

## **The Emerging Flâneur in Dematerialized Cities**

*Martín Hopenhayn*

The figure of the flâneur, described by Charles Baudelaire and largely analysed by Walter Benjamin as an icon of urban modern life, represents a provocative and suggestive character: the drifting walker in the cosmopolitan metropolis that deliberately embodies a non-utilitarian rationality, exerts an inner autonomy, reluctant to logics of productivity, and combines aesthetic exploration with social interaction in public spaces. And, at the same time, incarnates a version of modernistic subjectivity, lacking solid grounding, single axis and inner unity, seduced by the vertigo of “de-substantializing”. The experience of the flâneur, as Baudelaire sees it and as Benjamin reinforces it, is that of the “eternity within the instant”, or of no other eternity than its immanent condensation in time. From a more sociological perspective, the flâneur is emblematic of modern cities with their unprecedented array of aesthetic stimuli and social typologies, rendered possible by the conjunction of demographic shifts, secularization of values, industrial revolution and refinement of markets.

This presentation aims to revisit the flâneur, now in the context of the twenty-first-century Latin American metropolis: megacities dematerialized by the “non place” (non-lieu), by the relocalization/segregation/gentrification of city life and dwelling, by the predominance of virtual interaction through digital means, and by new aesthetical imprinting in the industry and market logics. The main idea is that in the present context, where liquid modernity, digital dematerialization and peripheral cosmopolitanism reinforce each other (in cities such as Santiago or Buenos Aires), this urban wandering in search of sensations and forms, which evokes the archetype of the flâneur, is still there but has radically mutated its nuances. Exploring such nuances may allow us to identify renewed relations between aesthetics and society within the context of Latin American metropolis.

Finally, and in a merely conjectural bet, I propose the aphoristic literary genre (with examples of my own creation) as a way to shed light into the inner, subjective side of this drifting-dispersive disposition of the flâneur. Providing some aphoristic examples, I intend (metaphorically) to wander the wanderer, drift into the drifter, walk into the walker. And, through this experimentation with such a filo-poetic writing, grasp the de-centred and de-based torsions inhabiting the flâneur in its postmodern, or late modern, or liquidly modern version. In this effort, aphorism may be a genre consistent with the object: fragmentary, and at the same time referring to a fragmented subjectivity.

## **Art and Urban Imaginaries**

*Armando Silva*

Imaginaries and the arts are bound by an aesthetic condition that they both possess, but they work in different ways. Imaginaries are composed of aesthetics, in the sense that the world is affected by sensations and feelings that take form in social life. There are therefore certain situations in which there is a greater production of imaginaries, where affects such as love, fear, hope, hate, peace, frontiers or consumption are dominant. We can study the society from the way that we, as a group, construct visions of the world, that we call imaginary points of view (as I describe in my book *Imaginarios, el asombro social*; available in English <http://dx.doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.VOS.7-2.10>).

What I do is to identify different points of view that assemble common imaginaries and thereby consider forms of 'being social' that are expressed in a city, region or country. On this occasion I am interested in exploring modes of perception that are characteristic of the region of Latin America, by means of certain objects that have caught my attention for their intense imaginary power: civic art, graffiti, Latin family albums, or digital photos of friends in social media. I am looking, ultimately, to understand the urban personalities of today.

For example, the new graffiti we see on building façades in São Paulo over the past decade creates an imaginary (imagined?) family with urban art in Bogotá, to be found in improvised street art galleries, or with that of Guadalajara, where streets are dominated by interventions carried out on works public art or monuments. The same can be observed in a number of different, highly evocative, urban objects.

At the end we identify as an imaginary the capacity of causing astonishment and I will present a triadic model of social perception.

### **Joyería en los Andes (Bolivia)**

*Alicia Szmukler*

La idea que organiza este trabajo es que la orfebrería en general, y la joyería en particular, es parte y resultado de un contexto tecnológico, productivo y creativo, social y cotidiano, religioso y cultural. Como tal, representa un cierto "mundo de vida" asociado a dicho contexto y a las relaciones sociales particulares que tienen lugar en él. En este sentido, estudiar los procesos de producción de los objetos, su iconografía y sentidos, los usos, las intenciones y los fines a los cuales se destinan, puede darnos una idea de los imaginarios sociales y culturales de los cuales forman parte. Desde este punto de vista, los objetos "hablan".

Adicionalmente, me pregunto por la "actualidad" de métodos de trabajo ancestrales en este ámbito así como de una iconografía que apela a un pasado pre y colonial en Bolivia: ¿es posible ver hoy en la orfebrería y joyería boliviana una re-elaboración, unas referencias, un diálogo, con un pasado cultural? ¿Qué iconografía pervive, se reactualiza o se representa en la joyería actual? ¿Con qué fines? ¿En qué ámbitos? ¿Para qué usos?

