

The city as the place of augmented imagination

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Imagination can be seen as an illusion, a resource or a threat. In the city of today imagination is a resource. It is anywhere: fashion, architecture, urban scenography ... It is the “artified city”. The city is a décor as beautiful as possible (and also, changing because of fashion). To understand how the city has become the place of “augmented imagination” at the time of Internet, one can have recourse to a “natural history of the imaginary”.

Also, this “natural history of the imaginary” shows that there is a “gardened imaginary” and a “spontaneous imaginary”. The “spontaneous imaginary” is more among the youngsters, who like drugs and alcohol, sport and even violence. “Urban trances” can occur: the Music Day, feasts in the streets ... Problems of urban governance are posed. They can be solved. The paper deals with the night of the 15th July 2018 in Paris after the victory of the French soccer team in the World Cup. This night with just a little violence can be explained thanks to theories like the sociology of the actor-network and that of the “cognitive dissonance”.

The question of the coding of the imaginary is posed. It seems that the imaginary cannot be coded if the democratic values remain. Arguments are given.

A “natural history of the imaginary”

There are successive stages:

- in the Middle Ages the imaginary is mainly religious
- in the 18 th century, at the time of atheist philosophy, there is a dawn with the appearance of fantasy in Art: Piranesi, Potocki, Mary Shelley, the Italian and Austrian trompe l’oeil...
- The real birth is around 1820. Stendhal in his book “On love” presents his theory of “crystallization” (a strong desire triggers idealization and pleasure, simultaneously). The symbol is a twig covered with salt which triggers dream while the rough wood under the salt is forgotten:



The discovery of the imaginary is an affair of artists (the French poet Baudelaire) and doctors (they studied drugs, like Moreau de Tours and ... Sigmund Freud). The psychology appears. Psychoanalysis takes into account imagination (the Id).

- then the imaginary is considered as a resource by theorists and ... for the human being. Spencer explains Religion starting from the extra conscious states. Durkheim studying the totemism explains that the fictions of totemism have triggered intellectual progress (concepts like opposition, division...). Bernays invents marketing, which explores the imagination of the consumers to satisfy their needs in a more efficient way (even, psychoanalysis has been used by the Dr Dichter to understand the consumers ' motivations). The notion of "Culture" among anthropologists means that the collective identity is defined taking into account a specific imaginary.

- in the industrial city there is an explosion of imagination. The causes are: products (alcohol and drugs), machines which inspire artists and the society itself which is observed and commented (low life, enigmas like in the detective novel) and new medias (photography, newspapers, radio, movies ...)

- today the city is a sound box for the imaginary. Thanks to Internet, images are everywhere including fictitious landscapes and characters ... The city is artified (according to the French sociologist Lipovetsky). The city scenarizes its past, its present, its future , its products etc. thanks to urban scenography. During a year, in a large city feasts are innumerable.

There is a “gardened imaginary” and a “spontaneous imaginary”

After the Renaissance, when a secular world emerged, a norm was needed which is called Education. “Courtesy” of the Knights was an ornament, Education is mandatory. It is good manners, beautiful language and some expertise. Even, there are schools for aristocrats. Kids in aristocratic families are taught by tutors (often Jesuits). At this time the ambition of the intellectuals becomes to fashion Man (Bauman). One can quote the Erasmus’s book on good manners for young boys of the Upper Class, or the Norbert Elias’s book “The good manners”. Bauman quotes the French Philosophes (18th century) and Idéologues (at the time of the French Revolution). From this time Culture and the imaginary have been “gardened” (Bauman). It was the affair of philosophers, writers, artists ... Now it is the affair of professionals like moviemakers, advertisers ... But beside the gardened imaginary there remains a spontaneous imaginary which concerns mainly the youngsters. It explains the “urban trances” like the Music Day, feasts in the streets (“botellons” in Spain), parades... There is not always violence. How to explain it?

The example of the night of the 15 th July in Paris

After the victory of the French soccer team in the World Cup the 15 of July 2018, the streets of Paris were given to youngsters wanting to celebrate the victory. In the streets, no police, no taxis, no buses, the only cars were those of the youngsters using klaxon etc. There was just a little violence. It can be explained thanks to the sociology of the actor-network and the cognitive dissonance theory:

- according to the sociology of the actor-network translation is to present one's doctrine or point of view in such a way that the other's mindset or behavior is changed. It can rely on "actants" (objects which are considered as actors). The absence of police was translation: it means that the goal of the presence of the youngsters in the streets is clearly peaceful celebration. So the youngsters (from the suburbs in their cars, or Parisian) were incited to remain peaceful. The klaxons, French flags and beer cans etc. were actants.

- according to the American psychologist Festinger, a cognitive dissonance is discomfort, tension, for instance after a choice if the alternative which has been removed remains attractive. Changing an element of knowledge or behavior can reduce the cognitive dissonance (by making the alternative which has been rejected less attractive). Some people (liking Order) were anxious at the date of the 15 of July. Of course, they feared trouble. All the peaceful signs displayed by the youngsters were means to reduce this cognitive dissonance. In other words, it was clear that the goals of the presence of youngsters in the streets was joy after the French team 's victory and celebration. The removed alternative is less attractive: the presence of police would have been at least useless, at worst provocative, therefore triggering violence.

The imaginary cannot be coded

The only group which could code the imaginary is the intellectuals. But there are two objections:

- according to Bauman, the intellectuals are no more (cannot have the ambition to be) legislators (that is to say, those who fashion Man). They have become “interpreters”, useful to translate a tradition into another one. They make conferences during cruises, speak to listeners of radio, are viewed on the TV screen ... They can advise the Power. Or they can present a specialty they know to experts of fashion, advertising etc. The questions: alcohol or cannabis? – lean or fat? – to drive fast or slow? – and even: ecology, yes or no? are not answered by the intellectuals. The driving force is more the consumers’ society. According to Lipovetsky, majorities appear which decide the answer to these questions. The imaginary is “gardened” by many professionals (artists, advertisers and even doctors) but no group is able to supervise the coding of the imaginary.

- there is also the role of democratic values. The French sociologist Bruno Latour has theorized the takeover of doctors on Health. It was a little after the Pastorian revolution. The ultimate explanation is political: at this time there was a political will to reconcile Health and Wealth (including the wish to have young, safe males for the army). A wealthy society has to be healthy. At this time urban planners were very much interested in hygiene. Today, as long as the democratic values remain, there is not the political context necessary to the coding of the imaginary: at the opposite, democratic values involve that anybody can make his (her) choices to be happy and choose his (her) opinions. So there is not the condition which would allow the intellectuals supervising those who “garden” the imaginary, to code the imaginary.

Conclusion

The imagination can be considered in three ways: illusion, resource, threat.

Clearly, in the city of today imagination is a resource. But it is considered sometimes as a threat. The problems of urban governance which are posed can be solved. The useful measures that can be taken are explained using the sociology of the actor-network (translation, actants) and the theory of the collective cognitive dissonance.