

CHAPTER 1: MAPPING THE CONTEXT

Which world is this? It is enough to turn on the television or the radio, go for a walk in a city, buy a weekly or daily newspaper, to know that this world is constructed through a statement arrangement, through a sign regime, the expression of which is called advertising, and what is expressed (the meaning) is a prompt, a command, representing per se a valuation, a judgment, a view of the world, of themselves and others. What is expressed (the meaning) is not an ideological valuation, but rather an incentive (it gives signs), a prompt to assume a form of living, i.e. a way of dressing, having a body, eating, communicating, residing, moving, having a gender, speaking, etc. (Lazzarato, 2003)

1.1 Social context in São Paulo, Brazil

People living in cities such as São Paulo are becoming less and less familiar with notions of sharing experiences in public spaces. Excluding special circumstances, such as commemorative events and open public festivals, it is very difficult to find situations where a common social reality is created by means of collective participation, which would include people from different social classes, notably strangers.

Cities are spaces where people, more likely strangers, move and stay in proximity to each other. The ubiquitous presence of strangers is indeed a permanent component of city life, as reminded by Zygmunt Bauman: 'the stranger is the unknown variable in all equations calculated when decisions about what to do and how to behave are made'. Bauman assumes that the presence of strangers is discomfoting 'even when not behaving aggressively or actively resented' (2003: 28).

It is as if it was an emergent kind of voluntary alienation concerning the participation in public life. In Bauman's words, the (O)ther or the stranger is 'an agent moved by intentions one can at best guess but would never know for sure' (28) The option to relate or not with such an agent is a decision-

making matter that involves fear and ambiguous attitudes. Such attitudes are part of a sort of phobia particularly observed in cities such as São Paulo: it is a city that no longer provides safety for its inhabitants, and is related to a place of danger more often than of security.

The incidence of violence is emphasized by statistics and reports publicized on a daily basis by the mass media, and are considered both as the reason and the consequence of the increasing deterioration of the city's public spaces and the lack of opportunities to experience public life. Together with the privatization of the few once available public spaces, very often privileging the construction of big malls, larger avenues, parking lots and other profitable resources for car owners, what follows is a corresponding change in social behaviour, composing an even more complex picture of the city (Greater São Paulo's population is now over nineteen million).

Anthropologist Teresa Caldeira¹ refers to São Paulo as a 'city of walls', pointing to a process of spatial segregation visibly and undisguisedly expressed throughout the city. As a consequence of a society featuring one of the most inequitable wealth distributions in the world, 'physical barriers have been constructed around houses, apartments, buildings, parks, squares, office complexes, and schools'. Caldeira describes that the population actually witnesses the creation of different kinds of sealed environments: 'gardens are now everywhere separated by high fences and walls, and guarded by electronic devices and armed security men[/*women*]' (1996: 307). The proliferation of highly surveilled private residential condominiums, very often isolated from the city centre - where it pulses with its noises, odours and strangers - indicates that such separation is supposed to produce a safe and private distance from those considered to be 'socially inferior'.

Even spaces once designed to be open, are now integrated into the logics of separation and segregation. This process has determined the aesthetics of

¹ Teresa P. R. Caldeira is an anthropologist teaching at Unicamp (State University of Campinas, São Paulo) and at the University of California, Irvine.

security in shaping the framework of the city, which 'imposes its new logic of surveillance and distance as a means for displaying status which is changing the character of public life and social interactions' (308).

In a city containing in excess of 5 millions cars,² the growth in the number of armoured vehicles, cars equipped with bullet proof shields, the massive popularity of sun films/drapers for privacy, the increasing use of satellite navigation system in cars, may lead to the conclusion that cars in themselves are also a means of sealing the outside space off, producing protective, closed and private environments. It is a scenario where every corner, every pedestrian crossing, every encounter with the (O)ther (who is outside the encapsulated and protected ambient) is supposed to be risky and potentially harmful. Actions such as to avoid speaking to strangers, never stop moving, to avoid hanging out in the few public spaces left, to keep circulating by any means, are just a small part of a increasing paranoia reverberating in the statistics on violence in the city.

