



Global Advanced Research Journal of Educational Research and Review (ISSN: 2315-5132) Vol. 5(1) pp. 001-008, January, 2016  
Available online <http://garj.org/garjerr/index.htm>  
Copyright © 2016 Global Advanced Research Journals

## Review

# The Intellectual in the Information Society: *An essay on subjectivity, knowledge, and communication*

Eduardo C. B. Bittar

Associate Professor at the Department of Philosophy and General Theory of Law at the School of Law (USP, São Paulo, Brazil). Is 2o. Vice-President of ABRAFI (IVR/ Brazil). N-2 level Researcher at Council for National Research – CNPq. Reseracher on the area of Philosophy and General Theory of Law, developing his actual research work on “Human Rights Education” and “Theory of democracy”.  
E-mail: [ecbbittar@gmail.com](mailto:ecbbittar@gmail.com)

Accepted 28 December, 2015

**This article discusses the place of the intellectual in the modern world, and makes reflections about the situation of the impoverishment of intellectual venues, in the information society, as a sign of the decadence of this critical potential, discussing with the conception and main concepts of the Critical Theory, the ways to social emancipation.**

**Keywords:** Critical Theory – Intellectual – Social Emancipation – Information Society.

## SUMMARY

1. The place of the intellectual in the modern world;
2. The intellectual as a pariah of the information society;
3. The information society as an autistic society;
4. Violence and the discomfort of intellectuals;
5. Melancholy and the political crises;
6. Conclusions.

### The place of the intellectual and the modern world

Modern society is born permeated by rumors originating from intellectual life, the worlds of science, the arts, culture, from freedom of thought and from emancipation venues.

The public sphere has a great mission to build, within its domains, the identity of the historical moment of effervescence, resulting from transformations in social life. It is exactly within this context, and especially following revolutionary transformations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that the intellectual figure, as active *intelligentsia* assumes a mature stature in modern society. In the

special series, “What is the use of an intellectual?” in the Caderno Mais! Section of the Folha de São Paulo, August 2006, in the article *Chaos in the Public Sphere*, it is Habermas who states: “It is already in this period of incubation, when the virus of the French revolution spread across Europe, that the constellation in which modern intellectuals will find their place emerged. With rhetorically compelling arguments to influence public opinion, intellectuals depend on a public sphere that is alert and knowledgeable to serve as their resonating box.” Jürgen Habermas, “Chaos in the Public Sphere,” *Caderno Mais!, Folha de São Paulo* (2006): 04. In the wake of revolutionary modernity follows productive modernity, smothering the possibility of fulfillment of contextualized ideals and opportunities of its predecessor. Therefore, the progress of modernity did not lead to the fulfillment of its ideals, and, even having overcome its revolutionary phase, consolidates itself under the predominance of *instrumental reason*. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*, (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 1985), 34. It is this historical form of reason, a partner of *progress* and

*efficiency*, that fuels the productive process, but which restricts social life to its labor-productive significance, responsible for a century of political-cultural and intellectual serenity, where presently and strangely excessive noise is the rule.

Following the question, "What is the use of an intellectual?" comes another, "What is the meaning of modernity today?" Moacir Scliar, "The Birth of Melancholy," *Ide: psicanálise e cultura*, 31, 2008, 138. In a world of instrumental modernity, the intellectual is, due to his text productions, to his theoretical constructions, to his appreciation of meticulous research, to his reflective analysis, and to his humanistic formative concerns, an outcast. To follow the ideals that inspired the Enlightenment today is to follow a profession that has its meaning misplaced. Hence the intellectual's ambiguous existential experience in a world in which rationalization serves the predominance of strategic means of interaction; on one hand, intellectuals were responsible for the establishment of favorable emancipatory conditions; however, on the other hand, intellectuals were denied their historical role in defining modes of rationality. In an attempt to find a means of identifying reason, during the early stages of modernity, emancipatory reason, originating from public, literary, philosophical and intellectual spheres, makes the modern world possible, along with and its characteristics; when trying to position emancipatory reason within modern history, one notices that it has become redundant and, therefore, has stagnated the legacy of emancipatory modern ideals in an unfinished past. The mystification of objects caused people to fade into the woodwork of the market, to establish existential mediocrity. Jürgen Habermas, "Chaos in the Public Sphere," *Caderno Mais!, Folha de São Paulo* (2006): 04.

