



PRESENTATION

"Where are our children?" This was the title of a highly colorful figurative picture showing a scene taken from daily life on a street in an African country and that was in no way reminiscent of children. But suddenly the disquieting title makes sense in connection with the strange malaise that struck me during my visit to the last São Paulo Bienal art exhibition. A profusion of images of children was on show, especially in photographs from Eastern Europe (mini-models, made-up and dressed in a sexualized manner, both glamorous and adult). Neil Postman had already verified the disappearance of childhood. If it arose as from the invention of books, which brought in their wake the need for schooling, it reached its height in the nineteenth century and disappeared in the mid-twentieth century, with the invention and popularization of television, which eliminated the boundaries between the adult universe and that of children. Increasingly visible pedophilia scandals point to the practical impact of the culture of our days.

We are also exposed to the media spectacle of the planes that hit the twin towers in New York, which we were compelled to watch, hypnotically fascinated in our horror. As we watch suicide being transformed into the most novel, lethal and chaotic weapon of war and destruction (one which, in terms of inventiveness, outdoes the gas chamber, the vanishing of political activists and the mass rape of women by far), we have the feeling that one has moved into a zone that had heretofore never been reached, perhaps the exposure of a pure death drive to the impotence of containing it.

Suicide is the means whereby one denies the body and its imperfect and mortal materiality, in the name of cultural and social ideals erected as a tyrannical rule, as a final destiny, the hope of incorporeal immortality, even if at the price of sacrificing the pleasurable or unpleasurable life that is enabled through the inhabiting of a mortal body. Is there any greater denial of the body than transforming it into a faultless bomb of blasting energy for mass assassination, at the service of an immortality fantasy, that a life beyond would look upon as being the true life? In an age of clones and cryonics, suicide transmuted into a weapon of war is a somatic mega symptom bordering on that which is beyond or beneath the human-inhuman element, as it causes the very body to disappear, its being transformed into pure fuel.

Pure fuel is what we find at the core of the media spectacle regarding the state of war between the United States and Iraq. The oil that pours out of stone, that like black bile gushes forth from the phallic tower that contains the manic desire for increasingly more riches, power and control, is its sole true motive. What do the thousands of victims that will perish, should this war materialize, matter to the owners of American power, who may be the same people vetoing the manufacturing and distribution of unbranded drugs for the treatment of some thirty million Aids carriers in Africa, leading to a genocide of an unprecedented scale, for purely economic reasons?

The bodies of the clone, the suicide and the frozen corpse, the pedophile and the war give rise to an image of serialization that becomes the expression of the American empire. They bring a peculiar kind of materiality to a strong death impulse, in its silent manifestation for the compulsion of repetition. It is the expression of the fantasy of being unique, immortal and self-engendered, which exists within each one of us since the earliest of times. It is the seed of what Freud called destructive narcissistic fury, which eliminates all obstacles standing in the way of its delusions or which compels the constitution of a pedophilic super-person, as rigid and destructive as the fury which it attacks. In *Discontent in Contemporary Civilization*, Freud showed this narcissism as the root of aggressiveness, an obstacle which civilization and social life must come up against and that makes it difficult to think about a natural humanism. Man is man's wolf. It is this destructive narcissism that constantly insists that we must undo ourselves to enable the reinvention of heterosexuality, of the relationship with the other, of the desire for the other as we assume our original helplessness, and of the relative dependence on the other, forever present, the constituent intersubjectivity of the humanization process. The sublimable fate of this fantasy is pointed out by the popular saying: father a child, write a book, plant a tree. But this implies in an arduous task for a spirit that seeks freedom: accepting to inhabit a mortal body.