En los Andes precolombinos se desarrolló toda una producción orfebre asociada a una fuerte religiosidad y a las distintas posiciones de autoridad en las comunidades. Diversas culturas expresaron sus creencias y valores a través de objetos producidos en distintos metales, los que adquirirían valor más por lo que representaban (un vínculo con lo sagrado, autoridad) que por el soporte material del cual estaban hechos. La llegada de los españoles implicó un cambio brusco con relación a las representaciones imaginarias de su religiosidad y modo de vida, que reprimieron fuertemente a través del proceso de "extirpación de idolatrías". Sin embargo, como el Barroco Mestizo atestigua sobre todo en la arquitectura en Bolivia, los indígenas encontraron modos de expresar materialmente sus creencias y subjetividades incluso en los espacios y producciones materiales "propias" de la religión católica.

Así, la orfebrería y la joyería se asociaron al ámbito religioso, tanto en el período precolombino como colonial. También fueron, y continúan siendo, expresión de una ubicación socioeconómica, de prestigio, de pertenencia a una elite.

Sostengo la hipótesis de que es posible detectar en parte de la joyería actual en Bolivia referencias a un pasado pre colonial y colonial. Pienso por ejemplo en el uso actual de los topos para sujetar las *mantas de chola*, en la ornamentación que aún se utiliza en los *bastones de mando* de las autoridades de comunidades originarias, en el uso exacerbado de joyas en los sombreros y mantas de las *cholas* durante las fiestas patronales, en las joyas con claras referencias a “lo precolombino” y en los objetos de uso doméstico realizados en estaño asociados a “lo colonial” (copas, soperas, cubiertos, cucharones) dirigidos al turismo de la calle Sagárnaga y alrededores en la ciudad de La Paz, en una joyería más regional vinculada a un Sucre y un Potosí coloniales, en la joyería barroca que las *cholas* usan en las fiestas privadas. Entonces, me pregunto: ¿qué significan estas producciones y usos en términos de imaginarios, de posicionamientos étnicos, socioeconómicos y socioculturales? Espero con este trabajo encontrar algunas respuestas...

### **Past and Present Andean Aesthetics: Whither the “Cholification Process”?**

*Jorge Sanjinés*

In Latin America, the dynamic between the Europeanized criollo elites and the other sectors of society (mestizos, Indians, and Blacks) was staged in the “realist” novels that flourished in the first half of the twentieth century. Centered on the Bolivian Andes, my most recent research problematizes this dynamic, which appeared in the novela del encholamiento (the social phenomenon, represented in the novels, of sexual relations between young criollo gentlemen and cholas, women considered to be of lower social standing). From a socio-political perspective, these novels are examples of the cholo aesthetics that emerges with the upward mobility of cholo-Indians, also known as the “process of cholification.”

If socio-historical studies have elucidated how “realist” novels enrich our understanding of the historical process and meanings of the twentieth century, my participation at Cambridge will be significantly different because it will problematize two examples of cholo aesthetics by exploring the inverse: how the ethnic conflicts and contradictions of the past enrich and complicate our reading of present-day aesthetic production. Guided by my reading of Pierre Macherey’s *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire*, and Eric Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, as well as by Roger Bartra’s *The Artificial Savage*, this shift in interpretation has important implications for our understanding of the “figural,” and how it steps aside from the customary representation of reality.

In the first example, my approach will expose the fictionalized chola to an anthropological analysis that studies an extensive web of “wild-woman” imagery drawn from European culture, with little connection to traditional historical or political explanations. In so doing, my interdisciplinary analysis will deal with the figural use of this imagery, beyond the conventional socio-political representation of reality.

The second example will project my analysis of the figural to the present-day mixed-use dream houses called cholets, a pun on the words “chalet” and cholo. They have been regarded as a futuristic representation of upward mobility, with the circular Aymara motifs in their façades, their baroque party halls on the mezzanine, a storey or two of apartments, and a cholo or chola owner’s penthouse. Regarded as being inspired by science fiction, particularly by the Transformer movies, I will argue, however, that the commercial ground floor of the cholets holds the secret to its reason of being, namely the central relationship between sellers and buyers that money has crystallized since

the Middle Ages. In this trend of thought, no futurism can grasp nor truly explain how cholos have mastered this relationship against the grain of centuries of prejudice. Be it the mutation of the “wild-woman” or the ascent of money, the figural hidden past conflicts with the socio-historical “process of cholification.” It may well be that cholos have always refused to be integrated into a symbolic order, and have responded with creative anarchy the legacy of male colonial domination.

