

A Crisis of Culture

The model of neoliberalism and globalization are fuelling a crisis of our culture, by erasing differences, universalizing standards and lauding market interests above all. Thus, in neoliberalism, the market is of the essence and the law of economics comes first. A subject is regarded as part of the machinery of the business corporation. One is encouraged to compete and to defeat the other, even at the cost of destruction, and to govern oneself in such a way as to adapt constantly to the unceasing vicissitudes of the market. The individual is often expected to be faultless. All of this modifies and affects everyday practices and relations. Success is seen solely in terms of professional life and the subject remains totally alienated in this field. There is, however, a draining of subjectivity, of desires, of personal achievements, and a displacement of interests to fields, such as coaching, neurolinguistic programming, and transactional analysis, that seek to drive the subject to subdue emotions, in an effort to survive brutal competition.

Success alone is valued and, without it, there are only feelings of impotence and failure, leading to exclusion, depression, melancholia, suicide, addiction. All that is left is submission to the market and an insistence on unbridled consumption, as if it were possible to indulge in infinite joy, without castration. Science, a new religion allied to market interests, segregates and seeks to medicalize symptoms, seeing the subject as a mere body, an agglomeration of chemical substances. There are also now protocols, akin to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual checklists, in which some kinds of suffering, such as hysteria and paranoia do not appear. Case histories simplify things and some afflictions end up isolating and excluding the subject from society. The listening ear of desire disappears, along with uniqueness and background of the subject, reducing it to a mere effect of an organic body.

The technological *neo-subject* is responsible for its own *enterprise*. It is valued as a “brain” trained to obtain limitless enjoyment. It strives to govern itself, using self-help to be “‘successful’, to ‘guide’, ‘stimulate’, ‘shape’, or ‘empower’ it to achieve its ‘goals’” (Laval & Dardot, p. 328).

Psychoanalysis, seeing the subject as divided—an effect of the unconscious and subject to castration—operates differently. It acknowledges lack as the foundation of the very structure of the subject and considers the “presence” of the object, the lack of lack, as the cause of anguish. There is no point stopping up the structuring lack in search of a non-existent object and an impossible enjoyment. At the same time, the subject cannot be reduced to a discourse sustained by *binary polarities* or by ‘likes’ on social media networks. Subjects are often *objectified*, their lives “inhibited”, ordered and subjugated to technology, be it games or information technology devices that, despite serving to communicate, are unable to foster social ties. This subject finds itself subject to a technological “servitude.”

The constitution of the subject reminds us of the suckling infant, whose Ego has not separated from the outside world. It gradually learns to do so by way of external stimuli. We imagine how strange it must feel to have various sources of excitation, later

understood to be bodily organs, capable of transmitting sensations at any moment, while others, such as the mother's breast, only appear in response to cries for help. Freud notes that "an object first presents itself to the ego as something existing "outside," which is only induced to appear by a particular act" (Freud, p.12).

Our current ego-feeling is just a remnant of a broader one, more intimately connected to the outside world. If this primary sense of ego has been preserved in the psyche of many, then we are dealing with an oceanic feeling. The retention of all prior stages, alongside the definitive configuration, is only possible in the realm of the psyche; it cannot be represented visually. "We can only be sure that it is more the rule than the exception for the past to survive in the mind" (Freud, p.20).

Basically "suffering comes from three quarters: from our own body, which is destined to decay and dissolution, and cannot even dispense with anxiety and pain as danger signals; from the outer world, which can rage against us with the most powerful and pitiless forces of destruction; and, finally, from our relations with other men. The unhappiness which has this last origin we find perhaps more painful than any other. We tend to regard it more or less as a gratuitous addition, although it cannot be any less an inevitable fate than the suffering that proceeds from other sources" (Freud, p.28).

"Unbridled gratification of all desires forces itself to the foreground as the most alluring guiding principle in life, but it entails preferring enjoyment to caution, and penalizes itself after short indulgence" (Freud, p.30). One of the great ills of our age, a crisis caused by our culture, is that of addiction. Some seek out substances that elicit an immediate sensation of pleasure, affecting a person's sensibility in such a way that they become incapable of tolerating unpleasant impulses. Our own bodies can create a similar effect, even without ingesting toxic substances. This is what makes addictions so damaging and dangerous: the inability to tolerate the unpleasant, lack, loss, frustration. Feeling helpless, the subject defends against a "supposed" fragility, tries to evade castration. Addictions do not only come in the form of toxic substances such as alcohol, but are any kind of thing that isolates an individual in their own bubble, detached from the world. It can be drink, sex, the Internet, prescribed medication, illicit drugs. Feeling helpless and alone in the world, subjects may go in search of limitless enjoyment.

The Drug of Fascism

We are living in difficult times, when ghosts are confounded with reality and distinctions are blurred. We are not the only country to be going through this. We are seeing various European countries and the United States flirt with fascism. What can we do? Is this history repeating itself? The return of the repressed in the masses? The effect of ineffective or incomplete trauma elaboration Is it a return or a fixed Real, always in the same place, like the unmoving sky and stars? In Brazil, there is talk of proto-fascism or neo-fascism, and, in various countries, there are moves afoot to curb immigration, to adopt narcissistic nationalistic attitudes, to espouse racial supremacy, and to believe in the need for walls. We know that fascism differs from other forms of dictatorship in that it was initially a mass movement organized around a single source of authority. This radical evil takes the form of sadism towards women, black people, and minorities and deep identification on the part of the masses with a leader, in a manner that seems oblivious to reason or reflection. In many countries, these issues have become part of

political discourse and public debate. How does this affect our work as psychoanalysts with the three registers of the Symbolic, Real and Imaginary? In Brazil, there are those who advocate conversion therapy, the so-called “gay cure” and view any deviation from the heteronormative orientation as a form of disease.

We feel beholden to a culture of prejudice that flouts morality. What can we do about this? What is the way out? Is it valid for psychoanalysis to address such social issues? This is one of the many facets of the current crisis of culture.

Ana Lúcia Falcão e Luíza Bradley Araújo (representatives of Intersecção Psicanalítica do Brasil)

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