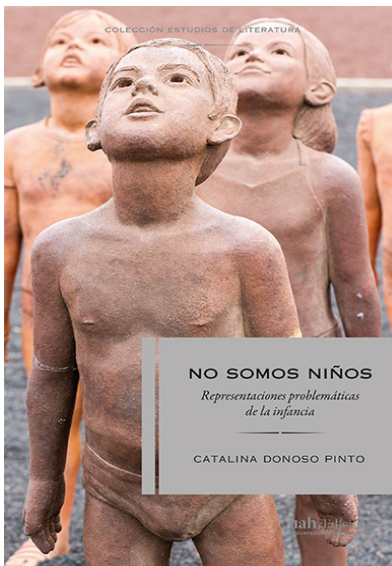


We Are Not Children. Problematic Representations of Childhood

Catalina Donoso. (2020). *No somos niños. Representaciones problemáticas de la infancia*. Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado. 272 páginas. ISBN 978-956-357-225-4



Often in childhood, one would hear the adults talking about the children: “This is not a topic for children”, “This film is not for children”, “of course you have rights, read the rights of the child!”, however, “who are these children?”. We Are Not Children. Problematic Representations of Childhood (2020) by Catalina Donoso, over the course of 270 pages extracts the question from the affirmation: “we are not children. We are not those children, we are not that manner of children, we are not, were not nor will we be made in the image of an infancy created by an adult-centric patriarchy; a patriarchy reminiscent of a cruel romanticism in which belonging to a state of infancy is reduced

to always being less, where animal bestiality equates to a lack of reasoning and not a manifestation of animal beauty – a beauty ever found in the marginal/marginalized – a beauty without motive, inherent to children and childhood.

We are not children, at least not those children, at least not that childish, questioning infancy from a cinematographic perspective where time is diluted to make way for a child’s landscape. An existential experience on the fringe, generally marginalized, that pushes the boundaries of what is permitted. It is no longer about being those children that belong to a chronological and linear timeline, nor is it about age limits. What Catalina Donoso gives us in her book, and does so with great clarity, is a boundary-pushing way to approach childhood that we have collectively cancelled as a culture. The image, footprint, tinge of infancy that draws attention to all the absences that the control of productive forces has desired to eliminate.

The book presents the reader with an analysis of several different films with a special bent toward Latin America. It really couldn’t be any other way if the reading of cinematography is given as a constant laying hidden outside the frame, as Donoso indicates. Latin America and infancy, the “new world” hand in hand with the “undegraded”, appear to disturb and confuse the norm, the purist framework of seventh place given to a managed art, and in the majority of cases managed by a cultural elite. Some of the films analyzed in the book are *Los Olvidados* by Luis Buñuel (1950), *La vendedora de rosas* by Víctor Gaviria (1998), *El planeta de los niños* by Valeria Sarmiento (1992), *Shunko* by Lautaro Murúa (1960), *Dugin, la lengua* by Pamela Pequeño (2012) and *Crónica de un niño solo* by Leonardo Favio (1965). We are not children, Problematic re-

presentations of childhood is a book that provokes, using varying layers of images, an undeniable contribution to the thought process around childhood as a constant that falls outside of the framework, a transversal alienation, like a queer otherness; a permanent questioning of the adult-centric, and therefore patriarchal, order. Catalina Donoso develops her proposal mainly from a cinematographic perspective, while maintaining constant dialogue with the literature and, in some form or fashion, with the theatrical which enriches the book still further, making the issue of image a transversal issue throughout.

Within the intentional and interesting break away from “theoretical purism”, there may be particular interest in the links the author makes between cinema, literature and psychoanalysis. Characters that lose their eyes, others that rob them, a premonition or part of an eternal narrative? However it may be, in many of the passages of this book the chronological order of the official story is put foremost, and raises the alert on one of the most “cinematographic” landscapes of recent Chilean history: the Chilean spring is read in every story and reflection presented by the author, especially in the beginning and end of the book.

In some etymological studies they speak of the social unrest as the destruction/transformation of a piece of wood into innumerable splinters. The splinter acting as a small stake is the image that the majority of the films analyzed in the book may come to reveal, and, in the same fashion, that infancy is a small, tiny splinter, painful and at the same time, magnificent.

