

The objectification of human phenomena: observations in the light of Winnicott and Heidegger

A objetificação dos fenômenos humanos: um olhar à luz de Winnicott e Heidegger

*Caroline Vasconcelos Ribeiro*¹

UEFS

E-mail: carolinevasconcelos@hotmail.com

Abstract

In *The Age of the World Picture*, philosopher Martin Heidegger claims that scientific representations do not reduce themselves to pure appropriations of what they present. Rather, they convey investigations that confine being to rules of appropriation. Those rules govern how natural science accesses phenomena. The choice of natural science as the predominant mode of representation of reality entails what Heidegger calls a process of objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*). In his *Zollikon Seminars*, Heidegger questions the tribute paid by the sciences of the mind to the logic of the natural sciences, and stresses that Freud, by thinking of the mind as a machine driven by instinctive powers, assigns to human phenomena the objective features set by the natural sciences. This paper purports to show that Winnicott, by formulating a theory of personal maturing, disagrees with the objectifying requirements of the natural sciences. For Winnicott, traditional psychoanalysis uses categories that are inadequate for describing the changes babies undergo in the environment that gives them care and attention, because its analysis is confined to the field of libido relations. With that in mind, it is not possible to speak about human maturation processes using an objectifying language; Winnicott stresses (in *The newborn and his mother*) that “I cannot sacrifice a patient on the altar of science”. This paper argues that Winnicott disagrees with the naturalistic imperative, which reduces the real to what is objective and places physics as a model for the sciences. The paper also broaches on the issue of how far the considerations of Heidegger and Winnicott regarding access to human phenomena allow us to discuss the current overwhelming process of medicating everyday life.

¹ Holds a Bachelor of Psychology of the Federal University of São João del-Rei (1997), a MA in Philosophy of the Federal University of Paraíba (2000) and a PhD of Philosophy of the UNICAMP (2008), supervised by Professor Dr. Zeljko Loparic. She is Professor of the State University of Feira de Santana- Bahia-Brazil. This article refers to an updated version of the same title of lecture at the **XX Colóquio Internacional Winnicott and I International Winnicott Association (IWA) Congress**.

Key-words: **objectification, Heidegger, Winnicott**

Resumo:

No texto *A época das imagens de mundo* o filósofo Martin Heidegger nos indica que a representação científica não se reduz a uma mera apreensão do que se apresenta, ao invés, equivale a uma investigação que faz com que o ente se domestique às regras de apreensão, posto que “o ataque das regras domina”. Estas regras governam o modo como a ciência natural deve acessar os fenômenos. O que está implicado na eleição da representação científico-natural como índice hegemônico de acesso ao real é a execução do que Heidegger denomina de processo de objetificação (*Vergegenständlichung*). Na obra *Seminários de Zollikon*, o filósofo problematiza o tributo que as ciências dos fenômenos psíquicos pagam à lógica da pesquisa científico-natural e afirma que Freud, ao pensar o psiquismo como um aparelho regido por forças pulsionais, destina aos fenômenos humanos pretensões de objetividade afinadas às ciências da natureza. Com esse trabalho pretendemos indicar que Winnicott, ao formular a teoria do amadurecimento pessoal, não faz coro às pretensões objetificantes da ciência natural. Para Winnicott, a psicanálise tradicional serve-se de categorias que são incapazes de descrever as trocas que se estabelecem entre um bebê e o ambiente que lhe provê cuidados, afinal, reduz sua análise ao campo das relações libidinais. Posto que não é possível versar sobre o amadurecer humano munido com uma semântica que segue padrões objetificantes Winnicott, no texto *O recém-nascido e sua mãe*, afirma: “não posso sacrificar um paciente sobre o altar da ciência”. Visamos, com esse artigo, indicar que Winnicott não faz coro ao imperativo naturalista que reduz o real ao objetificável e estabelece a física como a ciência emblemática. Pleiteamos, ainda, tematizar o quanto as ponderações de Heidegger e Winnicott em relação ao acesso aos fenômenos humanos nos permitem discutir o contemporâneo e avassalador processo de medicalização do cotidiano.