## **Post-Terran Cities in the Age of the Aerocene: Tomás Saraceno**

*Joanna Page*

Tomás Saraceno’s artworks often draw attention to the scale of human damage to the environment that characterizes the ‘Anthropocene’ era, exploring instead a possible future era of airborne living, dubbed the ‘Aerocene’. Unlike many environmental artists, Tomás Saraceno makes unapologetic use of technologies and fabricated materials, working alongside engineers and material scientists from space agencies. He experiments with extremely lightweight, inflatable structures that are suspended above the ground, often powered by solar energy and the wind, and inspired by delicate, buoyant forms within nature, such as bubbles, foams, clouds or spiderwebs. These structures allow us to imagine a new nomadic mode of living in floating cities that would transcend national frontiers, unshackling humans from their earthbound existence, while making them more aware of their reliance on the elemental forces that govern the universe.

Saraceno’s projects are closely informed by dialogues with contemporary sociologists and philosophers, including Bruno Latour and Peter Sloterdijk. He cites extensively from Sloterdijk’s monumental trilogy *Spheres* (1998-2004), in which the properties of bubbles, the globe and foam become ways of thinking about how humans live together, starting from the premise that human existence is always a shared one, never one of isolation. Foam for Sloterdijk becomes a way of expressing the ‘aggregate of microspheres’ that characterizes contemporary society. The foam-like clusters of polyhedrons and bubbles Saraceno has constructed for his *Cloud Cities* and other exhibitions are a conscious materialization of Sloterdijk’s concept. They show how life ‘unfolds multifocally, multiperspectively and heterarchically’ and express the notion of co-fragility that recognizes the extent to which all lives are intertwined with other lives, and with the environment.

This presentation will trace some Argentine and international precursors for Saraceno’s airborne cities in order to throw into relief their particular qualities. It will also situate them within Saraceno’s broader interests in reclaiming the commons (including the atmosphere) for ‘do-it-together’ projects that imagine and enact new forms of co-creation and co-habitation. Lastly, it will explore some of the potential limitations of these projects with respect to the kind of political participation they envision and enable.

## **Biographies**

**Martin Hopenhayn** is a writer as well as a philosopher, a social development researcher and a lecturer. After working for 25 years as researcher and Director of the Social Development Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL-ECLAC), he is now Professor at the Universidad Diego Portales in Santiago, Chile. Among his books are *Por qué Kafka? Poder, mala conciencia y literatura* (1983 and 2000); *Ni apocalípticos ni integrados: aventuras de la modernidad en América Latina* (1994 and 1996); *Después del nihilismo: de Nietzsche a Foucault* (1997 and 2005); and *Atajos para no llegar* (aphorisms, 2014).

**Armando Silva** is Director of the PhD program in Social Studies at the Universidad Externado de Colombia in Bogotá and also of the world project of Urban Imaginaries. His most recent book is *Imaginarios: el asombro social* (Bogotá: Externado Press, 2013); in Portuguese translation *Imaginarios, estranhamentos urbanos* (São Paulo: SESC Press, 2014).

**Javier Sanjinés** is Professor of Literature and Andean Cultural Studies at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. His most recent books are *Mestizaje Upside-Down: Aesthetical Politics in Contemporary Bolivia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004) and *Embers of the Past. Essays on Aesthetic Decolonization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

**Alicia Szmukler** is a sociologist with a PhD in Anthropology (from the Universidad de Buenos Aires), and Masters degrees in Information and Knowledge Society (UOC) and in Social Sciences (ILADES-Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome). She has worked on the relationships between diasporas and communication technologies, cultural identities and aesthetics. She teaches at the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales in Argentina. She is the author of *Bolivianos en la diáspora: representaciones y prácticas comunicativas en el ciberespacio* (2015) and *La ciudad imaginaria. Un análisis sociológico de la pintura contemporánea en Bolivia* (1998).

**Joanna Page** is Director of the Centre of Latin American Studies in Cambridge, and a Reader in Latin American Literature and Visual Culture. She is the author of *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema* (Duke University Press, 2009), *Creativity and Science in Contemporary Argentine Literature: Between Romanticism and Formalism* (University of Calgary Press, 2014), *Science Fiction from Argentina: Technologies of the Text in a Material Multiverse* (University of Michigan Press, 2016), and *Posthumanism and the Graphic Novel in Latin America* (with Edward King; London: UCL Press, 2017).