy climate of Florianopolis could not be tolerated if it weren't for the courage of these kids and for the floating network of support that is created among them during the harshest times and which includes salesmen, local store owners, pedestrians, friends and relatives. During winter, especially when they are sick, these kids sleep in the homes of friends or relatives and in municipal or NGO shelters. Within the group there is also an appreciation for the capacity of surviving under harsh conditions. These children and adolescents usually carry in their stories the pride of being able to take care of themselves and of no longer working for their parents. In many cases, they are involved in local drug dealing, taking messages or carrying small quantity of drugs. Not many homeless kids grow powerful within the hierarchy of drug dealerships; they are usually consumers (and work to sustain their addiction) and only a few become heavy duty dealers.

Like the youngsters in Santa Fe, they form specific groups with which they usually sleep, seeking greater safety against the police and rival groups. For this reason, their hiding places ("*mocós*") are kept secret and only those trustworthy to the group know its location. If the location is told to someone outside their trust zone, they will immediately move to a different "*mocó*". In addition, they move frequently to new hiding places in an attempt to keep them secret from others.

Even if the presence of these children and adolescents on the streets has dramatic reasons such as violence at home, lack of adequate education¹¹, drugs, and poverty, factors remembered in reports and in academic research about this population, it is important to mention strategic aspects of these communities such as the "exchange of children," as emphasized by Fonseca (1993, 1995) and Silva (1998). All of these issues are motivators for these children's remaining on the streets. These facts of street life are also solidified on the streets: the

¹⁰ This phenomenon can be observed in almost the entire Brazilian territory. Recent studies about tourism and street infancy observed by Shine-a-Light, show that in Mexico, the children of the indigenous population - which traditionally worked as a family (usually the mother with the children) - selling artifacts to tourists and pedestrians, are nowadays, due to the shoppers' preference in negotiating with them or even giving them charity, have become the main actors of their family's sales.

¹¹ Most of them can't tolerate school and even if they don't begin living on the streets, hardly do they continue in school. They complain saying that they aren't capable of being good students. Usually, schools have a routine that is inadequate to the community's reality. Therefore, it is in the schools, from the teachers, that these kids learn about their "lack of capacity of being a student". In addition, parents not always support their children in going to school, claiming that they won't learn anything useful in the classroom. Some fine programs such as "*Oficina do Saber*" ("Knowledge Workshop") from CEDEP, has been trying to change this reality by employing inclusive pedagogies, using methods that stem from the students' realities. A few schools, with the initiative of some professionals, have made partnerships with the communities, incorporating them to the routine of the school.

subjectivity of each child and the life on the streets, the processes of identification, the notion of street as an extension of the home where parental and solidarity relationships take place, and the way in which these kids resist being sent to institutions, configuring the streets as a place of living together.

3. Reflecting upon Santa Fe and Florianopolis - Different realities, same story:

In Santa Fe, when I found the adolescents on the streets, I noticed a reality quite different from that in Brazil. The main issue in this difference is denoted by social-economic factors, given that the youngsters in Santa Fe have greater access to goods such as food, clothing, cars, and cell phones, than those in Brazil - where items such as cell phones and cars are not so common on the streets - do. However, this difference doesn't help us in understanding life on the streets since rich and poor all go to the streets no matter if they have or not the comfort of the home or of the street¹². Another difference between them is that in Brazil, the great majority of the kids living on the streets begin doing so at an early age, whereas in Santa Fe, they cannot be considered small children anymore when they start going to the streets. These factors contribute to differentiating the life-styles of these youngsters; be it in the hardship of living in such environment, in the strategies for survival, or in the meaning that living on the street represents to each one of them. However, despite all these differences, the phenomenon presents similarities worth being considered. Some of the aspects present in both worlds allow a reflection upon "being on the street" and perhaps help us understand a bit more about this phenomenon.

In both cases, the experience of living on the street is one of daily struggle for survival, in which these kids get involved in a network of relationships that allow them to get food, shelter, friendship, and care. Besides having a network of support, they form groups with which they identify. This is an important aspect since we can observe the diversity of the groups and of the means employed to remain in that environment, confirming that there's no homogeneity, but instead, aggregating and contrastive processes of identification.

The street is an important factor in the development of group identification. The meaning of street becomes one that clearly contrasts with the value modern society gives to it. The street is, above all, a place for sociability, a meeting place, and such perspective does not correspond to modern society's. A passage way, a means of access to stores, to school, and to home, the street is more and more portrayed within an imagery of "danger". This way, both groups are seen by society as being "outside" the space assigned to them; i.e., they are outside the proper institutions for their education such as home, school, reformatories¹³, army, or navy.

¹²

An adolescent living on the streets of Santa Fe, comparing the experience on the streets of the US (Santa Fe) to that on the streets of Brazil, reminded that one of the main differences of living on the streets of these countries is that in Santa Fe one doesn't starve to death. Despite agreeing with her, I reminded her that in Brazil, due to social inequality, one may starve to death on the streets or at home.

