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Aesthetics of youth scenes: politics of resistance or arts of existence?.

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Abstract: The aesthetic expressions which emerged in post-war youth micro-cultures used to have an intentional transformation of the collective order. Their objective was to display resistance and subvertion to a «social order» understood as an oppressor of youth life experiences and chances. A social order which some fringes of young people perceived as restrictor of their work possibilities and social mobility opportunities, subordinating them to a pre-defined order of values and social positions. In this paradigm, the stylistic resources created within some marginal youth scenes were subsumed to their class status and seen as an ideological reflection of their dominated and disadvantadge social position, as social representatives of the youth fringes of the working class.

The political content of those micro-cultural expressions has, however, taken on new meanings. Where once it was found a militant and collective *politics of resistance*, impeled by an ethics of contestation of life standards, oriented by utopian and universalist values for its betterment and equality, we now observe a diverse and fragmented world of *arts of existence*. The youth scenes of nowadays are much more oriented towards an ethics of celebration of everyday life, cultivating particularist, hedonist, experimentalist, presentist and friendship values. More than to change the World, their action tryes to enlarge the field of possibilities of self-expression and creativity, as well as to improve the conditions for the social recognition of their aesthetics as arts of living and for living from their arts.

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Aesthetics of youth scenes: politics of resistance or arts of existence?

Vitor Sérgio Ferreira

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Behind youth scenes

Some of the stylistic resources displayed within the context of the youth cultures that emerged in the 50's have recently begun to gain an aesthetic aura far beyond their traditional anti-aesthetic legitimacy. In a context marked by an intense porosity and hybridism between art worlds, cultural industries and street cultures[1], the former begin to recognise and symbolically warrant the artistic legitimacy of some objects produced in the remaining contexts as *frontier arts*[2], the street cultures and the cultural industries accentuate the logic of authorial creativity, traditionally a characteristic of the artistic worlds, and all of them see (and are interested in) their objects being commercialised under the sign of «singularity», «difference» and «authenticity».[3]

When one talks about stylistic resources of street cultures, we are referring to objects as diversified as, for example: the graffiti that colours the façades of public transports, walls or buildings in the urban scenery and that earn the statute of street art; the tattoos or other type of body modifications that cover more or less extensively the flesh of many young people, claimed by professionals and consumers of today as body art; the clothes and accessories that create youth looks and whose creativity is kept under the scouting of fashion and design industries; the cartoons, illustrations or texts that have started to fill the pages of fanzines produced and distributed on a small scale, or of websites that invade the virtual space, which may become part of the more traditional mediums of the editorial market; the expressions of street dance that makes moving street corners and arcades of suburban neighbourhoods, and that have moved on to more valuable stages, gymnasiums and dance schools; the underground musical bands and genres that are heard in garage stages or other marginal circuits of presentation for the public and that are quickly absorbed by the phonographic industry, etc., etc., etc.

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[1] Social dynamics frequently identified under the general designation of aesthetization of everyday life. Regarding this process see Featherstone, 1991; Pais, 1994; Shusterman, 1988.
[2] See Pais, Ferreira and Ferreira, 1995; and Lima dos Santos, Ferreira, Martinho and Nunes, 2003.
[3] Regarding the commercialisation of street cultures, emphasis is placed on a recent interview with Paul Willis by Sassatelli and Santoro (2009).

Isolated or put together, these aesthetic resources contribute actively to the production and expression of youth sociabilities and identities. As classified and classifying objects, generally identified by a spectacular and exoticised aesthetic, they produce and reproduce specific symbolic systems that, in turn, create social frontiers between young people. They are, as such, expressive resources that place young people *on scene(s)* in the social world, a «native category»[4] often employed in the social life of young people to classify the micro-cultures they frequent.[5]

The social use of this dramaturgical metaphor invokes the frequenting of appropriate social spaces such as *stages*, in the sense that Goffman (1993 [1959]) gives to the term. Through them, some young people build and demonstrate their collective feelings, perform specific social roles, and act for their daily audiences, captivating their attention: «looking and being looked at becomes the most effective way of being present in the public sphere» (Diógenes, 1998:181), turning each individual into an actor par excellence. Performances, styles, choreographies and other aesthetic resources are used as ways of *being in scene*, namely among those objectively placed in the «backstages of the social scene», who frequent the most marginal, subterranean and interstitial areas of the social space.