Thus, the discussion of modernity's most compelling ideas has become *démodé* while intellectuals, on the forefront of social emancipation, attempt to reverse the legacy, in social life, of pervasive instrumental reason. In addition to being tedious and unpleasant, this represents a Sisyphean task; it demonstrates what nobody wants to see. So, critical intellectuals are cast into obscurity since their continued efforts towards liberating modernity's incubated and repressed ideals do not find an echo in modern-day society. Thus, a stagnated, imperfect and implicitly harmful version of modernity is defined and guided by a single dominating functional aspect. Hence the symptom of the human experience having been characterized by what it lacks, notoriously completion and meaning.

This is the root of the problem of violence in modern society. This is also the root of the problem of violence against intellectuals. In fact, critics of modern life recognize and reiterate modern-day issues, pointing out the intrinsic agents that block the march of socialization, justice and equality. The mere fact that a significant part of critical intellectual endeavors involve exposing current

paranoia, violence and inconsistencies, indicates that the squandered psychic and intellectual energies, thus employed, could be directed towards more constructive and creative areas. The task of diagnosing the effects of instrumental reason is always less attractive than building new gateways to freedom. The diagnosis of modernity's shortcomings projects intellectuals into a form of resistance against the tried and true idea that all is governed by the principle of progress and that, therefore, the modern world follows a self-guiding compass, regardless of any human aspiration. Olgária Matos, "The Many and the One: mixed blood logos and hospitality," *Ide: psychoanalysis and culture*, 31, 2008, 10.

### The intellectual as a pariah of the information society

Habermas writes, "...I should not here evade the most beloved of intellectual occupations: they love to tune in to ritual complaints about the decline of the intellectual," concerning the theme, "What is the Use of an Intellectual?" in the article *Chaos in the Public Sphere*. Later, after a pause, he adds: "I confess that I am not entirely indifferent to this tendency." Jürgen Habermas, "Chaos in the Public Sphere," *Caderno Mais!, Folha de São Paulo* (2006): 04. The perception that intellectuality withers, appears to be constant theme of debates politicizing the function of intellectuals in modern society. May this suspicion be true? May it be a part of intellectual whining? Is there a concrete parallel in social life? Does it find a concrete mirror in social life? It is the functional specialization of the worker in the modern world that points to an answer. In terms of productivity, which defines knowledge as an economic asset, the intellectual is only granted a place as a specialized tool to service power mechanisms. The confinement of intellectuals to their designated knowledge cubicle, the university, is but a symptom of the distance and lack of significance of critical analysis in social life. "The arrival of intellectuals depicts the last phase in the evolution of social consciousness. It is the last group to adopt the sociological perspective, since its position in the social division of labor does not provide direct access to any *vital* and *operating* segment of society. The isolated office and the dependency printed materials offer but an indirect perspective of the social process," states sociologist Mannheim. Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of the Intellectual," in *Sociology* (São Paulo: Ática, 1982), 101.

Nowadays, as a repository of knowledge, as a vault and storage room for academic information, the university allows the intellectual to find place in his "temple of melancholy" Moacir Scliar, in analyzing the theme of melancholy, says, "The temple of intellectual melancholy is the library." Moacir Scliar, "The Birth of Melancholy," *Ide: psicanálise e cultura*, 31, 2008, 138.

However, libraries are not the world; from them we can

extract what can be done with the world. So, the existential and melancholic soliloquies in respect to the modern world are impotent when not backed by direct political action and, considering politics itself is the task of specialists, then one realizes the gaping distance between what we *think* and what we *do*, in other words, between theory and practice. This distance, from a sociological stand point, is also seen as a social distance between the intellectual and other classes and social groups. Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of the Intellectual," in *Sociology* (São Paulo: Ática, 1982), 101

Therefore, essentially, it is the academic world which provides the intellectual with a place to tackle his burden of analyzing the social life of his time; it is there that the rivers of words and symbols stored in the "head-box" will flow into the "class-work" on the following day, opening channels and revealing reflective and subjective ruminations. 'University walls' double as 'sheltering walls,' blessed as a place to cool down existentially and professionally, to think, reflect, form and conduct research. *Not-being-part-of-the-system*, as a conscious decision, is only possible, in part, within the confines of a shielded protection of the few environments where the driving waves of critical thought subsist: the public university. It is, therefore, a bunker for this subsisting intellectual critic, the place of refuge facing the disenchanting political aspirations; there is no further meaning, incidentally, since Plato's day, in the term Academy. Moacir Scliar, "The Birth of Melancholy," *Ide: psicanálise e cultura*, 31, 2008, 137. In this sense, the intellectual cannot begrudge his condition, for "The wise man is with himself," (*Sapiens... secum est*), as observes Seneca, in his *Epistles* (9, 16).