It is within this complex panorama that this issue of *Interface* is published, with Ethics and Human Rights as its

pivot, these themes having been unfolded into four directions:

- 1) The delimitation of the issue from the general political and social points of view.
- 2) Specific issues pointing to its consequences in terms of rights and of the law: the sexual abuse of children, violence against women and the power and injustices present in scientific research.
- 3) Ethics in action, in the complexity of the multiple lines of force that traverse encounters, lending them their denseness (be it in the meeting of the physician who must share a difficult diagnosis with a pregnant woman, in the importance of social and familial representations of mental illness, or in the professionalizing subjectivity of the home care visits made by nurses). As Aragon states, through the delicacy and subtlety contrary to aseptic speed and the harsh technical view that is hegemonically imposed upon the field of Collective Healthcare, one may permit time to slow down in order to allow oneself to be touched by the unknown and to observe, interact and find the measure that enables the singularization of contact. Ethic in action that values listening to expressive statements, breaking through illusory hierarchical distances to share affection. It is the process of forming knowledge discussed in the article that highlights an interesting experiment in preventive education among peers and in the instigating debate on higher education at a distance. It is, furthermore, in singularity in action, and not abstractly, that one evaluates the operationalization of the principles of health promotion in projects across several regions of Brazil.
- 4) Ethics in Medicine, in the questioning of institutionalized Medicine, with the technification of care and medical hyper-specialization. The quest for knowledge, which becomes a power game, throws the medical machinery into an intrusiveness that instead of intervening in suffering seeks it, causing pain. There is an iatrogenicity of institutionalized Medicine, but, as Illich points out, the cunning demedicalization of healthcare also brought in its wake the social phenomenon of the iatrogenicity of the body, based on a quest for non-medical knowledge that changes bodily self-perception. Hence the concern with better medical training, to decrease the distance between schools and the population's needs.

Over the last few years, the outcry for ethics in Brazilian society became a sort of focal point condensing the anguish and disquiet brought about by inequalities, injustice and misery, which cause perplexity and can no longer be kept up. The recent presidential election is an unusual and symbolic landmark, having lent visibility to the outcry for ethics as a social fact: the delicacy of democracy emerged, rendering it impossible to assume rigid and radical positions. It requires the time of conflict, the patience of argumentations, the consideration of differences. In situating the four generations of human, civil, political and social rights, as well as rights concerning nature, Janine emphasizes democracy as the regime of desire, of desire in the public domain, stating that we cannot think of politics and society merely as a function of ideas of interest and needs. Recognizing the legitimacy of desire and of all its ambiguous nature, according to him, is as complicated as it is rare in political thought. Passing from the desires of the individual plane to the public plane is difficult.

The conception of ethics as a spiritual and intellectual attitude may favor this passage, displacing moral as its shadow. Ethics presupposes a conjunction of a singular element and a social element of a totally different nature from the moral one, which guides men from without, as from the internalization of conducts, functioning like an abstract and homogenizing image of the social element. On the other hand, the demand for ethics calls for a response to the issue of human happiness. Serfdom, laceration, unhappiness... are these the sole forms of human existence? This "severinity" or wretchedness that the words and images of "Natal Severino" refer to? Spinoza had already taught us that the ethical target is an internal desire to exist in action, be happy, behave well, live well, persevere in existence, and increase one's power, aiming at such freedom as man can achieve. Freud's visionary text, *Discontent in Contemporary Civilization*, treads the same path as Spinoza's thoughts. It affirms an ethic of singularity and plurality at one time, in which several paths to happiness are possible, the choice, however, being individual. Regarding both of them, we may state that the issue concerns including, in the existing social codes, that which enables the unique creation of a good life, beautifully lived, in accordance with one's wishes and involving the awareness of the reasons underlying one's own acts, even if not in an illuminist fashion, but through complex understanding and intuition and, therefore, freely. Ethics as the singular invention of life.

Thus, I highlight a segment of Djalma, part of Melo Neto's poem:

"... it is difficult to defend life only with words... And there is no better answer than the spectacle of life: to watch it unravel its thread, also called life, to see the factory that life itself stubbornly fabricates..."

"Devoid of new questions, devoid of suicide, "Severino" Death and Life comes to its end as an exaltation of life".

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