In their scenes, those young people use, dramatically and creatively, accessories and props, scenarios and soundtracks, performances and plots to sign and to demarcate their role in the world. Normally different and defying the canonical tastes, their *mise en scènes* cause social impact and bring attention to their protagonists. Placed in stage, they feel as if they would be «seen in the world and from the world», Sartre would say (1998 [1943]: 339). This is why the stylistic resources created and made available within the context of youth scenes have been frequently understood as a social expression of *resistance* to the normative and hegemonic models of social order.

However, the more orthodox subcultural version of the concept of «resistance» may reveal itself as problematic when applied in nowadays to analyse the oppositional practices of youth

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[4] The «native categories» – also called *concepts of first order* (Schutz, 1974) or *sensitising concepts* (Blumer, 1969) – are nothing more than the words that the social subject agencies in his current language and recognises as pertinent to give account of his experiences, to justify his actions, to give meaning to his positions in the world and before the world, in each of his spheres of existence.

[5] *Youth micro-cultures* are understood as social contexts where there occur «flow of meanings and values managed by small groups of young people in daily life, with respect to specific local situations » (Feixa, 1998:270). Regarding the approach of these as *scenes*, see Abramo, 1994; Bennett and Peterson, 2004; Grossegger, Heinzlmaier and Zentner, 2001; Hesmondhalgh, 2005.

scenes. The world has changed and, with it, as noted in some of his more recent approaches,[6] the social, stylistic and political configurations and experiences of youth scenes. In a context of intense proliferation and pulverisation of the possibilities of cultural choice, the social and symbolic frontiers of youth scenes have become significantly weakened.

Where belonging was understood as permanent, based on long term commitments and in a strong group identity, membership is now assumed as temporary and commitment as susceptible of being renegotiated or cancelled. Young people scroll among several scenes, in parallel or successively, structuring more fragmented, provisional and individualized identities. Where the stylistic homogeneity used to prevail, emerged now an eclectic, hybrid and profuse set of expressive styles and resources, via transformations, fusions and revivalisms that take place.

Lastly, where once it was found a militant and collective *politics of resistance*, impeled by an ethics of contestation of life standards, oriented by utopian and universalist values for its betterment and equality, we now observe a diverse and fragmented world of *arts of existence*. The youth scenes of nowadays are much more oriented towards an ethics of celebration of everyday life, cultivating particularist, hedonist, experimentalist, presentist and friendship values. More than to change the World, their action tryes to enlarge the field of possibilities of self-expression and creativity, as well as to improve the conditions for the social recognition of their aesthetics as arts of living and for living from their arts. As I will address in more detail, aesthetics and politics continue to intercross in current youth scenes, albeit with new contents and under more sophisticated guises.

Utopias *vs.* heterotopias

In following with the tradition started by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies of the University of Birmingham, the concept of *resistance* implied that the practices and resources used within the post-war youth subcultures would have an intention for transformation of the collective order. Their objective would be to subvert the «social order», understood as oppressing the experiences of youth, as restricting their work and social mobility opportunities, as subordinating young people to an «adult-centric» and alienating authority, as conforming them to an order of pre-defined values and social positions. According to this conception, the stylistic resources created and used by young people in those social contexts were subsumed to their class status

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[6] Namely those that give substance to the *post-subculturalist* conceptual turnabout. See Muggleton, 2000 (2002); Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003; Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004; Hesmondhalgh, 2005, Magnani, 2005; Ferreira, 2009.

and seen as a reflection of their dominated, oppressed and exploited position as members of the working class. The youth subcultures would be understand, thus, as representative social spaces of younger members of working classes.[7]

Giroux emphasises the classist and ideological content of the *practices of resistance*, and distinguishes them from simple *acts of rebellion* (1992:288-290). The latter, located in a confined space and time, correspond to random and more or less spontaneous actions, without any kind of *changing reflexivity*[8]. It corresponds to rebellious conducts typical of the period of adolescence and youth, often naturalised as being a part of its process of growing up and gaining autonomy. The *practices of resistance*, however, suppose an oppositional conscience that seeks to break with or win over a position considering the relations of power, the foundations of social control and the figures of authority. The practices of resistance are also defined by being activated with the conscience of the personal and social effects which may arise from them.

In addition, for an action to signify resistance, Giroux also presume the need to display an open ideological condemnation of repressive ideologies. It will have to contain a function of critical revelation of the situation of disadvantage and to provide the opportunity for the reflection and the struggle for social emancipation interests. In order to achieve that, the actions of resistance often are linked to a specific politicised program or manifest, to some collective organisation relatively self-centered and closed, which is oriented towards the satisfaction of the interests of that collective and the effective changes in the structure of the system it denounces.