¹³ In Brazil, the number of youngsters that live in reformatories is significant. With the objective of "adjusting the kid's conduct", these centers are in fact juvenile prisons where the youngsters quickly learn the codes of the crime world. Even if past experience has proven that such institutions do not bring any benefit to the behavior of these individuals (instead,

Being on the streets also means being away from the attention of educators, psychologists, and family, those who can tell them what is best in life. Mary Douglas (1970) demonstrated that what is seen as being “out of place” is also seen as being “dangerous” or as a “social issue” that needs to have its condition modified otherwise the entire group might suffer. However, the “disinfected” (“*asséptico*”) place (Freire, 1979; Ariés, 1985) offered to these youngsters is not the one they ultimately desire. This way, they break away from the hegemonic standards of notion of physical space and do not easily comply with the control of surveillance (Foucault, 1979; Ariés, 1985) that modern times will gradually impose to them.

But can we ask ourselves why do they break the patterns of home/street? And if they do break, what knowledge do they generate? What new truths do they produce in this knowledge? Why do they refuse so fiercely to accept the best place for them to be? Some issues are critical for understanding the phenomenon of homeless children under a perspective that denies the logic of social exclusion or pity so common in several of the analysis made by pedestrians. Here are three of these issues: 1) the way in which the street offers visibility that doesn’t exist at home; 2) the need for a life in which experience emerges and in which it is possible to produce unique narratives in which adrenaline, danger, and adventure are an integral part of not only their stories but also their lives, crucial values to the modern world; 3) the ability (or strength) to be agents of their own destiny that makes them capable of rebelling against an established culture and suggesting a new view about themselves.

3.1 The Invisibility of the home and the Visibility of the Street

It is true not only for upper and middle-class American children - to whom home consists of an almost lonely place due to cable television that allows them to view the world from a screen, the playing of videogames in which emotion and adventure are attained by pressing a few buttons, and the several toys that fill shelves - but also for Florianopolis’s slum communities - for which being at home may result in not having what to eat or not living in the universe of the streets with friends and relatives - that home may be a place of invisibility or of a loneliness apparently not possible on the streets. Thus, the street seems to represent a **possible place for visibility**¹⁴.

quite the opposite occurs) nor to society, given that if everyone knows that these institutions “form criminals” (a very commonly stated phrase by the population in general when referring to these institutions), more and more of these “secure” environments are being built, from which these young kids cannot escape. The administrators main concern is in conveying to society the security apparatus that will keep these boys and girls, usually poor and black, imprisoned. Likewise, in Santa Fe, almost everyone who lives on the streets has a long history of prison. They are sent to jail for any action that seems “illegal”. For instance, a beautiful girl, walking at a mall with her two children, was followed by two men who cursed at her; she entered a store and requested the owner to do something about it. He called the police, but in this case, the girl was the one arrested since she had escaped from prison several years ago. Another interesting story is that of a Latin American boy who was celebrating his friend’s leaving prison. They drank a lot and ended up fighting with some other kids on the streets. That night, besides getting beat by the other kids, he ended up spending the night in jail.

¹⁴ The street has also been portrayed by those that live in it as a place of freedom. And, for several reasons, it is indeed, since when young adults or children do not want to subject themselves to their families’ rules, staying on the streets means being free of such rules. However, even if the myth of “freedom” appears in essays that show reasons why youngsters choose to live on the streets, I understand that such experience does not embrace only this perspective since

Among those that work on the streets (children and adolescents that spend everyday working on the streets) of Florianopolis, the street is more than a traffic space; it is a place for living together with relatives, friends, salesmen, and shoppers. Especially in this case, the central streets, in which a larger number of people pass during the day, the visibility is even greater. Groups of daily association are formed: groups of mutual support that extends throughout the neighborhood, the home, in the form of being taken under one's wings, of networks of friendship, of work associations, in exchanges of services. In this case, one cannot even consider reverting the logic of the home since the continuum that exists between them characterizes a notion of street and home as not being opposite, but complementary spaces in which what happens at home extends to the streets and vice-versa¹⁵. Specifically in the case of homeless children, visibility is a result of the recognition among friends and of the friendship with the owners and employees of stores and supermarkets. And even in Florianopolis, many of these children can keep in touch with their relatives on the streets.

But having the street as a place of visibility is not a characteristic of poorer communities nor of street kids. In Florianopolis, another group that has redefined this space as one of living together, is the elderly, who, feeling lonely at home (especially those who live alone or whose sons and daughters or those with whom they live spend the entire day at work), have gone to the streets to chat, tell stories, laugh, play chess, watch the flow of people and cars, meet old friends, or simply figure out a way to spend the day before heading back home at night.