Outside the university, *there is no time or place for reflection*. Reflection demands all the conditions denied by the modern world, such as, silence for contemplation, for the slow rumination of ideas, the gut conviction of the acts of speech, the long drawn out periods of reading, the state of constant vigilance, the slow stewing of a text, the skeptical faith in an improved human condition, are but a few conditions of what makes of the critical experience as one of *circumspection* and, also, therefore, an experience of *de-adjustment*; at its limit, living becomes *unbearable*, for living means, simply, *acceptance* and, consequently, giving up on one's ideals, where a feeble compatibility wavers between living on or renouncing one's own ideals. One must, no doubt, go on living...

Nonetheless, to go on living means, in spite of what one knows and what one observes in the world, means a state of passive waiting for political decisions, for measures, whether wise or unwise of politics, the folklore of governmental ideologies, the generalized public inertia and the anesthetic ignorance towards social issues. Hence, to know implies *seeing*, *hearing*, using ones *intuition*, *feeling*, and *perceiving* what ordinarily is not noticed. If the eyes see more than my time permits, the soul suffers more than it can bear... In this sense,

intellectuals are not even allowed the soothing comfort of belonging to a class – as states Mannheim – they are not even close to forming anything of the sort: "It should be clear that intellectuals don't constitute, in any form, a class. (...) Nothing is further removed from this level than the unity of thought and cohesion." Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of the Intellectual," in *Sociology* (São Paulo: Ática, 1982), 104.

Hence the fact that, in spite of speaking 'of intellectuals,' one rarely mentions 'a collective unity,' rather, one speaks of a scattered similarity among individuals that engage the same type of activity. The lack of a transformative force on the part of intellectuals comes from this very condition that they occupy within the social framework.

Nevertheless, for the exercise of critical thought, the act of reflection presupposes *observation*, *detachment* and *reflection*. These rely on the need to 'stand outside,' to 'observe beyond the obvious,' and, thus, the intellectual jeopardizes his sociability; that is to say, as a person who exercises critical thought, the intellectual *de-adjusts* himself. Thinking differently presupposes suspicion in regards to ready-made formulas, overcoming the status quo through analysis and discordance towards *one-size-fits-all* worldly perspectives of social life. Hence, the detachment of the observer, that asks the critical intellectual to step back critically before being swept away, offers a heightened experience of musing different elements of a deceitfully solid and cohesive world, putting the ordinary experience on hold, which ordinarily simply implies a mundane acceptance of 'a reality kit with one possible perspective.' Along these lines, all reflective detachment also becomes a detachment from the prevailing social context. Curiously, thus, the critical intellectual, though not donning clerical robes and not submitting to any vows of reclusion, experiences a monastic ritual of estrangement from the real world, his ordinary life placed in suspended animation, enabling a venue for detached reflection. In this sense, the intellectual, though an active member of society, is a stranger in its midst. The intellectual is hired into the staff of an institution, but is not absorbed or digested by it, and does not reconcile himself completely with it, else he risk annihilation. Hence, the feeling, on a number of levels, of a permanent state of alienation. He doesn't belong to any class, but he distances himself from society itself which he intends to critically observe.

Therefore, the same walls that protect, *smother*, due to the insufficiency of his 'place' in social life. The university is this 'other' space, defined by what it is not, in terms of social life; the university is a *non-society*; consequently, academic activities continue to be viewed as *non-work*. At the same time, if it is true that the university offers shelter, it is not a forum for 'decisions.' Decisions are made beyond the walls of the university, and, in this sense, it is possible to recognize that the realm of ideas does not necessarily overlap with practical life, for

production that is useful, as opposed to what is not useful in academic terms will necessarily be subjected to a filter to separate the 'wheat' from the 'chaff.' Therefore, when the intellectual decides to join an academic career, his decision, is already *re-active*; in other words, a decision implying alienation: *non-participation*, in-action, non-production and, therefore, as an act, it spells *refuge*. Seeking refuge acknowledges the threat of hostile social surroundings in regards to reflection, and recognizes that, outside the academic space, there are few remaining opportunities for genuine intellectual work within social life. When seeking out academia as a venue for knowledge one gathers in the trenches where, at least for a while, to it is possible to breathe and, thus, live to see another day.