In considering armour, walls or fences, Bauman prompts that they all 'divide the otherwise uniform space into an "inside" and an "outside", but what is the "inside" for those on one side of the fence is the "outside" for those on the other' (2003: 29). We may think about the co-existence of 'apartheid realities', each of which are protected by thick 'membranes', creating a sort of 'bubble' that separates the inner from outer situations, resulting in different ways of living. The fence, the membrane of the bubble, 'separates the "voluntary ghetto" from the many enforced ones. For the insiders of the voluntary ghetto, the other ghettos are "we won't go in" spaces.' (29)

This description pictures a scenario of exclusion, fear, alienation and segregation, which leaves intrusion and privacy matters, as part of socio-political concerns in cities such as São Paulo to a secondary concern. This is to say that while in 'developed countries' these are highly appreciated as a whole set of priceless citizenship values, civil rights and access to public

² Source: <<http://www.detran.sp.gov.br>> accessed: 12/12/2005

means are just abstract notions in Brazil. For the majority of its population, basic concerns related to eating, working and living tend to override that of privacy. Thus, a series of facts would corroborate to the notion of privacy as a cultural matter. Brazilians are for example, considered to be opened to socializing, which reflects behavioral assumptions, such as allowing closer corporeal proximity, longish eye contacts and tolerance regarding intrusive gestures and habits in social life.



Fig. 1: A slogan by American online e-commerce company Newegg.com, posted in airports in USA.

1.2 Social context in London, UK

In the UK, while issues on safety in public spheres do not pose an immediate risk due to the relatively organized disciplinary and control power, there is more than just an 'interesting contrast' between the two contexts. The first point to consider is that London constitutes a perfect model for an information society in the sense discussed by David Lyon (2001: 10). This means that a comprehensive set of control systems are already embedded, if not internalized, in its infra-structure. It also means that most basic requirements for a proper sense of citizenship are somehow guaranteed.

Historically, as a leading trading power and financial centre for centuries, the UK has already established in the heart of its capitalistic economy, the constant update and implementation of the latest control technologies. The British saw the rise of a new subject, with rights and duties, in a new social

concept where the State theoretically takes on the responsibility for the health and well being of people, besides organizing and “optimizing” society’s economic growth, by means of order and discipline.³ The Welfare State in Britain was the result of a series of changes instituted in order to deal with the ‘Giant Evils’⁴, after the Second World War. These changes meant that the government recognized its responsibility in caring for the people of Britain ‘from the cradle to the grave’. The Welfare State was a commitment to public health (the National Health Service was created in 1948), education, employment and social security.

The ‘classic’ Welfare State period lasted from approximately 1945 to the 1970s. Over the past two decades, the government has greatly reduced public ownership by means of privatization programs, and has contained the growth of the Welfare State. What is implicit here is that most controlling mechanisms found in rich countries could be expressed as welfare policies.

The maintenance of order and discipline in the city are now in direct relation to control technologies, which have subsumed individuals to the social order of the State through socialization, education, organization and classification. In addition, new patterns of conducting “moral and honesty” have been influenced by the way through which these technologies of control scrutinize the geometrization of and circulation in urban spaces.

Such a background facilitated the adoption of more recent technologies allowing a new kind of disciplinary power,⁵ featuring subtle control feeling. In

³ As a contrast, the positivist slogan ‘Order and Progress’ read in the Brazilian’s flag has never related properly to any Welfare State.