3.2 The street experience: Stories and performances as visibility and reflection

In fact, one of the most attractive characteristics of the streets is that one can always listen to stories. There is always someone telling a joke or a past episode. There is a great flow of information, tricks, and games. When I was in the field, it was very common to hear all sort of stories; stories taken from life experiences, some dramatic, some funny. Stories of theft, filled with suspense, with a lot of money involved, the use of cars, weapons; stories about the struggle for survival on the streets, sexual experiences, etc. True or not, these stories express the imagery of life on the streets since they portray what is valued and what must be rejected in that environment. It is not our job here to question whether these stories are true. Stories always have something of fantastic, something curious and true. What matters is the fact that these stories, and not others, are the ones told on the streets. Moreover, I will not discuss if these stories hide other "realistic" or "grotesque" themes such as child labor, family violence, or drugs. What interests me is calling for attention on the existence of stories in both worlds (Santa Fe and Florianopolis) as an important element of expressing the experiences from the streets, on the content of these stories (which is similar in both places), and on the way these stories are told

many kids know that life on the streets is not completely free. This issue will be treated next but not in the sense of "freedom", rather, in the sense of the ability to be agents of their own destinies and the ungovernability that these youngsters demonstrate in staying on the streets.

¹⁵ For more detail on the subject, see Silva (1998) and DaMatta (1985).

(demonstrating the development of a street aesthetics in which the theatrical capacity of telling one's story is highly appreciated).

Observing the stories of children in both worlds, we can instantly notice how aspects such as courage, the confrontation of difficulties, and camaraderie among the children are relevant to the development of the experience on the streets.

In Florianopolis, I remember Zezinho, a 10-year old boy who came from his mother's house to see his friends on the streets. One day we caught the same bus and sat next to each other. We started talking about his friends and, I don't know how, we ended up talking about his life on the streets. The focus of his story was on how dangerous it was to live on the streets and the extent to which courage, cleverness, and shrewdness should be demonstrated. "Yeah miss, I once had a lot of money in my hands. One time, Zeca, Salésio, and I robbed a store and got R\$ 20,000. We had never seen so much money before. Then, we broke into a car and went out there spending the money. It was so much money we didn't even know where to put it". Since we were in a bus, nearly everyone could hear what we were saying and those who looked at him could notice his long and expressive gestures, turning his body one to side to the other, gestures filled with pride of his adventures and capacity of surviving on the streets.

Two months later, his uncle, a 14-year old kid who seemed nine due to his size and thinness and much more by his fame and ability to steal showed us the tension that exists among those who sleep on the street and those that went home, "subjecting" themselves to the comfort of the old institution. It was a Friday afternoon when Benedito (Bene) arrived at the Terminal Rodoviário Rita Maria (Rita Maria Bus Station) with two other friends. Two minutes before the following event took place I met with the kids and Heloisa, a friend of mine that worked in a city program focused on the street kids. Long-time friends of Heloisa, the kids told us funny stories about people I didn't know, laughed, and complained about not having any money. Saying that they urgently needed some money, they challenge her: "Do you want to see me let that other kid empty-handed?" Bene was referring to an adolescent about 14 years old, wearing a blue uniform that indicated he worked in the city's *Guardas Mirins* (Young Officers) project.

We were at the main departure gate at the bus station. The episode is fast but full of surprises. A cab arrives. Bene and two other friends get closer to the kid in uniform who tries to prevent them from approaching the car (kids that do not participate in the project are not allowed to help passengers with their luggage) and begin cursing at the kid, in a low voice, almost next to his ear, saying that he was dumb for participating in such an exploiting project. The car door opens and Benedito immediately steps in front, takes the kid's cart, heads to the back seat of the car, opens the door in a courteous manner and offers his hand to the thin and elegantly dressed lady, about 55 years old, that stepped out of the cab. When she extended her hand you could clearly see the contrast of her white skin to Bene's, dark because of dirt. He helps her get out of the cab, heads to the trunk to get her luggage and puts it on the cart, waves to the lady and leaves, walking elegantly, like a gentleman, slightly shaking his butt, following her to the departure gate. He only changed his elegant posture when, in a split second, he decided to show

his power to the kid in uniform. He looks back quickly, shows his tongue, blinks his left eye at us, looks at his friends, making sure that they saw what he was doing, looks again at the kid in uniform, and raises his head and nose as if saying: "See, I'm the one who rules here!!!!". After leaving the lady's luggage, receiving a pat on the head and some money for his services, he returns happily, skipping as a happy boy. As soon as he can no longer be seen by the lady, he starts walking slowly again, legs leaning forward, with a malicious and irreverent look. He arrives at where we were and says to the kid in uniform: "See who rules here, you playboy?!". He gives the kid a hard time in front of his friends, making fun of the kid's submission to the "owners of the station", chats a little longer with Heloisa who told him not to spend the money in crack, and leaves to the end of the bus station, toward *Baia Sul* (Southern Bay).

In Santa Fe, the story of a 15 year old adolescent is about the pleasure of traveling and the appreciation for the capacity of taking care of oneself. I first met him at Outreach. He promptly became interested to know what language Kurt and I were speaking. He approached me and we began talking, first with Kurt's help, and then by ourselves, despite his not knowing Portuguese and my poor English. Eddie asked me how to say "How are you?" in Portuguese. When Kurt headed to the other room, he asked me where I was from. I showed him on the map where Florianopolis was located, since he was very curious about this "faraway place". It was then that Eddie told me where he had already traveled to, hitching hikes, and where he had already lived. He had lived in several different American states. This fact surprised me since he looked very young. He showed great pride in telling how much he had already traveled, even without money. With the rides, he managed to go to one place to the other. He asked what I was doing there. When I told him that I work with homeless children in Florianopolis, he said he used to live on the streets but now he had a home. He immediately reached for his pocket and kindly showed me his keys.