Critical thought demands more than a simple faculty membership in a university. The ritual baptism as a ticket to a world where intellectual activity, more than just a privilege, represents a functional duty, bestows academic authority on the individual-intellectual; even if he is now a university professor, his academic credentials will not guarantee his psychological survival. It follows, since, among other factors, academy hostile spaces are rife concerning *different-thinking*. Exclusion among peers, the holding back of information and straight-forward sabotage also figure as visceral forces in the dynamics of what one calls 'the academic environment.' Interestingly, what presented itself as an escape into the university to seek refuge does not permit that pain be *mitigated*, per se, since pain will *shift*, only to reappear *elsewhere*; hence, the remedy for the critical intellectual may be sought in sharing, with an always finite audience, that which he feels to discomfort him.

### The information society as an autistic society

Hypothetically, contemporary society has produced the conditions for a dynamic information exchange and has authorized, through its means, a greater access to communications. This would, therefore, be a welcoming society, increasing the significance in the social role of intellectuals; after all, contemporary society is structured on the premise that information is indispensable. For this example, one may say: "The average north American watches, on a yearly basis, 973 hours of paid TV and 630 hours the open TV; he spends 189 hours online; he plays 85 hours of video games; watches 61 hours of DVDs; spends 15 hours navigating the Internet on his cell phone and spends 12 hours in movie theaters – according to a 2007 study by Veronis Suhler Stevenson, an investment fund specialized in media." Sérgio Dávila, "Order in Chaos," *Caderno Mais!, Folha de São Paulo*, December, 2008, E 7.

Nevertheless, it is the non-conversion of the bountiful information into socially relevant action, or yet, into an increased capacity of reflection which, in itself, defines

the non-illuminist predicament of the information society, recalling the old rule by which quality is not measured by a quantity. Gilberto Dupas, *Ethics and Power in the Information Society* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2001), 49.

Therefore, the effect of this information avalanche on postmodern individuals does not include a process of conscious and critical *self-subjectification*, but an intensified feeling of destitution, anxiety and melancholy, furthering modernity's misguided campaign. Moacir Scliar, "The Birth of Melancholy," *Ide: psicanálise e cultura*, 31, 2008, 135.

So, contrary to what would be desirable, individualism does not bring the individual any closer to himself; rather, like a stranger to himself, he inhabits an intimate and invisible cage, casting both gloom and disease. The virulent state of lethargy affecting the drifting individual in his private labyrinths generates, therefore, an autistic society.

An autistic society is one which, in spite of existing communication, is devoid of meaning, which has been dethroned. All speak and listen at the same time, while each only, in fact, searches for himself and, thus, associativism for millions upon millions of individuals dies in the process. These are statues communicating, as one can gather from the beautiful metaphor explored by Norbert Elias, as cited by Moacir Scliar: "The individual becomes lonely, like a thinking statue with eyes that can see, ears that can hear, a brain that can think, but incapable of establishing contact with other speaking statures, or with the world as a whole, from which he is separated by the abyss of incommunicability." Moacir Scliar, "The Birth of Melancholy," *Ide: psicanálise e cultura*, 31, 2008, 134.

People may be piled up in urban centers, may be jostling for elbow room, may access cell phones and messengers, may go to telecommunication centers but, fundamentally, they simply continue to engage in mimetically standardized behavior dictated by mass production interests, and, therefore, they continue to see themselves as individuals alien to the world of socially relevant action. In spite of the lights of television and communication media, despite a range of instruments offered by civilization and data processing technology, what ensues is obscurity, semantic poverty, opacity, fading and absences... blindness becomes possible in broad daylight... a society thus constituted is not, therefore, a society of enlightenment. Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?," in *Dits et Écrits*, vol. 2, 2000, 351.

### Violence and the discomfort of intellectuals

Frequently, throughout the history of modernity, the use of force against intellectuals is what closely affects his formation, physical sacrifice, persecution, isolation, imprisonment and extermination. Marx was the target of

hostilities during his entire intellectual trajectory. Walter Benjamin did not sacrifice himself on his own accord, as Trotsky did not go into exile guided by his own free will, and Gramsci did not choose to write in a prison cell because he considered these surroundings more inspiring than his office. The *universal* idea of *freedom of thought* as a fundamental human right since the Declaration of 1789, survives only as a sophisticated chant of liberal discourse, which does not survive as an *effective right* in terms of *thinking-beyond*. Therefore, the thought that challenges, the thought that presents resistance, the thought that goes against the flow, the thought that represents an act of full renovation is the target of justified and founded suppression of freedom. Theodor Adorno, *Education and Emancipation* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2003), 144.