⁴ The five "Giant Evils" were identified by the William Beveridge Report in 1942, in the British society as: squalor, ignorance, want, idleness and disease. William Henry Beveridge (1879-1963) was a British economist and social reformer, best known for his 1942 report Social Insurance and Allied Services (the Beveridge Report) source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welfare_State

⁵ Maurizio Lazzarato converges the ideas of Disciplinary and Control Societies (Foucault and Deleuze) by saying that ‘the control society integrates the "old" disciplinary dispositif’. Thus, in ‘societies where disciplinary institutions and "workfare" are weaker and less developed, control immediately means the logic of war, even in times of "peace" [see Brazil, still]’ Struggle, Event, Media (2003) in Republicart.net, published at: http://www.republicart.net/disc/representations/lazzarato01_en.htm

the last 5 years, London has witnessed an impressive growth in issues connected to surveillance.⁶

By 2000, one year prior to the September 11 attacks, it was already worrying the fact that laws in Britain had been deeply modified, with no transparency involved in its implementation process, in order to allow the State and the authorities to use new communication technologies as a way to exercise new forms of control. Bills were modified or implemented, such as the Regulation of Investigatory Power Act (the RIP bill - 2000) which aimed at allowing new forms of control by government agencies. For instance, internet providers were required to install communication flow sorting systems , recording the logs of each message. Routines once considered intrusive and not allowed before by any law, are now not only allowed but also mandatory.

The most common explanations for the implementation of online intrusions were that the police and the authorities must use and update equivalent methods to those adopted by criminals. Thus, the Internet was targeted as a potentially dangerous public space, used by 'strangers' belonging to groups of various tendencies including terrorists and pedophiles. Under the pretext of identifying criminals, the autonomy of many has been curtailed. A new order followed international decisions after the September 11, which lead to policies that more often than not, have exchanged freedom for security. The UK is currently notorious for boasting the highest rate of surveillance camera per capita in the world, – estimating that there is one camera for every 15 people, totalling more than 4 millions – serving as a main reference for other European countries.⁷

⁶ This dissertation will not abide by the events of September 11 because the unchain of “anti-terrorist” actions that followed the attack in the US involves political implications that give another tone to the study, adding elements that would disparage a more impartial analyses of the emergence of current control devices. The attacks have generated a “state of exception” and there was an extraordinary condescension with regards to restraining individual freedom. Many of the Technologies observed here had already been implemented or were in the process of being implemented before the attacks, so they reflect an international political tendency on course.

⁷ However this number could be higher, as the statistics include only registered CCTV systems. Source: the Home Office <<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/recordedcrime1.html>>

In London one can experience the presence of such lenses in every corner. They are inquisitive over our bodies. They watch our postures in subways, cash registers and automatic doors. They multiply, reproduce and check our images, and puts us in evidence. We are overexposed and offered to the gaze of machine eyes, as a step prior to being scrutinized by the gaze of another human being. We are constantly measured, identified not exactly by an(O)ther stranger. Surveillance and information control have become a routine practice as if they had always been part of our lives.



Envision Licensing Ltd.

“Our officers use computer systems, a fleet of detector vans and hand-held detectors to track down and prosecute people who use a TV without the right licence.”

“At the heart of our operation is the TV Licensing database, one of the largest in Europe. It has details of over 22 million UK addresses.”

“We can detect a TV in use from 30metres away . . . Not only will we be able to see where the television is and what’s being watched on it, we’ll know on the spot whether it’s licensed.”

Fig.2: Envision Licensing Ltd. was awarded as one of the most invasive companies in UK (2000) according to the Big Brother awards, organized by Privacy International.

The UK is indeed a society where personal data has been collected, stored and managed in many depths and through different networks by numerous companies such as supermarket chains, internet providers, bank branches, insurance companies, credit card operators, mobile phone corporations, as well as government and private organizations like the British Telecom (BT), the TV Licensing (Envision Licensing Ltd), the National Health System (NHS - Executive), The National DNA Database, the Identity Cards Programme and

others about to come.⁸ The rate of intrusive procedures in the UK has reached one of the highest in the world.

On a more intimate level, due to the internalization of control technologies in our everyday life and behaviour, most people see it as a kind of invasion that is much less serious than somebody looking into one's windows (as if it would danger one's protective 'bubble'). It remains intriguing, if not a contradiction, that, despite so many overwhelmingly controlling systems, inhabitants of large cities still respond to privacy intrusion against isolated individuals: for most, making eye contact or talking with strangers seem more intrusive than having governmental and private agencies store personal, financial and biometric data.