Palavras-chave: objetificação, Heidegger, Winnicott

This work aims at fostering a dialogue between Martin Heidegger’s philosophy and Winnicottian psychoanalysis. The guiding lines are Heidegger’s criticism of what he calls the process of objectifying reality and the resistance we find in Winnicott’s psychoanalysis to the logic of the natural sciences. Winnicott’s remarks on human phenomena do not echo the imperatives of modern philosophy of reducing all that is real to that which is objectifiable and of setting physics as a paradigm for all of science.

By refusing to describe human nature from the perspective of a semantics inspired in a physicalist language,² i.e. instead of thinking human psychology in terms of an apparatus ruled by drives, Winnicott invites us to contemplate the subtlety and depth of the “mother-baby pair”, and sets up alternative readings of the initial human phenomena, leading psychoanalysis towards unexplored terrains. Winnicott’s thought highlights the need for an extension of psychoanalytic theory backwards. In this paper, we indicate how that backwards extension into the more primitive stages of the human maturation process is the beginning of a new way of approaching human beings, radically different from the one conveyed in Freudian language, which suffers the influence of the standards of natural sciences.³ Through a dialogue between Heidegger and Winnicott, we question the increasing medicalization of life. More specifically, we draw considerations on the imperatives of classifying and medicating schoolchildren who allegedly show learning deficits and are for that reason diagnosed as suffering from ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder).

1. The process of objectifying reality

To set up the aforementioned dialogue, we shall begin clarifying Heidegger’s reading of the prevailing mode of unveiling of beings. This includes focusing on the process of objectifying reality, which is a trait of our contemporary state of affairs. We shall use as guide Heidegger’s *Zollikon Seminars*, which contain talks delivered to psychiatrists and students during a 10-year period in Zollikon, Switzerland.⁴

To entice an investigative attitude among the participants regarding the ontological bases of the sciences of mental phenomena, Heidegger attempted to deconstruct the idea – much emphasized among commentators of Freudian psychoanalysis – that Freud would have parted ways with the Modern heritage by

² We shall see below that Winnicott explicitly criticizes a physicalism in Freud’s work. It to be found especially in his metapsychology. Freud’s concepts of mental apparatus, drive (*Trieb*), repression (*Verdrängung*), unconscious, etc. – make use methods analogous to those of physics. On Freud’s physicalist heritage, see Loparic (2003, 2005); Fulgencio (2001, 2008); Assoun (1983); and Ribeiro (2008).

³ Freud himself compares his epistemic procedure with the ones used in physics. See Freud (2013 and 2014).

⁴ Upon an invitation by Medard Boss, Heidegger accepted the challenge of lecturing and debating with an audience that differed from his ordinary students. This seminar series began on September 8, 1959. On that occasion, Heidegger addressed a large audience at the psychiatry clinic of the University of Zurich. Soon afterwards, the meetings began to take place at Boss’s house, in Zollikon. See Boss, Preface to Heidegger (2001). We shall cite the *Zollikoner Seminare* referring to the pagination of the original edition.

positing an unconscious element within the psychological machinery. Heidegger argued that by assigning to the psychological realm the claims to objectivity that are typical of the natural sciences, Freud placed himself as herald of the process of objectification of beings.⁵ But what does this mean? How can we track down its installation and consolidation? To answer those questions, we must first understand what Heidegger calls “modification of the presence of entities objectivity”. In his seminar of July 6, 1965, Heidegger took up the issue as follows:

Objectivity [Gegenständlichkeit] is a definite modification of the presence of things. A subject thereby understands the presencing of a thing from itself with regard the representedness [Vorgestelltheit]. Presence is understood as representedness. Thereby, presence is no longer taken as what is given by itself, but only as how it is an object for me as the thinking subject, that is, how it is made an object over and against me. This kind of experience of being has existed only since Descartes, which is to say, only since the time when the emergence of the human being as a subject was put into effect. (HEIDEGGER, 2001, p. 129).