Violence that spills blood in physical or hostile acts, emphasizing the existence of the body to suppress the spreading of ideas, ranks tops in terms of supreme political persecution, of the curtailing of the freedom of thought and opinion, as an autocratic means of defining the thinking space. It is, of course, possible to think within the limits of established conventions. Otherwise, thinking becomes simply an act of vandalism, and all vandalism must be monitored, controlled, castrated, and imprisoned. Modern society promises freedom and practices control. However, the examination of violence in modern life that is tainted by bloody and physical persecution disguises other means of subtler violence, controlling and dominating the production of knowledge.

Therefore, parallel to violence, which *causes the body to bleed*, one should beware of the violence which *causes the soul to bleed*. While dictatorships and totalitarianism persecute and sacrifice intellectuals as political threats, contemporary democracies promote the widespread elimination of intellectual *venues*, *belittling* the role of the intellectual, and not by physical attacks. Under the principle of tolerance, intellectuals are tolerated, though still incapacitated in terms of intervening. Contemporary democracies, therefore and above all, are built on a self-sustaining hypocritical idea of freedom of thought which, on the contrary, is practiced in the absence of a formative education towards citizenship and in the absence of democrats, as states Olgária Matos. Olgária Matos, "The Many and the One: mixed blood logos and hospitality," *Ide: psicanálise e cultura*, 31, 2008, 11.

In contemporary democracies, swamped in the swell of information, exchanged messages and the multiplicity of conciliatory communications, the loss of significance in *communicative speech*, in *text registers*, and *social memory*, are but three symptoms of the loss of *venue* for what is intellectual. This is because the intellectual is engaged with and through these elements and, thus, in their absence, intellectual activity is doomed. Word are defeated by the fugacity of image and consciousness (political and social) goes under in the turbulent seas of

moral indifference of our times. Jürgen Habermas, "Chaos in the Public Sphere," *Caderno Mais!, Folha de São Paulo* (2006): 04.

New methods, new technologies, new forms of communicating, online media, programmed forms of interaction, pressure to publish academic papers on behalf of CAPES, the countless academic magazines and other virtual resources do not mitigate the absence of the *reading* experience, of *texts* and of *reflection*. This entire media performs at the same blinding speed of our globalized world, violating the means of text-based acculturation. The anti-culture of texts, which is developed within a highly *volatile* flow of unending written materials, conspires against any attempts to establish a culture that would grant intellectual production the means of intervening in public life. In corrupting the credibility of the text itself, any possibility of an enlightened society is equally corrupted, and this is where modernity fails to fulfill its promise. Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?," in *Dits et Écrits*, vol. 2, 2000, 345

Therefore, the lost prospects of authentic illuminism make it impossible, today, to envision the overcoming of humanities passive and individualized demeanor within our globalized society. The power of choice in a generic culture, a culture of masses absorbed by unity, is flattened to cause the disappearance of autonomous subjectivity and, therefore, the quality of the *human* gives way to the quality of the *generic*. Martin Jay, *A imaginação dialética: história da Escola de Frankfurt e do Instituto de Pesquisas Sociais* (Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto, 2008), 342. The masses refer only to icons identified with the generic construction process itself; they revere what the market reveres. The lost subjectivity of individualism is a trap of the modern civilization process, and the price to pay is the deactivation of the continuous link that allows for intersubjectivity, a fundamental element for the construction of social life. An easy prey to the domination processes of a merchandizing media, the person is imprisoned in the dynamics of taste, which further emphasizes the melancholic character of a stagnation-prone civilization, a victim of individualistic enlargement of the ego, to quote Freud. Moacir Sliar, "The Birth of Melancholy," *Ide: psicanálise e cultura*, 31, 2008, 138.

Paradoxically, immediate satisfaction becomes the prison that keeps the person in a permanent state of subservience to the market. It is the publicity image, now, which represents the instrument that sabotages the superego in creating the false perception that, even imprisoned by taste and consumption, the cell in which the individual is kept, is as large as his purchasing power. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood Douglas, *O mundo dos bens: para uma antropologia do consumo* (Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 2004).