This can be seen as another kind of existing sealed environment, protecting one not exactly against the criminal, the violent other (as expected to be in any crossing in São Paulo), but creating a sort of artificially sustained 'private-reality' with little exchange with the ordinariness of the city and its strangers.

1.3 Merging contexts: bubbles and sealed environments

In today's urban life, the social contexts mentioned above hold in common a feature described by Richard Sennet as 'fear of touching' (1994: 212-251). The projections of this fear meets Bauman's explanations on 'mixophobia',⁹ when he discloses on the existential condition of contemporary men and women 'born and bred in the deregulated, individualized, fluid world of accelerated and diffuse change' (2003: 31). Mixophobia, as opposed to

⁸ In 1998 Privacy International <<http://www.privacy.org>> presented the first annual Big Brother awards to organizations that have done the most to invade personal privacy in Britain. Among the already mentioned nominated ones were: Vodaphone, Norwich Union, The Home Office, The Department of Trade and Industry, UK Passport Service, Capita, Amazon UK and also The Data Protection Act, for failing to provide protection for citizens. The full history of nominations can be found at: <<http://www.bigbrotherawards.org>> accessed: 03/01/2006.

⁹ mixophobia = fear of mixing. Constructed by Bauman from *mix* [1538, back-formation from Anglo-Fr. *mixte*, from L. *mixtus*, pp. of *miscere* 'to mix'] + *phobia* [1786, fear, horror, aversion, Mod.L., from Gk. - *phobia*, from *phobos* "fear"]

mixophilia,¹⁰ is a manifestation of forces driven 'towards islands of similarity and sameness amidst the sea of variety and difference' (31). Bauman acknowledges the fact that city living is always an ambivalent experience. 'It attracts and repels, but to make the plight of the city dweller more complex yet, it is the same aspects of city life that, intermittently or simultaneously, attract and repel...' (33).

Mixophobia and mixophilia coexist in every city, but they also coexist inside every one of the city's residents. Bauman admits it as 'an uneasy coexistence, full of sound and fury – though signifying a lot to the people on the receiving end of the liquid-modern ambivalence' (34). By comparing social and cultural aspects of London and São Paulo, we have pictured London as a city more inclined towards mixophobia, while São Paulo, with its tropically inconsistent notions of privacy, could be described as tending more towards mixophilia. However, both produce protective, sealed 'bubbles' avoiding the direct contact with strangers. The overwhelming feeling of insecurity is felt differently in each city.

Bauman points to the need of shifting the balance between mixophobia and mixophilia in favour of the latter. But 'the allergic, febrile sensitivity to strangers and the strange' as the roots of mixophobia, 'lie beyond the reach of architectural competence or city-planners' remit' (36). Richard Sennet would further explicit such contradiction: 'Innate to the process of forming a coherent image of community is the desire to avoid actual participation. Feeling common bonds without common experience occurs [...] because men[/women] are afraid of participation, afraid of the dangers and the challenges of it, afraid of its pain' (1996: 39-42)

In spite of all dangers, the ones inhabiting protected environments, where the 'voluntary ghettos' reside, want to experiment 'participating in the common' and to approach mixophilia. This would require a circulation between the

¹⁰ mixophilia = mixing affinity constructed from mix + philia [comb. form meaning 'friendship, fondness, from Gk. philia 'affection,' from philos 'loving']

'inside' (the voluntary ghettos) to the 'outside' spaces (the enforced ghettos) as defined by Bauman (2003: 29).

For those who want to get a sense of the smell of its 'shabby and squalid streets' (29), for those who strategically plan to sponge its authenticity, it is necessary to communicate with the 'outside' space. This authenticity will turn out to be the essence of commodities, products and services produced and craved by those in the protected and wealthy environment.

In most cases, those willing to have their 'bubbles' voluntarily and safely perforated employ a sort of interface, a mediating tool, and/or produce devices that would grant the endorphin filled sensation of being immersed on the other side of the fence - supposedly without the 'pain' mentioned by Sennet.