However, this conception of resistance becomes analytically ill-suited and heuristically limited when we try to comprehend the cultural productions of today's youth scenes. On one hand, because youth scenes are no longer exclusively structured on the basis of social class[9], a variable which represented the starting point for the design of the concept. In nowadays, youth scenes are under an intense and non-stop social diversification and reticular fragmentation. Considering the already vast and solid social research on these realities, variables such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyles, tastes and symbolic values come across as greater poles of resistance and opposition in the discursive repertoires of many youth scenes.[10]

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[7] See, among other authors, Cohen and Taylor, 1978; Cohen, 1984; Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1986 [1979]), Willis, 1977.

[8] Here, we make use of Pais' concept, in order to acknowledge the transformative intentionality understood in those practices. The author calls *changing reflexivity* the «primordial reflexivity which destabilizes consensuses through the simple fact of questioning them» (2008:246), inducing questions that may lead to the social circulation of new symbolic frameworks and practical options to be considered.

[9] And this position is taking for granted that once in the past they really were.

[10] See, among other authors, Haenfler, 2004; Raby, 2005; Seymour, 2006.

On the other hand, the actual expressions of youth cultures are far from being any kind of voice for closed, organized and ideologically uniform collectives. Without losing their dissident intention, their goals are no longer exactly revolutionary, in the sense of trying to replace the dominant models with their own models. The changing reflexivity which is associated with their actors tends to display little ambition, considering objectives of social transformation. Their living experience within youth scenes displays a social action more oriented towards the *personal construction* of an escape lifestyle,[11] than towards the *collective imposition* of a certain ideological system that seeks the «common good». We may say, thus, that there is a reduction in the scale of intentions beneath the social action of youth scenes: the intentions are much more pragmatic and microscopic, targeting the immediate and concrete living conditions of the *life-world* of their participants[12].

Far from the rationale that was under the social action of the youth movements of the past, among the youth micro-cultures of today it is possible to observe a shared feeling of *impotence*, of powerlessness, of incapacity towards the goals of, *collectively*, to change the World, in the sense of any pre-defined and utopian social organization model. Far from the idealist and holistic devotion of some non-conformist youth movements of the 70's and 80's, within nowadays youth cultures there is no *utopian* social programme (such as that of the hippie movement, for example), nor even a *dystopian* programme (such as that of the punk movement), to guide its practices of resistance, in the sense of expressing a collective imagination of a «better society» or an «ideal society».

On the contrary, in these contexts we find an iconoclastic refusal of social models which, from the start, show such an ambition. An this because these are programmes imbued with a rationality which tends to promote standardised citizens concerning the duties and rights of society, carefully planned by legislators whose function is to ensure harmony, justice and egalitarianism of collective life: «the planning of how to inhabit, of production and consumption, the regulation of marriages and births, the political paternalism, the civic catechism, the normative power of science, the angelical and ascetic morals, all of these options constitute the profile of

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[11] Proposed by Pais (2001:71), the concept of *escape lifestyle* refers to the sets of practices which, in different areas of life, attempt to avoid the more standardized and widespread tastes, the more normative and routine social experiences, the more linear and saturated life paths, the hegemonic models seen as prescriptive ways of living life.

[12] In contrast with the *zone of distant things* (Mead, 1963 [1933]; Blumer, 1969), the *life world* corresponds to the *world of effective reach* of the individual, to his everyday *zone of operation* (Schutz and Luckmann, 1977, pp. 54-55), organized «around the "here" of my body and the "now" of my present. This "here and now" is the focus of the attention which I devote to the reality of everyday life» (Luckmann and Berger, 1999 [1966], pp. 39-40).

these alternative societies (More, Campanella, Fénelon, Morelly, Mercier, etc.)» (Wunenburger, 1986, p. 5).

The remains of utopian social programs which still survive inside some youth cultures (such as anarchy, communism or national-socialism, for example) end up being more often used as a repertoire of critical arguments towards some recent forms of social organization, than as sources of real and systematic proposals, considering the programs that they prescribed for the social future. The appropriation of some of their arguments by young people is more geared towards that what they *denounce* than towards what they *announce*, towards that what they *diagnose* rather than what they *predict*.