This same day, Friday, Jesse, a 19 year old boy who lived on the streets, told me about his weekend adventure. However, from his tone of voice, it could be noticed that he was pretty concerned since it was a very serious case to him. He was leaving a nightclub with a girl when a gang attacked them. The girl was the gang's target and ended up as the most severely hurt, despite Jesse's trying to protect her. Jesse had bruises on his belly. The girl had suffered so many bruises that she spent a whole week in a coma. That Friday, the girl had come out of the coma, but according to the doctors, she would spend almost a year without speaking. Jesse showed great disappointment in not being able to protect the girl. He and his friends were planning a revenge, but members of Outreach tried to convince them of calling the police, thus putting in end to the fight. In this case, being on the streets, being visible, meant being more exposed to gangs, a fact that concerned everyone. Jesse knew he would have to "disappear" for a while, despite his will to confront the gang. He, particularly, had a noticeably confrontational attitude. He always talked about his fighting skills and had scars that could prove what he was

saying. He had a “malandro”^{*} walking style, tattoos on his hands and clothes (sweatshirt with a hood) with a gang’s insignia. He was from southern Santa Fe and for this reason was identified as being from the “south side” gang¹⁶.

Simmel, in 1902, analyzing the metropolis, explained the ambiguity and duality that drives its inhabitants, in which, in order to survive, must become visible and at the same time protect themselves from all stimuli that exist, an attitude the author calls *blasé*. If, on the one hand, the attitude depicted as *blasé* points to a tendency of internalizing the individualistic life-style of the city, where the individual, to preserve oneself, requires a preservation, a slight aversion, repulsiveness, and a mutual indifference toward everything and everyone, on the other hand, the author claims that there is an essential independence in the metropolis, a freedom that in other places wouldn’t be possible. Among the individual’s characteristics cited by Simmel, and which, in my opinion, are very representative of those on the streets, the need for being able to be agents of one’s own destiny in the chaos of a metropolis has to be more evident. This aspect, as emphasized by the author, conveys an ambiguity almost aesthetical to the modern individual. This aspect recognizes the individual from an invisible side (internalized), and on the other side, confirms his uniqueness on the streets in an almost extravagant visibility. Moreover, Simmel stresses how “(...) one must meet the difficulty of asserting his own personality within the dimensions of metropolitan life. Where the quantitative increase in importance and the expense of energy reach their limits, one seizes upon qualitative differentiation in order somehow to attract the attention of the social circle by playing upon its sensitivity for differences”. (Simmel, 1979: 22).

Even though Simmel is correct when he talks about the *blasé* attitude of those who live in large cities, we can notice on the street kids an exaggeration of the theatrical attitude by which they want to express emotions like rage, courage, braveness, a sentiment of facing reality, and visibility all the time. They often show their chest (mainly the boys), agile arms, and their bodies moving from one side to the other in a sort of “malandro” walking style; their heads are always in an upward position, in an attitude of confrontation. They’ll only use the artifice of invisibility when necessary, for a specific reason, as seen above. In their very theatrical stories, they are capable of expressing street values and their own experiences. The streets seem like the perfect place to form groups and build one’s own narratives. Telling stories is a natural way of giving meaning to life. Expressing the street is particularly theatrical and for this reason is also reflexive since they know where and when they can or should use certain types of stories and codes. They control their own codes as a result of the situation, demonstrating their knowledge on how to deal with society and legislation. A typical example is when they want to earn money by

* “Malandro”, in Brazilian culture, represents someone who’s always trying to take advantage of others, through an supposedly superior cleverness. (NT)

¹⁶ The gang members have their own codes that identify them. These codes range from piercings, tattoos (in several parts of the body; ex: a tattoo next to the eye means that the gang member spent time in prison; among others, the symbol of this gang is a rose tattooed between the thumb and index finger), walking styles, clothing, and even greetings (which indicates where they came from and to what gang they belong; ex: waving with the index finger, middle finger, and pinkie upward mean they are from the West; waiving with the pinkie and index finger downward, mean they are from the South).

begging or when they want to find a job. When begging, they completely change their appearance, in some cases trying to invoke pity in others, and in other cases, seeming threatening, depending on whom they'll ask for money and on how these people react. In the case of finding a job, they show up in clean clothes, bathed, wearing perfume, and talking without using slang.

3.3 The value of experience

In order for the narrative and performance about life on the street to be effective and impact the groups, it must be affirmed in the experience itself. If it lacks such affirmation, it will certainly be considered a "false" narrative. The harsher and more exotic the experiences contained in these stories are, the greater meaning these stories will have. If someone sleeps in good conditions on the streets, it means that he/she didn't experience the unique difficulties of living on the streets. Hence, he hasn't experienced cold, hunger, pain, and insecurity. This person's narrative won't have the same value as the one of a person who has lived such troubles.