In our current and euphemistically 'globalized' condition, no big city can escape from being immersed in the recent mediation tools provided by communication corporations. Slogans such as 'Live Without Borders' (Tim Brasil), 'Connecting People' (Nokia), 'Solutions for a Small World' (IBM), bear promises of providing the feeling of participation in the 'outside' space. Far more than just selling communication tools, these slogans suggest the access to new worlds, the immersion into new 'realities', which inadvertently, come with representational artifices based on stereotypes and essentialisms that flattens and commodifies the actuality of whatever 'reality' it is being depicted.

Mobile phones, wireless gadgets, online games, GPS, connected enabled PDA's and handhelds bring together the common aspiration to interface 'realities', not necessarily promoting any true participation or closer touch regarding the 'outside' space, in the sense pointed by Bauman. They attempt to introduce the notion that reaching distant and separated 'realities' – often in-between private spheres – is the same as sharing experiences in public domains. Nevertheless, far from providing any legitimate experience of involvement in public life, 'the capability to connect', or the feeling of

participation suggested by communication corporation advertisements seem to be what best describes their ideologies concerning the construction of realities.

According to Lazzarato the representation of realities by means of its mediation, is already a fabrication, a form of replacement of a given 'reality' with 'media realities'. In Lazzarato's words, in corporate strategies 'images, signs and statements do not represent something, but rather create possible worlds'.¹¹ The author and activist recalls the semiotic extension of capitalism, emphasizing the predominance of language and symbols in the current economy of colonizing culture, art, urban life, and the body. 'The corporation does not generate the object (the commodity), but rather the world in which the object exists. Nor does it generate the subject (worker and consumer), but rather the world in which the subject exists' (2003: 2).

To participate in a fabricated world of signs described by Lazzarato as if 'constructed through statement-arrangement' (3) is not the same as engaging in shared spaces of a city. Recalling our previous metaphors, such technologies would not perforate the 'bubble' that separates these different 'realities'. Rather, they would set them apart through the production and commodification of 'membranes', or 'blind interfaces' that are neither permeable nor connective: they isolate.

1.4 Soft and alienating mediations

Brian Holmes considers the current forms of participation of individuals in public life, by means of recent technologies or working and leisure procedures, as an 'alienation from political society, which in the democratic sense is not a profitable affair and cannot be endlessly recycled into the production of images and emotions' (2002: 14).

¹¹ Speech at PUC-SP (Subjectivity Studies Department), organized by Suely Rolnik, as an open debate on Politics and Art also with the presence of Brian Holmes. Recorded on videotape by Lucas Bambozzi. São Paulo, 23/11/2005.

Holmes' assumptions suggest that the reconnection with the public life (the strangers, the 'outside' realities) may be needed in order to prevent from a fall into the emergent forms of alienation. However, corporative mediation solutions, with its range of globalized media products have just given 'legitimacy to a new, transnational consumer ideology' (2002: 2), based on the notion of mobility and ephemeral engagements, showing that through this path there would be no legitimate re-enactment with other than fabricated 'realities'.

The cultural industry, now fully supported by the telecommunication industries, has increasingly mobilized strategies to mimic 'realities', blurring the distinctions of 'legitimate' and 'forged' senses of ordinariness and public life employed by consumer strategies. 'Smart mobs' is a term introduced by Howard Rheingold to make reference to swarming practices, 'conducted by individuals capable of acting together even without knowing each other' (2002: xi-xii). It's origins are strongly linked to consumerism but at the same time it constitutes a socio-cultural phenomenon. The initial pretext to approach people, the apparently laudable premise of placing the individuals closer to each other, by means of smarter mediating technologies, could be a way through which one gets to meet the 'outside reality'. But when we focus on 'smart mob' tools, constituted by pervasive computing devices – 'inexpensive microprocessors embedded in everyday objects and environments' (2002: 12), there are some specific points to consider. These systems are 'locative' and naturally immersed in the public environment, and for this reason it is expected that they would help to effectively improve the experience of public life, re-shaping 'reality' at least with less mixophobia, as proposed by Bauman. Nevertheless, the immediate consequence of such actions 'in concert', has been the emergence of dispersed, temporary and instant local swarms, identified as nonsensical actions, hedonistic performances such as the *flash-mobs* – of course the employment of such technologies by activists, grassroots communities and artists, have lead to

some significantly empowered local networks.¹² These are however, subjects to be explored in chapters 2 and 3.

