

THE PHILOSOPHER'S LAUGH

It has been my good fortune to be asked to fulfil the stimulating and estimable task of introducing this issue of *Interface*. Thus, I myself will be the *interface* between you, the reader, and this set of papers which, themselves, stand for a range of other interfaces — interfaces multiply themselves *ad infinitum*, internally and externally, as I learned through this issue of the magazine.

I also learned that an interface is not the area that separates or distinguishes one identity from the next, regardless of whether these refer to territories, nationalities, individualities, objects etc., although this might be suggested by the related ideas of frontiers, divisions, or limits between one thing and the next. An interface is a surface of exchange and of interaction, a device whereby identities are mutually assigned to the spaces that connect through the very interface. Therefore, if there is an introduction I would like to make to this issue of *Interface*, it is to recommend that its readers allow themselves to be permeated by the magazine, while, at one and the same time, enriching it through their own reading of it. They should not cross the frontiers toward this material to colonize it with their own self, but rather, stimulated by the proposal of the publication itself, they should explore the encounter offered by its reading with a maximum of benefit and enjoyment.

Now, if you have reached this point of my introduction, it is quite probable that you have accepted me as your mediator, albeit temporarily. Having thus been granted your trust, I must police myself to ensure that I do not lead you to the same reading I have made of this issue — a risk altogether undesirable, but nonetheless so common in introductions, prefaces and reviews. I cannot, however, fail to respond to the curiosity that has led you, the reader, this far. You are, presumably, asking yourself: “What does this introducer have to say regarding the reading that I am about to embark upon?” And I shall answer you with the philosopher’s laugh and the patient’s inquiring countenance.

The philosopher’s laugh is to be found everywhere in the interview granted by Pierre Lévy to Ricardo Teixeira, especially where it deals with deeper and more meaningful subjects, whereas the inquiring countenance is in the second picture of Haná Vaisman’s photographic study, in harsh contrast with other laughs.

Why does the philosopher laugh? Why does the patient fail to laugh?

Reacting to Vaisman’s photograph, the medical academician concludes: “the relaxation is cool, but it’s a relaxation that is only ours, isn’t it?” Commenting on the philosopher’s laugh, the interviewer states: “it is the immense pleasure that our interlocutor finds in ideas... his spontaneous enjoyment of thinking”. The joint presence of these two elements, the fertile and shared experience of laughter, on one hand, and the strange and disquieting absence of such laughter, on the other hand, establishes a backdrop against which all the other papers acquire extremely lively and instigating contours. The articles brought together here are all permeated by this laughter and by its absence, by the ecstasy of freedom in the adventure of living and by the constant alarm that results from witnessing the role, not always concordant, yet inexorable, that other beings play in this adventure. As beings “obligated” to freedom, we understand laughter and demand its presence.

Perhaps we have failed, to date, to pay attention to the importance that Kant (in his

own ecstasies) attributed to happiness as the practical foundation of all thought and knowledge, and of Reason itself. In any event, the rich dialogue that Lévy, Teixeira, Vaisman and the hospital inmates establish among themselves and us exempts us from reaching out to such lofty philosophical claims in order to achieve an understanding, to my mind, almost as simple as it is fundamental: that *happiness may be the measure of reason and that the latter only realizes itself fully through effective communication with other beings.*

Reason is what sets us apart as beings bound to freedom. As beings that, at every turn, take reality as an open experience and set themselves to invent its forms, we lend wings to the great archangel mentioned by Michel Serres, propelled by the eternal winds of history, on which Walter Benjamin once discoursed. And what might be the reaction of a creative being as it beholds its creative capabilities, other than laughter and contentment? In the same way, the discomfort with divergence in happiness is a twofold sign of the relevance of communication within a rational program for humanizing life. Experienced as a deficiency, the lack of a smile is the evidence that the reason for one person's happiness may fail to be the reason for another person's contentment, or that the latter is not, effectively, a participant in the act of creating that is under way. At the same time, this feeling of lack expresses a true desire that things be different. It is as if, happiness being incomplete, reason were still only halfway along its path. The philosopher's laugh does not demand any meaning from us, but the patient's tense countenance does (and the detail of the Bible open by the head of the bed, the reading of which was possibly interrupted, lends even stronger tones to the depicted gap).

Well now, and what are all efforts of communication, if not this movement of reason that creates, of reason that updates our option for freedom, aiming at sharing it completely? Let us see. Is it not possible to interpret the Gertrudes doll as an attempt to enable the sharing of happiness with their sexual and reproductive life among different women? Does it not bother the PAISM researcher that the social assistance techniques in the field of female health care fail to sever the difference in power between men and women in the creation of the ways in which they live together? In scrutinizing the dialogue established through the medium of radio or of newspapers, is it not a doubt, regarding what is truly being created, that is at the heart of the matter?

And what can one say, furthermore, about the several texts that debate the issues of university and education? Is this not reason bending over itself and rejecting its limited abilities to generate shared happiness?

The following strikes me as the most substantial of all efforts regarding rationality or communication: the possibility of our joining up during creation, not to generate, all of us, the same thing, nor to do it once and for all, but to enjoy the same ecstasy in the freedom of inventing life. This also seems to me to be one of the possible readings of this stimulating issue of *Interface*, and it is the reading that I, for one, would like to invite our readers to share. Only the individual interpretation of each reader, on the other hand, may establish whether or not this shall prove to be a felicitous invitation.

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