Set apart of the guidelines of a *utopian programme of egalitarianism*, the political dimension of current youth scenes rather expresses a *heterotopic ambition of deviance*, to use a useful expression of Foucault (Foucault, 1984 [1967]). That is, a posture of social openness to plurality and to cultural coexistence through the constant questioning and defying of the principles and institutions which tend to frame and to standardize the experiences of youth. The goal here is no longer the collective demand for a change in the system, but rather the individualised claim for a space of existence as a *singular* («to be different»), *authentic* («to be myself») and *free* («to be what I want to be») person.

Universalism vs. particularisms

The changing reflexivity that defines the political culture of current youth scenes is therefore no longer associated with the collective demand for strictly political, human or social rights, not even of the so called *negative rights*.[13] It does include, now, the claim for *particularistic cultural rights*, in the sense of the individual freedom to create and to try new aesthetic and ethical models which may (or may not) reify a given lifestyle with biographical continuity in time[14]. From there stems the centrality which signs of consumption such as looks, music, dance, even food

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[13] Civil and social rights which citizenship proclaims as universal, that is, applicable and bestowed on everyone, yet frequently disrespected for certain, more vulnerable, social segments, according to certain attributes (skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). In other words, rights which, notwithstanding their supposed universal application, must be reinforced according to certain specific populations, not in the sense of defining them as exceptional situations, but of highlighting and preventing the conditions of discrimination and prejudice to which they are subjected (Cabral, 2000).

[14] Grossegger, Heinzlmaier and Zentner (2001:197) make the distinction between youth cultures and lifestyles in terms of age groups: when someone is young, they adopt a youth culture; when someone is an adult, they adopt a lifestyle, which assumes some stability and individuality in the appropriation of the resources offered by every scene which was passed through.

itself, among other stylistic resources, acquire in the everyday libertarian experience of these young people.

More than the *struggle for equity*, these expressions display a *struggle for subjectivity*, as it was point out by Kevin McDonald (McDonald, 1999). That is, a struggle related not to demands for social equality but rather self-defining singularity. Its political content should be understood not in the traditional framework of the universality of citizenship rights – which assumes the same set of civil liberties and responsibilities for everyone – but in a framework of affirmation of the individual. The political intention is found not only in the recognition of oneself as a *citizen* with equal rights, but in one's particularities as a *person*.

By intending to demonstrate and socially ratify a form of singular existence and social insertion as an alternative to conventional forms, the stylistic compositions created by these young people in their everyday *mise en scène* frequently maximize a *radical difference*[15] with regard to the dominant codes of aesthetic «good» taste. That's why often what is understood as a creative effort by the production side, is oftentimes socially receive and taken as hostility and provocation, resulting in reactions of disapproval, surprise or shock.

Therefore, the implicit resistance found in the aesthetic expressions of youth scenes is, today, addressed to a more abstract and diffuse enemy. It wants to target the dominant and normative understandings about life in society which categorise the practices of its participants within a conformist and normative code of public values and virtues. However, more than play a role as social antithesis, these young people just intend to guarantee their social way of existence as a possibility among many others. In this sense, they are working on the social incorporation of *structures of intersubjective reciprocity* (Yar, 2001: 72-73). That is, the construction of symbolic frameworks which support the openness to the Otherness, which promotes the sensitivity to difference, which endorses the *recognition* of the person in its subjectivity.[16]

In this perspective, the political dimension of youth scenes reflects a strategy of *remoralisation of everyday life*, in the sense of bringing the need for *dignity* in individual difference into the moral order of current society, as well as in the sense of recognising a *culture of civility*

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[15] The expression is used by Lipovetsky (1989 [1987]:170).

[16] Lash and Featherstone (2001) advocate the usefulness of the concept of *recognition* for the analysis of current forms of political culture, insofar as it enables the study of the new empirical realities practiced by the new social movements, in terms of political actions and objectives. In this perspective, Fraser and Honneth (2001) and Honneth (1995, 2004) distinguish between the *politics of redistribution* and the *politics of recognition*: the former are built on the notion of equity, rescued from the old social justice agenda, and mostly focus on economic objectives (more specifically, on the redistribution of material goods); the latter are founded on the value of *difference*, focusing mainly on objectives of a cultural nature, associated with the symbolic reconfiguration of the social aspect and with the need for social and/or individual respect and dignity.

which respects the *person*. This is made through the widening of the dominant conceptions of «normality». This kind of struggle for recognition is not, of course, oriented towards the institutional side of the political system, neither it is required in the realm of legal right. The recognition is demanded on the everyday ground of the individuals, taking into account their needs for social respect, affection and reciprocity from those who surround them.