1.5 Intimate technologies

Mediation systems usually employ strategies to make interfaces appear convincing and authentic. In order to appear as 'real as possible', language and technology, more often than not, mimic and simulates the aesthetics of 'reality', based on an individual's ordinary life. The key elements for the engagement in a mediated event is the promise of feelings of privacy and intimacy. Telecommunications corporative slogans usually bring these elements to the front line of their plea. It can be a SMS message sent in a specific special moment, a chat with the kids on their birthday, soft words exchanged anytime with one's boy/girlfriend. The drive behind such strategies is the offer of instant access to one's private life, which is likely to result in an 'intimate circumstance'. At the same time, approaching intimacy is usually linked to the idea of puncturing the crust of 'reality', as it equals reaching not always allowed domains – even when 'reality' is just a 'produced actuality', a varnish covering a fabricated situation.

The emergence of the so-called 'intimate technologies' has blurred even more the concepts related to intimacy, privacy and reality. Sara Diamond who has organized a series of meetings in Banff Centre to discuss intimacy says: 'The new technologies we use to enhance intimacy are also the very same ones being used to open up the social arena of discovery around once-private affairs' (2002: 3). The current flood of seductive gadgets, loaded with promises of eliminating the distances between real life and its representational possibilities, they all bring in an ideal notion of privacy, which would be the open door for an easy and 'secure intimacy'.

¹² Rheingold cites the emergence of spontaneous 'mobilezations' such as a cult of fare jumpers who ride Stockholm's public transit system and use text messaging to warn each other when a conductor is on the way to check tickets.

The recent proliferation of tiny cameras, now embedded in mobile phones have been leading to massive collections of supposed 'warm moments' that one would be likely to forget, feeding a sort of obsession on intimacy aesthetics. Like camera-enabled mobile phones, wearable computers, tactile media, location-based devices, instant messengers and voice over IP technologies (VoIP), they all attempt to offer an idea of comfort, a sort of 'everywhere-privacy' that can also be interpreted as intimacy. Rather than describing the technological instance (cellular), mobile phones encapsulate a notion of mobility, described as portable 'temporary intimate zones' (TIZ) by Matt Locke.¹³ The term TIZ borrows references from TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zone), coined by Hakim Bey referring to poetic events and actions that suggest subtle changes in the social reality aiming to a 'more intense mode of existence' (Bey 1991: 15). But can we still think about intimacy as a terrain of intensity, pleasure, proximity, fruition or appreciation?

Since personal information has become a valuable commodity, both privacy and intimacy turn out to be the most essential and recognizable icons of such value. As any commodity, intimacy features an aesthetically constructed significance, which becomes clear when it is connected to the idea of proximity (a temporary mixophilia) or is a result of technological mediation processes (instant access to privacy).

Also, intimacy acquires new configurations and meanings according to the technological systems it is attached to. Distinct levels and shades of intimacy can be obtained differently by phone, by e-mail, through VoIP devices, by touching sensors or through webcams.

As we learned with Lazzarato, representation strategies play an important role in contemporary alienating progression. Thus, intimacy aesthetics are related to how separated domains are mediated, or as an effect of experiencing 'reality' as a mere aesthetic understanding, an intangible

¹³ Matt Locke is a British theorist, former director of The Media Centre in Huddersfield and currently Head of BBC Imagineering. Matt has referred to TIZ in his speech at Intimate Technologies Conference, held at the Banff Centre in 2002.

occurrence. To accept fabricated worlds as a real experience is to fall into the traps of representation, as the overwhelming abundance of images produced by the media each day may compromise what we deem to be 'real'.