Two similar stories, one having taken place in Santa Fe, the other in Florianopolis, express the same experiences of living on the streets. The first story is based on an episode that I observed in Praça XV in Florianopolis. It was mid-afternoon and a group of street kids was talking enthusiastically when I arrived. They were talking to an upper-middle-class girl who considered herself one of them. Everyone made fun of her, saying that to become one of them, she would have to live like them. She had decided a few weeks ago that she would sleep on the street with them in order to prove that she was capable of such experience and be accepted by the group. She justified that she didn't live on the street because by staying home she could always get money to buy them "pot". This day, the kids insisted that she do what she had promised. She convinced them that she would spend that night with them. It was getting dark when she stood up and began to leave. One of the kids asked her where she was going. She replied that she would sleep with them but first had to go home to get her mother's car, a blanket, and a mattress. Everyone laughed at her, specially some of the girls who could barely stand her being in the group. One of the girls yelled: "I knew this rich girl wouldn't sleep with us. She's a bum! She thinks she can be one of us this way". One of the boys said while laughing: "The way she wants to sleep on the street, anyone can... She thinks you can have a warm blanket, a dry mattress, mommy's car...". The conversation went on until she left, since everyone was sure she was indeed a "spoiled rich girl" and wasn't suitable for living on the street.

The second episode is told by Kurt. It refers to the complaints made by Sarah, a member of the anarchist-punk group in Santa Fe. This day we were at Outreach and a few girls that were beginning to wonder on the streets came by wanting to get along with the people that hung out there. They still didn't live entirely on the street, and still drove nice cars they got from their upper-middle-class families in Santa Fe. They complained about their parents, saying that

they didn't give them the freedom they wanted. The punk girl, mad at one of the other girls, said she wanted to see those girls having to work everyday to help their parents afford the cars they were driving. She accused them of getting anything they needed effortlessly, and of not knowing what it was like to actually live on the street.

Exposed body marks, tattoos, piercings, and scars, confirmed knowledge of the places they had been, witnessing the described episodes, are all well-accepted artifices used to give the stories' narration a greater impact. The capacity of convincing a group lies in the ability of the person's telling the story to connect what really matters to what he/she has experienced. Someone good at lying may be well accepted by the group if this skill means being able to bypass the law and social rules, to save someone from trouble, to assure being able to tell great stories, or to get stuff for the group. However, someone who tries to tell stories he/she didn't actually experience, in an attempt to gain acceptance by the group, soon will be discredited once the lie is caught. Arno, a 22 year old guy that goes everyday to Outreach, told stories about his life on the streets, about how he managed to escape school despite his teachers' begging him to remain in school since he was so intelligent, and about his great accomplishments. His stories lost credibility among his peers and his ties to the group became looser as they realized he was constantly lying. His performance wasn't competent enough as the group quickly realized he was telling stories he hadn't actually lived. The group began perceiving him as being untrustworthy, especially because he often stole from those in the group. He is now practically ignored by everyone when telling his stories. Hence, the way lies are viewed within the group can be classified in two ways: if the lie is told to someone outside the group, it is seen as a sign of cleverness and astuteness, but if the lie is told to someone belonging to the group, it is viewed as an opportunistic and untrusting attitude that will certainly be opposed.

The competence on the streets is also tested in the well-known rituals of initiation through which some groups make their prospective members pass in order for him/her to be accepted in the group. These rituals of initiation, so well analyzed by Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's anthropological works, are an important means used by society to prepare its members to new phases of life; rituals of puberty, of naming. Boys and girls are subjected to isolation or tests to pass to another phase, taking new social roles upon other member of the community. In my observations, I saw several times the street kids subject their friends that wanted to live on the streets with them to challenges in stealing, challenges of cold and hunger, of courage, of obtaining drugs. If they didn't accept the challenges imposed, they were considered weak ("mommy's boy") to be on streets and should go back to their homes, otherwise would end up suffering abuses, even from their own peers. There's a very strong feeling of repulsion for those who do not show courage and perspicacity in that environment¹⁷. On the other hand, there's a

¹⁷ I point out the case of Carlinhos, an eight years old boy who had been sleeping on the streets of Florianopolis for the past week and was divided between the desire to join the street group and resisting to steal. He used to work but now lives on the street since he had a fight with his family and, because he had a cousin that already lived on the street, decided to stay with him. One of the kids on the street used to give him a hard time saying that if he hadn't the courage to steal, he ought to go back home.

sentiment of solidarity among them, since they understand that living on the street is tough and those who survive the experience deserve respect.

But group acceptance will not always be a result of the adoption of all codes. In Santa Fe, independence and resilience to the street's hegemony is one of the greatest virtues a person can have. This shows that the modern myth of individualism is part of the street's values. We could clearly notice this by the level of respect that certain individuals had in showing their authenticity to the others. Take Joe, a 19 year old kid for instance. Of all the kids I met in Santa Fe, he's the most theatrical, comparable only to Jesse. His great creativity on the way he dressed and his appealing and fun walking style visually distinguished him from the others. He avoided common habits such as doing drugs and by no means did the group respected him less. His decision not to do drugs, especially alcohol, was seen as a proof of courage and resistance to the group's rules. It denoted liberty and freedom, the most important values to the group.