Although the Freudian concept of unconscious seems to create a Narcissistic wound in the Cartesian view of man as a thinking subject, Heidegger points out that it does not entail a break with attempts of Modernity to apprehend all phenomena objectively. By conceiving the mind through an analogy with machines and by positing the unconscious as a causal factor of all mental phenomena – dreams, symptoms, parapraxes, etc. – Freud proceeded as a natural scientist whose goal was to explain the functioning of the mind.⁶ Freud conceived psychoanalysis’ main step forward as that of having treated scientifically a term that had been “manipulated uncarefully” in literature and philosophy: the unconscious. Said treatment consisted in determining objectively the laws that govern its functioning; thus psychoanalysis “by its researches [...] has led to a knowledge of the characteristics the unconscious mental which have hitherto been unsuspected, and it has discovered some of the laws that govern it” (FREUD, 1996a, p. 306).

⁵ On this topic, see Ribeiro (2014).

⁶ In the 24 Jan. 1964 seminar, Heidegger stated that Freud observing the psychodynamics of clinical phenomena, considers as real and as being, more precisely, as “real and actual” that which “can be explained in terms of psychological, unbroken, causal connections between forces”. This statement immediately led his students to refer to the well-known physicist Max Planck, who claimed that “only that which can be measured is real” (HEIDEGGER, 2001, p. 7).

According to Freud, the view that the mental contains an unconscious element allows psychoanalysis to figure among the natural sciences (FREUD, 2014, p. 49). To secure its place among the natural sciences, Freud formulated explicitly the laws that govern mental life, and addressed rigorously and objectively a concept that in fiction and philosophy had been dealt with only tentatively: the unconscious. Hence, Heidegger does not hesitate to place Freudian psychoanalysis among the sciences that pay a tribute to natural-scientific logic. From this perspective, by making use of terms such as those of mental apparatus, drive, homeostatic equilibrium, investment, charge and discharge of energy, and others, Freud would be operating an objectification of the mental.⁷

By speaking of a “modification of the presence of beings in objectivity”, Heidegger refers to the fact that, with Descartes, man achieved the condition of a subject. The Latin word *subiectum*, he says, has not always been synonymous to “thinking I”; rather, it was a wide-ranging term that referred everything that is at the basis, all that underlies. For this reason, in the book *Nietzsche II*, Heidegger says that we need first to draw apart the term *subiectum* and the concept of man, because *subiectum* could also apply to “[...] stones, plants, and animals no less than to men” (HEIDEGGER, 2007, p. 105). During the Modern era, by becoming *subiectum* par excellence, the “thinking I” becomes “the characterizing element of that which is properly already there for representation”, the object (HEIDEGGER, 1992, p.107). In the *Zollikon Seminars* Heidegger states:

Descartes was looking for a *fundamentum absolutum inconcussum*. But this can only be one’s own I. For only I myself am present everywhere, whether I think, whether I doubt, whether I wish, or whether I take a position toward something. Therefore, when searching for an absolutely secure foundation in thinking, the I becomes what “lies-in front” [*Vorliegendes*] in an outstanding sense because it is something indubitable. **From then on, subject progressively became the term for I.** Object now became all that stands over against the I and its thinking, by being able to be determined through the principles and categories of this thinking. (HEIDEGGER, 2001, p.154/144) [emphasis added]

With Descartes, the thinking ego became the ontological basis for all things, which attain the condition of objects that one must grasp through clear and distinct

⁷ Loparic (2005) and Fulgencio (2008) point out how Freud grounded his psychoanalysis on a soil seeded by the Kantian project for research on natural sciences and by the epistemology of Ernest Mach. Hence, it is quite difficult to maintain that Freud would have parted ways with the objectifying imperatives that are typical of Modernity.

ideas. According to Zimmerman (1990, p. 262), Descartes placed the ego as the ground that provided principles with which one measures the presence (or reality) of all things. Hence, “nothing really is unless it can be ‘re-presented’ (*vorgestellt*) to the subject completely by himself according to the rigorous standards of that same subject” (ZIMMERMAN, 1990, p. 262). From this perspective, representation is no mere apprehension of that which presents itself, of what is there. Rather, it is a form of apprehension that captures that which presents itself in a previously secured format. This renders beings as something understood not as that which is there, “simply in front of”, “before us”. Modernity’s great claim consists in this securing, which domesticates being into the rules of clear and objective apprehension, given that the “the attack of the rules dominates”.⁸ Those rules govern the way a subject clearly and distinctly – i.e. truly – apprehends “something”. All beings are then equaled to an entity represented by a subject. This attack on the entities is the hallmark of the process of objectification, which consists in subjecting the totality of beings to the objective domain. This entails that nothing can happen, or come to light, which is not determined as an object. (HEIDEGGER, 1982, p. 46).