This research has found it valuable to sketch the distinction between what could be termed the 'real' and 'reality'. In a simple comparison, the 'real' may be described as already experienced or felt prior to having been expressed through current forms of representation. The 'real', is translated more through sensations, whereas 'reality' is susceptible to representations that are often legitimized, but not necessarily legitimate.

Suely Rolnik has developed this distinction, reserving the word 'reality' for current forms of existence, both subjective and objective, defining 'reality' as it has been formatted and structured. As a consequence, Rolnik defines the 'real', as 'something broader and perhaps less tangible [...] something like a force field, that affects the mind, the body, in what is intensive and not so perceptible' (2004: 13). As such, 'reality' is thought of as a sort of battlefield from which one attempts to reach the force field of the real.

My argument is that the concept of 'reality' has been widely misused, shaped merely as discourse (a fabricated 'bubble') by corporate discourse via mainstream media in our daily life. As in a syndrome, it has been given artificial values not only by the sphere of mass media and advertising but also by most products of the cultural industry, the cinema circuit, the art system and new media.

As we do not grasp the world entirely through perception - as perception itself is often experienced through representations - then a gap is produced: what has been used to represent 'reality', may not provide an effective way to participate in a shared 'reality', that is, where the force field of the real within it is understood as a territory of exchange, public life and ordinariness. If we do not take part of such shared space, the feeling of non-belonging or detachment may result in some extreme situations:

Tourists offered homeless holidays

Charities accuse the Dutch travel company of trivializing homelessness

Kamstra Travel, based in Eemshaven, in the north of The Netherlands, is offering tourists the opportunity – at a cost of £300 – to live like vagrants on the streets of London, Paris, Brussels, Prague and Amsterdam.

As part of the package, they would receive return flights, be distributed around the cities in small groups along with a guide and left to look after themselves without money for three nights.

The holidaymakers would be given a sleeping bag and either a musical instrument or a sketchpad and pencil with which they could try to earn some money. Only on their fourth night would they be given a meal and a bed, although tourists who felt it too tough could go to a hotel at any stage.

[...] A spokeswoman for London's police force warned the holidaymakers could also face arrest. She said that the concept of 'slumming tourism' was 'at best in bad taste and at worst could have serious consequences.

(CNN.com 28/09/2001 8:14 Peter Wilkinson) ¹⁴

If there is a product, usually it is because there is a demand. News like the one above raise many issues: the trend to experience 'other realities' (the 'outside' spaces mentioned by Bauman); the move towards avoiding alienation by abiding to the twisted logic that commodifies it; and the wish to relate to strangers as co-inhabitants of a city.

Finally, the article suggests something that perhaps communication technology corporations have noticed a long time ago: the need to employ mediators as a means to establish direct experiences in public life within the city.

This recognition implies that the force field of the real has been captured as an important cog in the corporate mechanism of shaping social reality. The

¹⁴ Source: <<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/08/28/britain.homeless>>

map has been re-configured into one where the mediating strategies (the interfaces) play a decisive role in the way we may grasp or not the world.

If we take interfaces as a generic technical *dispositif*, increasingly being defined as the real content as stated by Lev Manovich (2000: 66), it would lead us to think that the mediation would serve us as the real contact with 'reality'.

Should we assume that interface promises of proximity and connectivity through digital technologies really dissociate users from the 'real'? Is the use of representational artifices incompatible with social awareness? To better define interface and its social mediating possibilities becomes crucial from this point.

1.6 Reality-based interfaces

Stephen Jones describes interfaces as interactions occurring from person to person (facial gesture, bodily gesture, language, conversations); from person to machines (the control surface of a machine that enables its use, known as Human Computer Interfaces – HCI); from machines to person (a function of feedback from the machine); or from machines to machines (interconnections between machines, data networks, artificial life, generative systems) (2004: 9-11).