3.4 The revised and mirrored myth: Media on the street and about the street

According to Shoerer (apud Watt, 1997), a myth is an image capable of giving direction and philosophical meaning to the facts of life. Watt (1997), when describing the myths of modern times, said that one of the main functions of myths is that of anchoring the past to the present; characters that once existed but now are part of stories. According to Levi-Strauss, the myth has a relation to the social structure. It is a form of language and as such can reveal aspects of the organization and structure of a certain society.

The myth of a hero who faces adventures and difficulties, who challenges himself every time, who doesn't avoid an act of courage and who suffers but doesn't flee from adversities is part of the imagery of the street kids portrayed in this essay. I could notice this fact not only in every story on acts of bravery (transcribed in this essay) but also in evidence related to historical myths that are part of the imagery of the world of courage. A clear example is Jesse, one of the bravest kids that lived on the streets of Santa Fe, whose full name is Jesse James: a name given by his father in honor to the great outlaw that "worked" in the states of New Mexico and Arizona during the second half of the nineteenth century. Jesse, the street kid, gave his son the same name: Jesse James Junior.

The real Jesse James was a gunman, a thief, but was also known for his solidarity to the people and to his group. He was part of a brotherhood, very considerate among themselves. Another interesting character cited in the kids' stories was Billy The Kid. The presence of this character in New Mexico is so huge that still today scientists and those living on the streets seek his mortal remains. Billy had a child face and for this reason was called Kid. He was the cruelest, the most skillful with a gun, and shot with no mercy. In addition, he was the best poker player of his time¹⁸.

¹⁸ Among those living on the streets of Santa Fe, you can still hear stories about the Coyote, a very astute and playful god. A myth of the Navajo Indians, the Pueblos, and the Zunis, the Coyote is the god of chaos. Curiously, the kid who told me about this myth had the nickname "Wolf".

These brave men from Santa Fe became main characters in several movies in the US, known as Westerns. In Brazil, these widely-known movies are highly recognized by the populations of the interior, who identified themselves with the life style in the “far west”. These movies shown on TV on afternoon sessions and especially on Saturdays were responsible for gathering men and their families in front of the TV. During my childhood in Florianopolis, you could sometimes see someone pretending to “pull a gun” as if he were one of the “outsiders”.

The myth of the outlaw usually tells the story of a bad guy who robs banks or trains, who could use a gun better than everybody else, who was feared by all, but who suddenly became the hero after saving someone. He usually saved a lady from the hands of a “good guy” who imprisoned her, claiming her love. At the end, she would usually fall in love with her savior. Above all, this villain/hero has in himself and others, freedom as core value.

In Brazil, besides the popularization of these characters through several generations, the heroes nowadays presented in the media also have bravery as their main trait. Above all, the courage to undertake risky moves, which the regular human being can't, builds part of the modern heroic imagery.

If on one side of a glass street kids see themselves as having an almost heroic courage, on the other side, as if seeing oneself the other way around, under the perspective of those who live in an institution (and cultivate the modern values of a central family and schooled childhood), the street kids are seen as being socially excluded, reinforcing the “myth of the villain”. However, there is a dialectic relation between the two myths, in which the former reinforces the latter and vice-versa, and one could not exist without the other. “Villain” and “hero” are two frames (Bateson, 1998; Goffman,1998) of “qualities” that fits into a single character. What highlights one “face of the character” or the other is the frame being used in the social interactions that these individuals have amongst themselves, something always modified within the context in which they meet. The frame's action is paradoxical; many times you live one seeming to be the other or you think about being one in order to become the other.

The villain/hero myth, in several of its macro-narratives¹⁹, intends to emphasize a form of representing good and evil, two opposing forces that are constantly interacting. The most current and perhaps most popular (among kids) stories in cartoons, action movies, and in TV news shows, seek however, the destruction of the forces of evil, justifying the execution of certain groups or individuals, as if they carried this evil force²⁰. This has been and intends to continue being the narrative that confronts social actors and gives them distinct places in society (behind bars or wearing a sheriff's star).

¹⁹ In the western (cowboy) movies, the villain is always chased by the good guy, but in many cases the latter is also viewed as being the villain until he shows his real self - that of a hero who had an act of courage. Who hasn't seen cartoons in which the heroes always win and have a life filled with adventures and a body covered with the consequences of their courage?

²⁰ This imagery is used in stories that try to justify the recent attack of the American armed forces in Iraq. Both George Bush and Tony Blair, when they spoke about the motivations of the war, portrayed the Middle East and Saddam Hussein as the great enemies of the rest of the world. Therefore, it seemed natural that the “forces of good” fought the “hidden forces of evil”.