According to Heidegger (2006), with the process of objectification of beings, the man who thinks gives way to the researcher engaged in research programs, who is assessed by presenting results and who is “driven by efficiency”. The outcome can be detected in the transformation of knowledge into an economic good, in the imposition of productivism as a necessary way of being in the world and in the regulation of the forms of life by the functionalization of existence. The wonder, which from the beginnings of Western civilization, mobilized thought, became a calculating action that captures all there is based on rules that objectify. This configuration had Heidegger characterizing our age as the “Age of the Technique”. But what does this mean?

The ontological basis for this phenomenon invites us to understand technique as a form of unveiling reality, nature, “all that there is”. Although Heidegger’s remarks on technique are quite complex, we are interested here on highlighting the technical device that reduces everything to the condition of a deposit (*Bestand*), a reservoir available for

⁸ This reasoning is based on footnote 9 of “L’epoque des ‘conceptions du monde’”, where Heidegger defines precisely his concept of *Vorstellung* (representation). See Heidegger (2006, p. 138-145).

the cycle of production.⁹ This is not about understanding technique as a means for producing gadgets and equipment, but about understanding it as a way of apprehending “all there is” through the condition of the deposit (*Bestand*). It is a permanent attack on beings that converts them into objects for use and for calculations. (LOPARIC, 1996). To elucidate this form of unveiling reality through the logic of unending use and abuse of “all there is”, an emblematic passage from Heidegger’s conference on The question concerning technology delivered in 1953, is helpful:

The hydroelectric plant sets the Rhine to supplying its hydraulic pressure, which then sets the turbines turning. This turning sets those machines in motion whose thrust sets going the electric current [...]. In the context of the interlocking processes pertaining to the orderly disposition of electric energy, even the Rhine itself appears as something at our command. The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine river as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. **Rather the river is dammed up into the power plant.** (HEIDEGGER, 2001, p. 20)

What interests us in this passage is Heidegger not only alerting how much we can transform a river into a mere device for providing electricity for the sake of using profitably natural resources, but also unveiling a way of disposing of nature as something that is there to be used, processed, and manipulated. Heidegger says it was the hydroelectric plant that had the river dammed up into it, and not the other way around. But what does this mean? Is it a challenge to the rules of logical thinking, or an unsettling and provoking image? By saying something unreasonable, namely, that it was the plant that dammed up the river into it, Heidegger is alerting that the river has been reduced into the condition of a device for providing energy. It is as if the river could no longer simply be there. The river Rhine becomes a deposit, an energy device for the hydroelectric plant. Nature, apprehended as *Bestand*, cannot simply be there without being explored! Hence, the river presented by Hölderlin in the hymn *The Rhine* loses its sense because it no longer affords productive qualities; it cannot be unveiled as a natural resource. The river “evoked by the work of art” is replaced by the river Rhine of the works of engineering and of the tourist industry (HEIDEGGER, 2001, p. 20). The river, deprived of any poetic enchantment, is reduced to a device that can be attached to a

⁹ Some authors translate *Bestand* as deposit, other as resource, and others still as raw material. Despite these differences, the sense of something available for use, of something seen only with respect to its functionality, remains. We addressed Heidegger’s approach to technique in Ribeiro (2009).

hydroelectric plant and its logic of production. The riverbed becomes a device functioning for the plant. After all, if machines do not operate in vain, nature will not be allowed the possibility of simply being there to enchant us. This logic consists in challenging beings to unveil themselves as deposits, resources – whether energy resources, financial resources, even human resources.¹⁰

The unveiling of reality that governs the “Age of the Technique” consists in reducing all beings to the condition of devices for the constant fulfilling of demands. Everything becomes *Bestand* and as such must be compelled to answer with maximum profit and minimum spending (HEIDEGGER, 2001, p. 19). Objectification becomes the predominant way of apprehending reality, and from that imperative not even men escape.

