

A New Subject?

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*"A whole humanity now burns in fever, night and day, a terrible and powerful wakefulness flickers through the agitated senses of millions, fate penetrates, unseen, through thousands of windows and doors and frightens sleep from every bed, frightens oblivion. There is less sleep in the world now, the nights are longer and the days longer."
(Zweig, 2013, p. 198)*

We live in a time in which we seem to have lost the capacity and taste for narrative. Experiences that shaped generations, the handing down from one generation to another of shared traditions and knowledge, of one's family and community roots, of the country which we lived in and came from... all of this dissipated in the "pollution" of our contemporary lives. By the way, the pollution of the environment is not only the relevant and frightening specter that marks this great transition underway in the globalized world! Any country in the world is composed of diasporas which make up enclaves of multiple ethnicities, religions, diverse lifestyles that erase the possibility of stating who is an insider and who is an outsider, or a foreigner. There are social and economic implications to this, but above all this plays out in the subjective contest to settle what spaces are the public commons, where all live together, and which are instead reserved for private purposes. The battle for this leads to forms of uprooting.

To a great degree, the State has largely abdicated the role of nation-building, making it difficult or even impossible for foreigners that arrive in a given country to be assimilated, while still imposing on them the loss of their own reference-points, forcing them to live in a state of limbo, as neither "natives" of their new country nor belonging to a homeland at all.

It is noteworthy that the utopian ideal of a "good society," based on the relative speed and ease with which one can move about the planet, the immediacy of communicating through social media, has not, in the end, meant even an inch of progress in bringing

different people groups together and in the recognition of the profound cultural differences among us, even if we manage to peacefully coexist.

One of the greatest sociologists of our day, Zygmunt Bauman, noted that "The now emerging human condition suggests an unprecedented degree of emancipation from constraints – and from need experienced as a kind of coercion, which is then resented, and which also generated a certain form of rebellion. This kind of emancipation tends to be experienced as the reconciliation of the 'pleasure principle' with the 'reality principle' proposed by Sigmund Freud, and then understood as the end of the conflict of an era, which according to Freud, made civilization a hotbed of unease." (BAUMAN, 2011, p.31)

Now, this malaise is sensitive to our perceptions whenever we are faced with a reality that is different from ours, and seemingly more interesting, and full of opportunities, especially so when the environment we live in is adversarial. There is no going backwards in regard to the fact that actions committed in one place bring about effects in others, and that this sometimes occurs on a planetary scale - hence, everything and everyone is connected to each other in invisible networks. This does not, however, mean that any one of the different nations of the world is truly willing to take on subjectively the responsibility for the objective consequences of its decisions.

Without forgetting that "freedom, in the concrete sense of the word, consists of the possibility of choice" (Weil, 2022, p. 23) and that this freedom is necessarily limited by demands that exceed the will of each person: how to be with another without exceeding the ethical limits of my desire in the face of the desires of the other? Who is then this subject that is produced by the contemporary world which devalues the experience of listening to narratives, both the subject's own, about his own roots, which would maybe provide him a sense of truly participating in his collective, as well as narratives of those around him, which as a consequence make him an uprooted wanderer?

In the case of adolescents who are always searching for a place different from that of their childhood, where they no longer feel they belong, what is offered to them to help

them face the anguish of believing themselves to be abandoned and alone? Faced with their inability to know how to respond to the physical as well as emotional demands of their sexuality, and it is in sharing with their group or band of friends, separate from their home life, that adolescents seek to find a place in which they may share the pain that is part of their common experience.

Beyond the boundaries of home, adolescents would manage at school to create a life apparently free from excessive family control, even when accounting for the fact that to be included under the groups' *law* or rules, each needed to find a way to be subject to the symbolic group "law." This is visible also in the role played by parents, who are tasked with introducing the child to how the rules of exchange operate: the child yearns for his beloved object, is then deprived of this object; and only later is able to enjoy a semblance of this object, which is in the end unattainable as this because it does not exist.

However, as father of adolescent have lost authority, that is to say, they no longer are valued as a symbolic reference point, adolescents are now alone, and are also being raised alone, abandoned as it were to this "uprooting." Charles Melman has stated it thus: "the father figure has become an anachronism" (2008, p. 34). Each adolescent's sense of abandonment, of rootlessness seems to have been further compounded by a greater loss of references, which leads us to think about the transformation of adolescence itself into a kind of pathology which may lead to suicide, for example. Suicide rates among adolescents (and also children) have increased enormously, on a worldwide scale. With no place left where they will be heard, as the family no longer acknowledges them for their singularity as subjects, and schools see them as mere *clients*, it seems that the only way out is to disappear from the world scene. Not even their sexuality is treated seriously. The new psychic or emotional economy makes sexuality a commodity like any other - adolescents in particular, are victims of this.

The question that needs to be asked of psychoanalysts is: how did these symptoms come about? Could this be a kind of perversion of the social pact, a perversion that in

even the most modern of democracies is sustained only by a savage competition in which a person has the right to fully realize his enjoyment, his *jouissance*, and to make commodities of others in order to attain it.

Freud stated that the unrest of our civilization is the result of limits which are imposed on subjects: restriction of desire and of being able to reach an always fragile satisfaction, or *jouissance*. In our time what we see emerging does not appear to be the law brought about by an oedipal legacy or heritage, with all the challenges that psychoanalysts know so well from their clinical practice.

Our psychic reality, shaped by the loss of the object - which grounded it as reality and led to our perceiving it as loss - today has been transformed into something far more fluid. The reality we deal with reveals that the proclaimed evolution of the new discourse would seem to be searching for an argument against castration. In other words: it would seem that people no longer accept any limits; everything is achievable, reachable, since the objects exist in the world. All we need to make a bit more effort to attain them and enjoy them.

What is happening today leads us to understand that a form of mutation is happening in the way a subject's relationship to an object is established. The neurotic always deals with his object from a starting point of absence (what we call castration), in which he dreams of finding it precisely because he is assured that this is not possible. In our contemporary world, a subject emphasizes the capturing of the object. For this reason, the resulting psychic economy places the subject in a relationship of dependency which will mean that the object will be required to allow itself to be captured, so that *jouissance* may explicitly occur. This object is now present in the field of reality,

We can observe that this perversion has become an ideal, a contemporary standard. And thus we are faced with a social perversion brought about by this libidinal economy.

What challenges does this present for psychoanalytic listening? A new kind of subject?

References

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