Interfaces have been up to now understood within the communication interaction field, as 'developed from observing reciprocal behaviours of organisms and persons in their environment' (2004: 1-2). Thus, it should be understood less as an 'in between' device, separating domains and more as 'an idea of exchange and flow between things, allowing the sharing of information between domains, suggested by Julio Plaza (1986: 195). In other words, the mediating interface can be considered as belonging to both sides of a domain, as a connective and confluence event.

We can elude the existence of interfaces. Jordan Crandall points to the naivety of orientations attempting to see our current condition as an impossibility of access to unmediated reality. It would just perpetuate a *dystopia* in which the world is actively constructed and controlled in terms of relational information systems. Crandall adds indeed that ‘in contemporary media, particularly with television and Internet [...] reality is subsumed within the dictates of the interface’ (2005: 6).

Most recent projects dealing with sensors, ‘intelligent ambient’ and gesture-based interactions point to a supposedly new situation where the interface cannot be just a supplementary idea. Lev Manovich argues that interfaces have become the core of many new media artworks, the key to all formal disposition confronted with its content. ‘Thus the old dichotomies content-form and content-medium can be re-written as content–interface’ (2000: 66). This should not be understood to mean that the interface *per se* should be experienced as the final purpose, overriding any other element of an art project – if so, most of our arguments pointing to the interface as a way to connect ‘realities’ would fail. Manovich rejects the idea that an artwork’s content could be independent from its medium – or from its aesthetics or codes. He adds that ‘the choice of a particular interface is motivated by the content of the work to such extent that it can no longer be thought of as a separate level. Content and interface merge into one entity, and no longer can be taken apart’ (67). As Manovich further describes it we understand that interfaces are already slices of our cultures and may also become part of things and objects that surround us.

At this point it should be clear that Graphical User Interfaces (GUI), employed by current operating systems (OS), are just functional references for the models to be considered here based on operations with the actuality and its conforming environment. Peter Weibel relies on the concept of endoapproach¹⁵ to describe that the experience of the observer in interactive

¹⁵ ‘Endophysics is a science that explores what a system looks like when the observer becomes part of this systems’ (Weibel 1996: 341)

works is related and dependent on an interface: 'The boundaries of the world are the boundaries of our interface' (1996: 343). As such, the world can be described as an interface from the perspective of an explicit internal observer.

Implied in this thoughts it seems important to point to mechanisms for empowering individuals with resources for experiencing tangible 'realities', if possible, as it was mentioned, beyond representational artifices.

This question points toward the creation of 'tools for minimal mediation', or 'reality-based interfaces' as a definition for devices that will not only encourage individuals to participate in the shaping of public spaces, but may also suggest awareness with regards to social reality – effective ways of 'perforating the bubble'. Artworks evolving out of this context would have to deal with this challenge, as it relates not only to new aesthetic preoccupations, but also to the socio-political issues pervading today's information society.

From this assumption it is important to envision that the individuals will not make the actual world ineffective in favour of the interface, but may use it as perspectives of flow and exchange between domains, beyond the merely technical approach.

1.7 Conclusion

'Reality-based interfaces' can be seen as exchanging experiences involving actual spaces, where mediation technologies will be employed to produce deeper connections in different levels: between exhibition spaces and public environments; between artworks and 'realness'; in a person-to-person level in situations that a real exchange is unlikely to happen. It is a proposal for minimal mediation, through the means of shareable types of interface. Hence, such concept would take into consideration the instability of the medium, cultural issues, identity, otherness and the surrounding space. Instead of

forging 'realities', they use models found in real life to produce approximation, empathy and a sense of awareness.

These qualities are to be found in different depths in the projects *4walls*, *meta4walls* and *Spio* which are focused in the next chapters. A fourth project called *Cubo*, developed collectively in São Paulo, was also included as a collaborative model of non-corporative networking that succeeded to establish a shared public environment. As possible models of reality-based interfaces, these projects were created as emerging out of the disturbing, unstable and challenging context I have attempted to deal with when developing them.

end of chapter 1