We are facing, therefore, a cultural politics against *humiliation*, *slander* and *insult* that many young people suffers daily because their radical difference. That is, a politics against outrageous, discriminatory and less courteous actions which, in one way or another, affect the sense of *dignity* of those young people in their everyday lives. Their demand for recognition is made alongside with their claim for a less prescriptive society, and their struggle for the dissolution of «normality» criteria whose rigidity and degree of institutionalisation are prone to transform any and all radical difference into *stigma*.

Contestation *vs.* celebration

Without losing the form of *expressive activism* from which the world is questioned and challenged, the politics carried out in contemporary youth scenes are experienced in a more mundane way, with raze to the ground ambitions and more personalised intentions. Struggling for their marginal *existence* within the structures (rather than for an access to a central position), the young people that participate in current youth micro-cultures are less interested in acting upon the world than acting on the world, taking advantage of it as much as they can, in the sense of taking the best it has to offer.

Therefore, their actions are not expression of *annihilating practices*, in the sense that they offer the possibility of changing the world, as strategies with the objective of destroying the «existing social order» and replacing it for a new. On the opposite, they configure *predatory practices*, that is, practices which take advantage of the resources and spaces which are socially available for young people statements' in the world, trying to expand the boundaries of cultural expression and personal creativity (through the body, clothing, music, speech, image, etc.).

In contrast with the holistic logic of collective *contestation* which characterised some of the youth movements of the past, the convivial solidarities of youth cultures are mostly organized around an *ethics of celebration*. In contrast with the passive ways of «killing time» or with the combative ways of living life, this ethics presumes a constant search for the festive side of existence, as a display of vitality and creative energy (Caillois, 1988 [1961]). It assembles values like *experimentalism*, as a constant attempt to push the existing boundaries; *hedonism,* as a

constant effort to search pleasure, enjoyment, personal fulfilment and satisfaction from life; and *presentism,* as an immediate way of living, valuing the living of the present moment with as much intensity as it can provide, without great worries about the future.

The ambition of these young people is to live life as a *drift* through the «exotic routes» that crosses the flow of routines[17], in the constant experimentation of limits and challenge of risks. As such, the ethics of celebration of life is structured towards the exploration of the unforeseeable and the imponderable of everyday life, of routes without pre-defined points of arrival, as free as possible from predetermined constraints.

The ethics of celebration is clearly connected with leisure times, seen as times of rupture, insurrection, freedom and evasion, with regard to the routine obligations of work or school moments, which, many times, are perceived as times of constraint. It is during leisure moments that many stylistic resources are experimented, many creative practices are developed, as ingredients in the «art of good living». Around these activities often young people build up dense networks of elective and affective affinities, contexts of strong sociability and identity share: Clothes that are taken out of the closet, tattoos and piercings that are uncovered, graffiti that are sprayed throughout the city, body movements that animate streets and corners, sounds which are listened and shared, and many times also played.

In fact, the appropriation and exploration of resources by young people are not always restricted to consumption practices. Frequently, they extend to the area of production, where several stylistic resources can be experienced in a more playful and sociable way, or with a more professional conviction and ambition. The broadening of a vast industry of cultural consumptions, specifically targeting and consumed by young people, indeed has widening the possibilities of certain activities of consumption or leisure to become seductive forms of work, dreamt as such on the horizon of work expectations of increasingly many young people.

Such is the case of musical practices or of the practices of production of corporal façades, for example. Youth involvement in these practices often starts as a merely recreational activity, with the simple goal of taking up some free time or of expressing a personal look. But they might begun, over time, to be meditated as a concrete professional possibility, whether as an *odd job* (temporary) or as a *career* (of a future). This way, some young people end up obtaining a peculiar fusion between identity and work, between the life project they built from leisure and consumption

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[17] «In reality, the term 'exotic' (from the Greek *exotikós*) evokes everything which is foreign, unknown, extravagant. To extravagate, in turn, evokes the idea of proceeding out of order, which, in this case, would be the order of routine» (Pais, 1994:100).

and the life means needed for its maintenance, keeping themselves fully *on the scene* (Ferreira, 2008).