Having learned from Foucault (1994) that power is relational, breaking the great narrative of good and evil and confusing the place reserved for the hero and villain in the post-modern imagery, the perpetuation of the dualist narrative that aims at identifying, tracking down and eliminating all evil from the planet (see the modern myth of Superman) is an integral part of the modern “safe” life imagery, in which the right of property, of family life, and welfare state are guaranteed to the good citizens, workers and those that obey the law. Security is the promise and desire of most people living in large cities, but, as mentioned in the beginning of this essay, it is the promise that gets spread throughout the world. This promise becomes true especially in the development of security apparatuses; from the most simple ones, to the weapons of mass destruction that entail a promise of security to entire nations, amplifying the fear for the enemy and creating hidden forces to eliminate the enemy. The discourse on security (and the actions it generates) has developed several social categories of exclusion such as delinquents, crooks, thieves, “malandros”, tax evaders, runaways (from schools and homes), informal workers that do not pay taxes, bums that do not want to work (work that sometimes resembles slavery), blacks, Jews, etc. These are accusatory terms to those socially classified as being on the “evil team”. There’s no need to mention that legislation too has been specializing in terms and in more or less rigorous laws that seek to remove those socially excluded by our society from the sight of the good citizens. It seems like the old Western story: the good guys chasing the “bad guys”.

Dos Santos (2003) reminds us that in the 80s, the myth of the hero, the rebel, was the great depiction of life on the streets. This myth was portrayed in many academic reports, in reports by institutions that financed studies in the field of childhood, and were disseminated in the social imagery, when, in this decade, several of these heroes were killed by the policemen in Rio de Janeiro, in front of the Candelária Church, in an episode that became widely known as the "*Chacina da Candelária*" (Candelaria Massacre). "Too many heroes lived on the streets...". It was after this episode, in which several kids were murdered and those that survived were chased by the police so they wouldn't serve as witnesses to the crime, that the issue of the massacre of street children achieved a greater dimension in the media and these kids became the emblem of social injustice. "Street children were seen as 'prophets', 'heroes', and 'rebels' until the early 1980s in Brazil (Pastoral do Menor da Arquidiocese de São Paulo 1987) and later as an emblem of social injustice or an emblem of social neglect (...)" (Dos Santos, 2003).

The existence and current maintaining of distinct denominations - "children and adolescents" to refer to those that live at home and "runaways" or “minors” to refer to the youngsters that live on the streets or belong to a lower social class - accuses the differentiated imagery that is set forth in this theme²¹. These terms refer to different characters that occupy the dualism between "educated child" and "deviant child". In the second category is the evil that must be eliminated from the world. What these distinct terms express, above all, are categorizations that exclude, giving children a generic categorization that does not express their

²¹ Especially in Brazil, after the creation of the *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* (Statute for the Children and Adolescent) and due to the strong campaign made in the 90's to eliminate the term "minor", since the term was stigmatizing and frequently used to classify children and adolescents of lower social classes.

beings. They only help in maintaining the social division, establishing value to distinct experiences and subjectivities, establishing rights and obligations that, as we know, will never be universal (Dumont, 2000); a guarantee given by the capitalist dynamics that is widely spreading throughout the modern world.

On the one hand, if street kids are viewed with alarm and fear, transforming them into myths (of "crooks" or "poor things") and not as regular human beings that need to feel alive, on the other hand, in reaction to this attitude, these children build themselves as myths, transforming the confrontational attitude in a survival technique in order to be heard and respected (either because of the population's fear or by his peers). Therefore, if in a certain point of their lives they personify a myth to make it alive or feel the need for "pretending to live the myth", this is because this desire has been socially developed as a mythical possibility. Many kids choose to go to the streets because on the streets, either as a "social issue" or through one's experience that makes significant narrative possible, they will feel, in some way, as being focused. They will have their daily lives vitalized by the challenge and by the urgency of life that they encounter on the streets and that is not possible at home.

It is not my intention to romanticize the life on the street; the dangers that exist on the streets may also exist at home. Instead, I attempt to understand the experience that the street kids develop within the possibility of human existence; as the result of a socially excluded life that society has historically attributed to them or as "myths" that, like other social villains, will have a guaranteed destiny: prison. The risk we run is that of imitating life through the looking glass into which Alice fell (cited on the epigraph of this essay): "What sort of things do you remember best?" Alice ventured to ask. 'Oh, things that happened the week after next', the Queen replied in a careless tone. 'For instance, now', she went on, sticking a large piece of plaster on her finger as she spoke, 'there's the King's Messenger. He's in prison now, being punished: and the trial doesn't even begin till next Wednesday: and of course the crime comes last of all.'"

4. Some considerations to conclude this essay without conclusion

The homeless people that are part of this narrative do not reverse the logic of those who live at home; they are not an anti-structure as proposed by Victor Turner (1994). They are not outsiders. They emphasize in their lives what is built as a value and is reiterated in the media and is already present in social dynamics. Speaking about **action** and **representation**, Dumont suggests that individuals act with a socially given idea in mind. The author is not discarding the social actor's creativity, instead, he reminds us on how "Individuals act as a result of what they think, and if they possess the ability to tailor their thoughts at their own will and the ability to build new categories, they do it from socially given categories and their relation to language is sufficient to remember such fact (...)" (Dumont, 1992: 54).

The search for the myth of the modern "adventurous hero" on the streets is nothing

more than the search for the ontological plenitude that the existentialist emptiness of the invisibility of the home put them in, either due to the government's blindness, the family, or by the way we organize ourselves to live in large cities, where fear is the background for existing in such place. This search doesn't seem exclusive to the children or to the elderly that play chess at Praça XV. It seems to be a symptom of modern life.