In contemporary democracies, bathed by the principles of tolerance, new means of torture do not condone hostility towards the body, since we are horrified by this

prospect. Explicit forms of ideological, political or intellectual persecution are also strictly avoided, quoting consolidated constitutional rights. However, this does not eliminate the uninterrupted processes of devising and honing new forms of exile, prevalent throughout the history of modernity. Modern life, especially instrumental modern life, lacks an comprehensive idea of intellectual freedom and, therefore, when challenged, creates barriers and adjusts the meaning of freedom, imbuing the idea of freedom itself with limitations and provisos accessible exclusively to those in power. Instead of providing more ample space for freedom, modernity moves in the opposite direction, towards banning the prospect of thought. Thus, the vertigo of intellectuals is a clear symptom of their ensuing sense of discomfort. Sigmund Freud, *O mal-estar na civilização* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1997) and Sergio Paulo Rouanet, *Mal-estar na modernidade* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1993).

One shifts, at this pace, from explicit denial of freedom to implicit means of disguising the truth. In this process, the possibility of critical analysis is buffered by systemic mechanisms and, therefore, its seepage into the systems allows for its endemic survival as an ornament of sorts, in the onward march of instrumental modernity. Thus, intellectuals are accepted, even admitted, for they exercise a *meaningless* freedom, *void* of content. So, the subtle perception of the field of debates exposes the scenario of critical intellectuals drawing their weapons against inexistent opponents. Hence, the phenomena of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which enables life in a world that has decreed the end of ideologies and meta-narratives: psychological introspection of suffering, anxiety and pain. Critical intellectuals speak to deaf audiences, communicate with blind readers, exchange communication with nonexistent parties, issue publications to shapeless masses of people, disseminate texts on the internet to multitudes of bits and usernames, generating intellectual production statistics of interest only to general productivity records. No doubt, information technology contributes to the advancement of communication, though its effectiveness continues to be questionable in terms of fostering critical awareness. Therefore, in *Chaos in the Public Sphere*, Habermas states: "The use of the Internet both broadened and fragmented communication nexus. Hence, the Internet produces, on one hand, a subversive effect on authoritative regimes and their policies towards the public sphere." Jürgen Habermas, "Chaos in the Public Sphere," *Caderno Mais!, Folha de São Paulo* (2006): 04.

It becomes apparent in contemporary democracies, however, that intellectuals are, in fact, granted the right to speak, but not to be heard and, if heard, not to be understood, and if understood, this will pass, as all passes, faced with the perception that there is nothing that can be done about it; after all, we live at the end of historical times. Hence, his assimilation into the system

and the candidness of his active role. The demise of the historical persona in philosophy indicates, therefore, since the turn of the century, more than the cooling process of the emancipatory drive but, especially, it suggests the death of the individual himself. The anguish of critical reflection, therefore, becomes a ghost which, then, turns into an intellectual monster, causing the unrest within the soul; hence the birth of agitation which characterizes the life of internal riches converted into emotional and social misery. Vladimir Safatle, *Cinismo e falência da crítica* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2008), 124-140.

### Melancholy and political crisis

Banned from the venues of playful of socialization, of intervention in social life, of taking part in public interlude and community exchanges, critical thinking becomes a sterile exercise of reflecting social pains. So, the intellectual suffers of the ills of those who are invited to bring, due to the hostile world of autistic individuals, what belongs to *inter-psychological* spheres into *intra-psychological* spheres and, therefore, of *political* jurisdiction. The challenge posed to intellectual life in a world that degenerates into virtual interaction networks also pertains to living with social strategies designed to deny them political venue. Eduardo C. B. Bittar, *Justice in Postmodernity* (Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2009), 54-68. The strategy of invisibility, of opacity and the non-venue, in the recluse environment in which critical analysis is accepted and 'socially approved,' annuls the perspective of thought as a form of changing social mechanisms. In this sense, the metaphor found in the image created by Dürer (*Melancholy I*), comes into full force: melancholy is the degree of power that wings build up in order to make sure that all remains the same as it ever was. Moacir Scliar, "The Birth of Melancholy," *Ide: psicanálise e cultura*, 31, 2008, 135.