Given our brief Heideggerian analysis of the imperatives of objectification present in the “Age of the Technique”, we may now ask whether – and to what extent – this philosophical diagnosis relates to Winnicott’s psychoanalysis. To be sure, we cannot expect a Winnicottian ontological analysis of this process, because philosophical flights are not inherent to psychoanalysis. But we may ask whether Winnicottian psychoanalysis fits in with the process of objectification of reality; whether Winnicott agrees with or resists to that process while thinking about human phenomena.

2. Winnicott and the refusal to objectify human nature

In “The psychology of madness: a contribution from psycho-analysis” Winnicott alerts us to the need to pay attention to the initial stages of human development. He thus declares the need for an “extension of psycho-analytic theory backwards” (WINNICOTT, 1989vk, p. 95). Backwards extension of the theory towards a study of the more primitive stages of maturing does not entail using the semantic arsenal of traditional psychoanalysis to speak of the more primitive relations between mother and baby. This is not a mere widening of the scope of the phenomena that are to be analyzed, but the construction of a language capable of reaching the subtleties of the initial mother-baby relation. This entails addressing those initial stages without the categories of Freudian metapsychology, which describe human phenomena in terms of a play of drives and forces within the mental apparatus. If the analytic horizon is attached

¹⁰ We explore further this Heideggerian argument in Ribeiro (2009).

to a metapsychological semantics, then the investigation will turn on the question about the satisfaction of the drives; in other words, on the how the mental apparatus invests on its objects.¹¹ However, if the language for speaking of human phenomena is not hooked onto the physicalism that is typical of metapsychology, then human nature and the first moments of the baby's life may be analyzed considering environmental reliability, mother's care, the long journey towards integration, living in his or her body and the capacity to relate to shared objects.¹² From a Winnicottian perspective, the baby is moved by a tendency to mature, and not by drives towards objects of investment. The language for describing the initial exchanges between mother and baby cannot be reduced to the field of libido relations, but must consider the environment that provides care and reliability. The troubles that afflict this initial relation have to do with the continuity of being and the quality of the communication, i.e. they are not restricted to the appeasement of opposing drives. Hence, Winnicott's focus is on the baby's maturation process, and not on the polarity of pleasure and displeasure of drives. Winnicott is interested in environmental provision and not in the vicissitudes of the drives, and for that reason he invites us to pay attention to the mother's adaptability to the baby's needs, i.e., he invites us to consider "[...] the deep waters of mutuality that does not relate directly to drives or to instinct tensions" (WINNICOTT, 1970b [1969], p. 199). On the mother's adaptation, Winnicott states:

In early psycho-analytic days adaptation could only mean one thing, meeting the infant's instinctual needs. A great deal of misconception has arisen out of the slowness of some to understand that an infant's needs are not confined to instinct tensions, important though these may be. [...] *The language here is that the mother 'does not let her infant down'*. (WINNICOTT, 1965r [1963], p. 83)

The author calls attention to the nature of the language needed to analyze the "deep waters of mutuality", i.e. to describe the silent communication and the mother's care for the baby, if he or she is lucky enough to have a sufficiently good mother. By alerting us that such language should not be restricted to the field of instinctual tensions, Winnicott indicates the need for considering the environment and its reliability. This

¹¹ See Freud (2013).

¹² This journey is characterized, in environmental terms, as follows: "The facilitating environment can be described as *holding*, developing into *handling*, to which is added *object-presenting*. In such a facilitating environment, the individual undergoes development which can be classified as *integrating*, to which is added *indwelling* (or *psycho-somatic collusion*) and then *object-relating*." (WINNICOTT, 1974, p. 72).

implies that by mitigating the role of the environment and by describing the baby from an inner psychological perspective, traditional psychoanalysis disregarded achievements which cannot happen for a baby; for example, the capacity to desire, the investment on external or internal objects, the feeling of reality, and integration. Winnicottian psychoanalysis shows us that a careful investigation of environmental provisions is unavoidable.