The stories told by street kids are a live and theatrical expression of the fact that they have a looking glass that listens to them and reflects their own image. This glass is the general society, and the image built of oneself can be more dangerous or heroic as a result of who sees through it and gets reflected on the other side. If we look at those in the looking glass as regular beings, who want to be seen and heard, who want to build themselves as subjects, perhaps we could change too the myth of the street as a place of danger and violence and experiment being on the street without fear.

Leaving home is an obvious indication that the place given to these children is not the place they want to be, in which they can feel recognized as actors of their own history. Perhaps we could, through a gaze that witnesses individuals on the streets not only as personified myths, notice what other looking glasses exist, what other looks can be sent upon us in this kaleidoscope of images that we are able to constantly create in social interactions. This gaze can provide us with new experiences, new practices that will certainly reflect upon the way children and adolescents develop; not only the street kid but also a kid at home who many times become prisoner of the desires of consumption influenced by his/her parents. In what ways can our view of those who live on the streets modify the stigmatizing logic (Goffman, 1989) of heroes/villains or the victimization of these children?

Furthermore, I want to call attention to what these kids can teach us: they show our submission to a system that seems immutable and at the same time mirror our ungovernability. They show what remains active inside us in the submission of our daily lives at work (submission to the boss, to the government, to what comes ready for us to consume without having to create anything). This doesn't mean that they live the dream that all of us have, but in some way, they spread the ungovernability that we cannot tolerate in ourselves, since, indeed, we subject ourselves more than we resist. They convey what is already a dream in many of us. They accept the risks of life with their own lives! And we, with the discourse of fear, choose the modern security of not living.

Bibliography:

ARIÉS, Philippe. **História Social da Infância e da Família**. RJ: Guanabara, 1985.

BATESON, Gregory. Uma teoria sobre brincadeira e fantasia. In: Ribeiro, B.T. e Garcez, P. M. (org). **Sociolinguística Interacional: Antropologia, Linguística e Sociologia em Análise de Discurso**. Porto Alegre: Ed. Age, 1998.

BRIGGS, Charles. **Competence in Performance: The creativity of tradition in Mexican verbal art**. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.

DAMATTA, Roberto. **A casa e a rua**. SP: Brasiliense, 1985.

DOS SANTOS, Benedito. **Ungovernable children**. PhD dissertation University California Berkeley, 2003.

DUMONT, Luis. **Individualismo**. SP: Rocco, 1992.

DUMONT, Luis. **Homo Hierárquicus**. SP: EDUSP, 2000.

DOUGLAS, M. **Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo**. London: Routledge, 1970.

FONSECA, Cláudia. Criança, Família e Desigualdade Social no Brasil. In: RIZZINI, Irene. **A Criança no Brasil Hoje - Desafio para o Terceiro Milênio**. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Universitária Santa Úrsula, 1993.

FONSECA, Cláudia. **Caminhos da Adoção**. São Paulo: Cortez, 1995.

FOUCAULT, M. **Discipline and Punish**. New York: Vintage Books, 1979

FOUCAULT, M. "The Subject and the Power," in *Power*. Edited by J. Faubion. New York: The New Press. 1994.

FREIRE Costa, J. **Ordem médica e norma familiar**. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1979.

GOFFMAN, Irving. **A Representação do Eu na Vida Cotidiana**. Tradução de Maria Célia Santos Raposo. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1989.

GOFFMAN, Erving. Footing. In: Ribeiro, B.T. e Garcez, P. M. (org). **Sociolinguística Interacional: Antropologia, Linguística e Sociologia em Análise de Discurso**. Porto Alegre: Ed. Age, 1998.

LECZNEISK, Lisiane; *Corpo*, Virilidade e gosto pelo desafio: a masculinidade entre os guris de rua. In: **Horizontes Antropológicos - Gênero**. ano 1, no 1, PA, 1995.

RIZZINI, I, and I. Rizzini. ""Menores" Institucionalizados e Meninos de Rua: Os Grandes Temas de Pesquisas na Década de 80," in **O Trabalho e a Rua: Crianças e Adolescentes no Brasil Urbano dos Anos 80**. In: R. Cervini and A. Fausto. São Paulo: Cortez Editora, 1991.

SHAW, Kurt. **La Globalizacion de la Exclusion**. www.shinealight.com/Ensaio para compreender a rua. 2002. (Visitado em 2003).

SILVA, Rita de Cácia Oenning da. **A Porta Entreaberta" - Práticas e representações em torno das relações entre casa e rua junto a crianças de camadas populares em Florianopolis**. Florianopolis,. Dissertação de Mestrado em Antropologia Social - Programa de Pós-Graduação em Antropologia Social, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 1998.

SIMMEL, G. A Metrópole e a vida mental. In: In: VELHO, Gilberto. **O Fenômeno Urbano**. RJ: Zahar, 1979.

TURNER, Victor. **O processo ritual: estrutura e antiestrutura**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1974.
Watt, Ian. **Mitos do Individualismo Moderno**. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1997.