Globalized online society, as a society drifting away from politics is, therefore, fit to make way to a new generation – the *Prozac generation*, the de-mobilization society. It absorbs, in terms of the individual, that which is public, and the confusion that ensues internalizes within the psyche the pent up social anxieties that can only find remedy through politically engaged and interactive social measures. Zigmund Bauman, *In Search of Politics* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2000) and *Community* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2003). Therefore, the pain of those who have 'ears to hear and eyes to see' is *experienced* as an *individual* psychological symptom and, thus, assimilated as a problem referred to professional psychological counsel, a private practice, a place of reclusion, where the most extreme form of subjectivity is practiced, even if guided by psychoanalytical ethics. Maria Rita Kehl, *Psychoanalysis and Ethics* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2002).

Psychoanalysis has come to speak of depression as

the *illness of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, in the same form as hysteria was the illness of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Sigmund Freud, "Studies on Hysteria," in *Sigmund Freud*, vol. 2 (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1996), 34-320.

The Greek were familiar with the term *krásis* (temperament) since Hippocrates, and the melancholic temperament, as compared to the sanguine, phlegmatic and bilious, is identified as the most pathological. The term temperament has finds limited use in psychology, as is the case with a multitude of intellectual concepts, including that of melancholy, to find more appropriate perspectives, Susana Kampff Lages, *Walter Benjamin: translation and melancholy* (São Paulo: EDUSP, 2007), 101 having been substituted by studies of depression, in its psycho-somatic and physiological aspects. The information society frustrates the expectation of social interaction.

What is noticeable, however, is that sensible psychism in the contemporary world appears, especially, as adaptive and reactive. More and more, the principle of reality governs the means of abandonment of what the outside world recognizes and deems a form of "idealism;" increasingly, market logic imposes its way of life, taking hostage our means of structuring coexistence, projecting the impossibility of things being any different. One must adapt. Imitation, the fundamental element in forming a social identity, is the market's weapon of choice for the transplantation on a global scale of adoptable and mandatory prototypes. Norbert Elias, *O processo civilizador* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 1994).

From the perspective of social life, envy corrosively affects the logic of construction, not in the socialization spaces, but in the competitiveness between *losers* and *winners*. The loss of meaning in justice venues, and the slow encroachment of market anarchy promoting an anti-solidary individualistic spirit, come as no surprise. Psychism in face of these contemporary hostilities, is set in a defensive mode in order to safeguard the slightest control over itself, or yet, if it intends to survive its state of sleepwalking, still attempting to permanently recreate the space for interaction, and, with it, the forms of social integration, managing emancipated and emancipatory psychological forms.

A prisoner of numerous anxieties, present-day individuals, in spite of overwhelming torrents of information, begrudge the absence of political channels for venting social needs and, thus, he identifies the smothering character of living in a society which provides information but lacks any effective means of social interaction. Therefore, modern man remains a hostage to anxiety due to the ill effects of social life, converted into a defeated soldier, without ever having fought or approached the battlefield; there is, in fact, no battle to be fought since the ideology encompassing the end of ideologies generates an overall feeling that, in the absence or excess of limitations, projects its very expression. In the society of consumerist ego worship,

there is no room for common venues; commonality is important in the need to share, which, as an experience and as a concept, that has ceased to exist in the dynamics of customs, for sharing implies giving up pleasure or, rather, giving up narcissistic pleasure. Individualism turns the need for self-satisfaction into neurosis, an element that works as a destructive yeast on social psychism; if civilization implies giving up on pleasure, then there is no possible civilization in which all wish to indiscriminately enjoy every reward.

The individual and isolated assessment of social life, the privatization of existential anxieties, the built-in social isolation based on the fragmentation of the disillusioned idea of human nature, the corralling of ideologies on the outskirts of a one-way world, the disorientation of an era, are factors making of existence smothering cubicle... all these symptoms converge to establish that the crop of radical liberal views falls considerably short of its ideals. Considering present market conditions, it's very ideology lacks support. In an anarchistic society of individual thirst quenched by market remedies, justice or any form of social regulation, clearly, does not apply and lacks any social meaning, unless, if viewed, in itself, as a product. It is not an issue of efficiency of consumer rights, but a conjectural issue of the *establishment of rights in themselves*.