Winnicott does not presuppose that the baby will enjoy the feeling of being a unity, and has us understand that “all the processes of a live infant constitute a going-on-being, a kind of blueprint for existentialism”. The mother who gives to her baby a good enough care during the stages of its absolute dependence “is able to protect her infant’s going-on-being” (WINNICOTT, 1965r [1963], p. 82). When referring to the initial moments of the baby’s life, the author mentions a “blueprint for existentialism” and not a mental apparatus moved by oral drives. By calling into question the use of that metapsychological semantics, Winnicott attempts to describe the mother-baby relation without falling back onto an objectifying language inspired in the natural sciences. He thus states, “The words homeostatic equilibrium again avoid some of the fine points which appear before our eyes if we look at this relationship with the care that it deserves” (WINNICOTT, 1958n, p. 400).

If we observe carefully the mother-baby phenomena, we cannot assume that the baby initially has any sort of integration that enables him or her to feel alive, real, and capable of investing in objects. Hence, it is out of place to speak of discharges and of homeostatic equilibrium, rather than of going-on-being and environmental provision. One cannot talk about these topics without a language that is free from the constraints of natural science. This is why Winnicott says, “I cannot sacrifice a patient on the altar of science” (WINNICOTT, 1964c, p. 150). Along the same reasoning, in “Psycho-analysis and the sense of guilt”, Winnicott criticizes Freudian analysis for centering the sense of guilt on the economics of drives. In that work, Winnicott remarks that we can identify an implicit determinism in Freudian analysis, as well as “an assumption that human nature can be examined objectively and can have applied to it laws that are known to apply in physics” (WINNICOTT, 1958o, p. 20)

In the passage above, we find a criticism of Freud’s debt to the natural-scientific perspective. This allows us to say that Winnicott does not endorse the claims to the effect that all that is real can be reduced to what is objective. In Heideggerian terms, we

might say that Winnicott does not fit in with those scientists who work as heralds of the process of objectification. By refusing to talk about human nature using a metapsychological semantics inspired in physics, Winnicott gave us a theory that does not objectify reality. By aiming at approaching human phenomena as they show themselves to us, Winnicott resists the objectifying domestication that sacrifices patients on the altar of science! Those Winnicottian remarks allow us to relate them to Heidegger's thoughts on the objectification of beings. However, we still need to indicate how Heidegger and Winnicott connect to the main topic of the **20th International Winnicott Colloquium**. How are we to relate the issues discussed above with the future of psychoanalysis? We believe that an analysis regarding the future of psychoanalytic theory and practice as well as of the future of our age cannot set aside something that troubles us deeply today: the growing medicalization of all spheres of life. In the next section, we attempt to think about that process in the light of a dialogue between Heidegger and Winnicott.

3. The medicalization of life and the “altar of science”

For our brief discussion of the process of medicalization of all spheres of life we shall refer to two books: *New grasps and old diagnostics in the age of disorders*, organized by Cecília Collares, Maria Moyses, and Monica Ribeiro (2013), and *Subsidies for the campaign “no to the medicalization of life; medicalization of education”* organized and edited by the Federal Board of Psychology (2011-2013). In the latter, more precisely in the section on “Medicalization of life: whose interests?”, the following information is given: in Brazil, consumption of methylphenidate – a substance administered to children and adolescents for treating “attention deficit” – rose from 70,000 boxes sold in the year 2000 to 2.000,000 boxes sold in 2010. This placed our country as the world's second largest consumer of that substance, after the United States. Distribution¹³ of methylphenidate by government health care facilities in the last five years is up from 43,320 tablets to 1,156,016; an increase of approximately 1,284%.

Although those numbers speak for themselves, it is important to underscore that when speaking of medicalization, we are – according to the definition set by the Federal Psychology Board in the document mentioned above – referring to a process that

¹³ According to ANVISA, distribution is the act of providing medication, pharmaceutical items and the like to consumers. See <http://www.anvisa.gov.br/medicamentos/conceito.htm>

changes social, political, and cultural issues into “disorders”, attributing to individuals a series of difficulties that place them in the realm of psychiatric pathologies, labels, and classifications.