Youth scenes thus constitute *laboratories of creative experimentation* (Feixa, Costa, Pallarés, 2001) or *cultural laboratories* (Melucci, 1989). By encouraging the creativity and innovation of its participants in several areas of life, they serve as the support for the social experimentation, sharing and celebration of more marginal aesthetic tastes, integrated within more ex-centric lifestyles. This effort of stylization of life shows a desire to dissolve the idea of «art» in everyday life, that is, «the dissolution of the artist in a kind of universal *homo aestheticus*, which, in all of us, legitimises an artist, and in each of our productions or gestures, a work of art» (Cruz, 1991:61).

Resistance vs. existence

More than *class* or *ideological* criteria, characteristic of the traditional subcultural approach, the current approach of youth scenes privileges the axis of *form*, that is, of visual and visible identity, transmitted through the *mise en scènes* of looks and/or performances able to identity each group of style: each one «a society, certainly, but a society in which the human collective which comprises them has already renounced the other form of legitimisation, mediation and integration – excluding any possible diffuse ideological ingredients – which is anything more than the public display of purely stylistic elements: clothing, dialect, bodily changes, hairstyle, gestures, forms of entertainment, food guidelines, tastes... (...) The criterion for intersubjective recognition is not founded on an agreement between consciences, but between appearances» (Ruiz, 2002:117).

Taking all what we have said into consideration, it can be argued that the expressive forms considered as practices of resistance in the past can be perceived in nowadays as what Foucault called the *arts of existence*, that is, «reflective and volunteer practices through which men not only determine rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to modify themselves in their singular being and to make their lives a work which includes certain aesthetic values and fulfils certain criteria of style» (1994 [1984]:17). These are arts which use life itself as raw material, creatively designed through the use of certain aesthetic resources and practices.

These are used to stylise, sophisticate and distinguish ways of living suited «for the heroes of the new epopees of everyday life – those that want to make a work of art out of their own lives (greatly investing in strategies of self-fulfilment and self-discovery, under the somewhat

diaphanous command of "authenticity", a reaction which, according to Giddens, is directed against the impersonal and abstract systems of late or radicalised modernity» (Lopes, 2002:63).

This is not about ignoring or refusing the political dimension of these practices and resources for the benefit of a mere aestheticism. It is about recognising the political transfiguration of those actions and aesthetic resources, which also imply ethical principles in the «art of fine living», namely those which concern their social and symbolic conditions of recognition and freedom. The construction of life as a «work of art»», according to Foucault, involves the construction of an emancipatory aesthetic, devoted to the self-fulfilment and self-affirmation of the subject. It also implies the search for an ethics grounded on an exercise of individual freedom, and not to obedience of a collective code of rules: «the notion of an aesthetic of existence hypertrophies the value of individual experimentation» (Costa, 1995: 127-128). By challenging the prescribed ways of existence, the arts of existence thus represent ways of social resistance in the subject's quest for singularity and affirmation of its difference.

This does not imply, however, as Foucault had hastily proposed (1984), that such an experience is arbitrarily exercised, in the absence of any kind of social and/or moral order. The reinvention of oneself and of new ways of subjectification also implies the reinvention of new ways of relating with the other, as well as the power and the competence for transformation of the world which surrounds him. And indeed, what we can find in the context of the contemporary youth scenes is the demand for a libertarian life experience under conditions of *coexistencial pluralism*, that is, under a «moral disorder expressed through the existence of multiple moralities, [even though they are] frequently conflictive among themselves» (Pais, 2008:253).

The *politics of resistance* are replaced by *politics of existence*, which mobilize aesthetic practices and stylistic resources that seek possibilities of expression and recognition of a subjectivity which is self-perceived as singular, authentic and free, and celebrated through lifestyles that intends to *escape* the socially saturated formulas currently available at the «style supermarket». In a system where some young people perceive their social experience as being subjected to cultural commodification and homogenisation constraints, some cutting-edge aesthetics may be seen as expressive forms of reaction which allow them to announce their presence in the world, and to perform an alternative existence in the world.

In their everyday life, some young people refuse to see their subjectivities reduced to functional or dysfunctional categories of the system, instead seeking the social recognition of their specific difference in the micro social contexts which cultivate bonds of complicity in the public expression of difference, and sharing reciprocal feelings of freedom, respect and dignity. These

young people, who are distant from the traditional centres where power is exercised, do not, however, abandon their politics to the representatives of the State or to any other sovereign institution.

Unlike more bureaucratic forms of organisation, where young people run the risk of being seen as an undifferentiated mass with the same type of problems, inside the scenes where they perform they discover themselves more as citizens than as victims in need of «interventionist care», finding concrete and creative ways of socially participate in the managing and negotiating of their own interests and expectations.

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