Privatizing the dream and confining utopia allow fantasies to become enclosed within material parameters of immediate desires and reification in the act of consuming. While the practices of political awareness whither, in youth or social movements, in a set of political consolidation actions, a tide of new complex contexts is unleashed, renewing the outlook ominous weather on the horizon: unemployment, crumbling family structures, lack of references, environmental degradation. The world becomes, thus, the henchman of utopian emancipatory ideas, and each executed virtue pushes the ego closer to the limiting and controlling principles of reality, subjecting it to castration and conditioning. The ego's structuring under relative limitations of the Eros is not pathological in itself; however the absorption of the entire principle of life by the principle of reality represents a pathological condition of a world that shapes one-dimensional personalities, instruments applied to the productive process. Erich Fromm, *To Have or Be ?* (São Paulo: LTC, 1987).

The current civilization witnesses the withering process of the individual, challenged and defined by the superego of the social world which de-structures autonomy, while social ties are turned over to market interests and trespassed by forms of interaction oblivious to any concern for understanding, but guided by systemic imperatives, which dissolve the categories of the human-individual and human-social interaction. Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2002).

Staunch critical vigilance, reflection to permeate the

gap left by an act of barbarism, a concern for the ailments of the world, an ethical posture towards humanity... these are the characteristics of critical thinking, which guide theoretical action and keep it from becoming a legitimizing instrument of barbarism. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*, (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 1985).

It is, therefore, strongly centered in its power of resistance. Nonetheless, the world's anti-humanism floods the intellectual with guilt for his decision to project himself towards the inside of the human being, of the world, for being ahead of his time. One question will not still: "Is there any redeeming value to be found in the pain felt in 'speaking of pain' or, yet, in 'bearing the pain of others?'" There is always the choice of being assimilated; being assimilated is, always, the effort of adjusting, of fitting into rules, of serving the system, of converting oneself. This means not pushing to *go beyond*, restricting *divergent thought*, and, therefore, the impossibility of *critical thought* itself. Within this context, his art becomes, thus, his martyrdom, his melancholy, his mausoleum. In spite of Walter Benjamin stating, in his 1930's text about left-wing melancholy: "Melancholy and intestinal obstruction have always been associated," Walter Benjamin, "Left-wing Melancholy," in *Magic, Technique, Art and Politics* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994), 77.

for all intents and purposes, the imprisoned condition of the intellectual can only mean a conversion of pleasure into pain, which means the same in the worlds of 20<sup>th</sup> Century English poet, J. Keats, who, in *Ode on Melancholy III*, versifies: "Ay, in the very temple of Delight/ Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine." Therefore, nowadays, the dark, discrete, humid and silent dungeon into which intellectuals are thrust for daring to be and think differently, is operated in broad daylight and, with all freedom and all instruments of civilization at its disposal; yet, it uses weapons that have lost their transformative efficiency.

His acceptance is always subject to his organic condition. The prevailing and hegemonic formula conditions acceptance and inclusion in the system to an alignment with current practices and demands. The price? Self denial. It all conspires towards one end:

convert and deny yourself. Giordano Bruno was forced to do so, when facing the Inquisition, but we are forced to do so every day, in name of practical rationality, which attacks us from all flanks with torrents of pragmatism and immediatism. If for ancient thinkers, such as Aristotle, contemplative life, the most excellent among the forms of the *bíoi*, meant the crowning of a happy existence, the closest to godly activities, we may not say the same, in times when, in spite of surviving, intellectuals take on the burden of thinking the paradoxes of civilization, though unable to intervene to effect transformation. Thus, in the film adapted from the book *The Name of the Rose*, by Umberto Eco, in his retreat for his evening reading, the monk who takes care of the library, a guardian of knowledge and information control, in the company of a secretary, states: "The more the knowledge, the greater the resulting suffering." It is not an accident that, in many cases, the love of thought drives many critical intellectuals to skepticism, a one-way street for those who find their sustenance in pure realism. Sigmund Freud, *O mal-estar na civilização* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1997); Sergio Paulo Rouanet, *Mal-estar na modernidade* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1993).

## CONCLUSIONS

This investigation enables us to realize, from the reading of certain texts, that the situation of the intellectual as a person in history is conditioned to the state of things, socially stacked against him. Thus, given the death of historical philosophical ideas, consequences are intensely felt and experienced throughout social existence, and in the fields of science, social sciences, in general. Therefore, the melancholic distillation of the human condition ceases to act as the birthplace of a possible reflection on emancipation and its forms of realization. The impoverishment of intellectual venues is a sign of its lack of social prestige and the decadence of this critical potential, nothing that one may not convert, in a more incisive bet towards the activation of the role that the public sphere has in the creation of perspectives for social life.