Given that the huge growth in consumption of the above-mentioned medicament refers to an “alleged” disorder that overwhelms the educational context – the ADHD¹⁴ – we ask whether those numbers and that logic are not at the service of the objectification of existence and of the pathologization of students. We believe that those numbers show that our age has sacrificed students, in Winnicott’s words, at the altar of science, more precisely at the altar of pharmaceutical industry. Many students are swollen by the educational model that somehow inflicts on them troubles with reading and writing. But the analysis of those difficulties falls squarely on their behaviors and on their bodies, more precisely on their brains. School and its methods, teaching and learning environment and conditions are excused from any blame in this crusade that hurts the educational ideal. Issues pertaining to the relation between the subject matters taught and student’s lives, teachers’ work conditions, and obsolete curricula are simply ignored. Meanwhile, behaviors that pierce the standards set down by goals for success are promptly catalogued and therefore medicated.

According to the Federal Psychology Board (2011-2013 administration), a danger lurks: the heralds of the pathologization of children who cannot learn properly or do not behave well at school have begun to claim that medication is a right. The child who falls behind in schools must have the right to diagnosis, treatment, and medication, and the public health care system must bear burden of funding this process.

All this seems quite conscientious, but one must pay attention to the fact that claims for that right do not question the cataloguing process and the pharmacologization of existence, which are at the service of the domestication of student, in other words, at the service of a violent calculating rationality that objectifies. From that violence no one can escape, not even the characters that inhabit our playful imagination. Hence:

The “Menino Maluquinho” no longer exists, he has been labeled and now receives psychotropic for ADHD; Mafalda is treated and her Opposing Defiant Disorder (ODD) has been silenced;

¹⁴ Rohde, Barbosa, Tramontina *et al* (2000) point out that, according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, edited by the American Psychiatric Association, the classic triad of symptoms for ADHD is inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsivity. According to the authors, regardless of the classificatory system used, children with ADHD are easily identified in schools and at home. See: Rohde, Barbosa, Tramontina *et al* (2000).

Xaveco no longer lives up in the skies, he has landed, his Attention Deficit has been identified; outspoken and impulsive Emília is quiet and contained [...]. Cascão's case is analyzed and debated in the committee in charge of the DSM-5, and there are divergences as to whether he suffers from OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder for dirt) or from Hydrophobia Disorder... (MOYSÉS and COLLARES, 2013, p. 44)

Although this has been formulated in a jocose manner, the passage reveals the danger we face: that of no longer being allowed to live with people who fall out to the dictatorship of the “good” behavior – either in empirical reality or in phantasy. That danger presents itself in the form of Laws and Statutes – of all levels of public administration – that include services, agreements, and programs for the diagnosis and treatment of alleged disorders into the public health care system, especially dyslexia and ADHD. The Federal Psychology Board has been calling attention to this change in the public policies for education that convey this “benefit”. If those projects are approved without qualifications, the public policies for education will begin treating and diagnosing all children and adolescents that exhibit difficulties in learning, rather than focusing on bettering the quality of the education offered.

This is a rather broad issue, and we do not have the time now to dwell longer on it. Thus, we would like to finish with a few questions:

- 1) Is it true that the proposal for creating diagnostic centers within the public educational system does not entail – as in Heidegger's example of the river Rhine and the power plant – an inversion of the situation? Not diagnostic centers are to be installed in the school system, but rather the school system is to be installed in the diagnostic centers. In this case, schools would be, as the river Rhine, in the condition of a device feeding the machine that produces diagnostics and distributes medicine.
- 2) Is it the case that by agreeing uncritically with law proposals that institutionalize mechanisms for producing diagnostics and large-scale medicine distribution we are not, as Winnicott cautions us, sacrificing students at the altar of science? Or, more precisely, at the altar of the market?
- 3) Would it not be possible to point out that underlying the imperatives of medicalization is the understanding that we are *Bestand*, resources for turning the wheel of the market with maximum profit? In other words, just as a

hydroelectric plant must force a river into producing electricity, so too must students follow the imperative of re-producing formal knowledge and attain maximum school performance! Those who are slow and present deficits in their performances should, from that perspective, be diagnosed and medicated.

- 4) Is it not the case that by shifting focus to individual students rather than questioning the educational context as a whole we are disregarding that an analysis of the environmental conditions is unavoidable when human phenomena are at stake, as Winnicott advocates?

I leave you with an invitation to ponder on these issues.¹⁵

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¹⁵ This text was translated into English by Rogério Severo.

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