Childhood is a form of spring. Chile explodes; in other words, is reduced to splinters when it makes itself heard, when the fringe, the marginalized, childhood, becomes central.

When the idea of an unconscious state in infancy appears, it reappears in a group of public secondary school students that first kicked off the protests of the Chilean spring in 2019. Once again “secondary actors” steal the scene. What is the story behind each one of the children that woke up a country? Certainly, several of those stories crisscross, weave, overlap, are narrated, told as if they were the protagonists of the films analyzed by Catalina Donoso. This is the crossover between what’s real and the reality beautifully presented in the book; the movies presented therein are created on the basis of a childhood uprising in the face of any attempt to regulate and pigeonhole them. On them the author raises the issue of the traditional representation of infancy, generating a double sense of being beyond oneself as Baudrillard would put it, perhaps even triple considering the Latin American angle as well. The reading systematically brings us to this “beyond oneself” of childhood, allowing the theoretical approach to maintain its corporal emotional condition. The latter is how the author traps us in the duality of “mind/body”, which would always be contradictory if what we want to do is to present childhood or childhoods, and not just the children we never were, are not, and never will be.

We are not children, Problematic representations of childhood depicts several different frameworks for the dominant patriarchal operations, especially those related to the social imaginary of childhood: what adults consider inherent to a boy or girl, especially anything linked to sexuality, pleasure and joy. What does and does not have a right to desire childhood? In one way or another all the stories presented in the book take an approach to this interrogative and question the festivities that misappropriate with the artifices of supposed needs

made desires in those children, desires that mirror the happiness of the market but that, sooner or later, fail to compensate for the unspeakable joy of pushing past all limits, catching reason while its sleeping, in the dark room as Lihn would put it (1963). What will be of the children we were? Is the poet’s question. A similar question is put forward by Donoso in her book, a constant questioning of the evolution of childhood, of that other childhood, the other childhoods, all from the genesis of another room/dark room, revealing the constant game of being forever off camera. Much of this we can find at the beginning of the book, an announcement that, with a drop of humor, brings us to the abyss of what we have marginalized, of what we have been taught to hide in order to move us away from a principle of reason, anything that takes any seriousness from the performance of a cartesian certainty: out with dreams, out with senses, out with the body, out with childhood.

The book shouldn’t be reduced to a compendium of cinematographic analyses built on an axis of childhood issues. What the author presents us with is rather, a questioning of childhood imaginaries, precisely through image/cinema. An image that given its particularities echoes in the history that arises from absence: an absence of social justice, of dignity, empathy, and an absence of humanity.

Catalina Donoso centers her reflexive proposal on what I would call, if I may, the “other trinity”, an intersection between ethics, esthetics and politics, always seen from the viewpoint of childhood, a perspective that looks us head on and questions a childhood that doesn’t exist, or exists but only as a marketed image. In *We are not children*. Problematic representations of childhood we get to enjoy the intersection of political cinema that not only

deals with the absence, it is also, in a way, the absence itself, with interlocutors that Catalina Donoso beautifully converses with. I say converse in the manner that Humberto Giannini (1987) understood it to mean: as an encounter with a clear beginning, but an unsuspected end.

Cinema and book, blessed by this alternative trinity, intertwine to destabilize the hierarchies of knowledge and fields of discipline. Here conversation and dialogue are built between great cinematic, philosophical, literal and psychoanalytical theory and the infantile marginal or marginalized lives that, similarly, are orphaned from the infinite. This last point akin to being orphans of the absolute, the absolute that could ultimately become the territory of freedom.

The book is composed of four sections: but what is most likely to happen to you when you read it is that it doesn’t need divisions, indexes nor indications of any kind, infancy is present in the author’s work; it makes itself known, there is a presence, Chronos is stilled to make way for Aion. Catalina Donoso not only speaks to us of infancy, in her book, the author also allows us to inhabit infancy for an infinity.

Lorena Herrera P.

University of Chile
lorenaherrera@u.uchile.cl

References

- Giannini, H. (1987). *La reflexión cotidiana*. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Universitaria.
- Lihn, E. (1963). *La pieza oscura*. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Universitaria.