

A clockwork orange: The subject's dissolution in modern society

Viviana Román González
INES Research Group. Bilingualism Research Line

*What man knows the most clearly
now it is that the idea he had done
of himself is destined to disappear,
equal as a sand face disappears
in the limits of the sea.*

Michel Foucault

*As I was saying, Alex,
you can be instrumental in
changing the public verdict.*

Do you understand, Alex?

Have I made myself clear?

The Minister, A Clockwork orange.

The Anthony Burgess' most famous work, *A Clockwork Orange*, was written in 1962. The great tale of the young "droog" Alex and his large histories of mugging people, beating up other gangs, raping women, and stealing from shops each night are the best reflection of Burgess constant preoccupation about the destructive and self-destructive aspects of men and society. Immortalized ten years after its publication by the excellent Stanley

Kubrick's filmic version, *A Clockwork Orange* is a strong critic to the modern society which tries to eliminate all the undesirable characteristics of its subjects by using technological practices that, in fact, castrate their free will, their creativity.

In this way, the Subject's Dissolution philosophy is the central reference point from which the history is developed; that is formed from the analysis of the main entities that lead to the individual death - in terms of Foucault- in the project of modernity. The foucaultian Subjects' Dissolution is based on the subject establishment of himself through the different power's modalities, his transformation in agent or his deployment in tactile and operative practices.

This is the case of the main character, who is a typical example of Stanley Kubrick's thought: "The human being is the assassin with the least remorse all around the world. The attraction which violence exerts on us reveals partly

that, in our subconscious mind, we are not so different from our primitive ancestors” . In the book we can see how Alex transforms into a subject created from the others expectations, but not from his own consciousness. Therefore, it is produced a process of “technification of the subject”, which allows the individual to make (with other’s help) some changes in his body, soul, thoughts, conduct, or any form of personality, obtaining a transformation of himself, with the purpose of reaching happiness, purity, wisdom or immortality.

The main tool of this “technification” is the behaviorist psychology, a science appeared at the beginning of the XXth century. In accordance with it, individuals behave according to the stimulus-answer pattern on which is based the treatment to change certain behaviors. Alex becomes an object of this experiment when they applied to him the Ludovico method, trying to produce a change in his ultra-violent conduct. Nevertheless, it was later demonstrated that the Torture-punishment-discipline-prison treatment only caused a temporary conduct displacement or hiding (case of Alex) and that it tended to reappear afterwards unavoidably.

Thus, Alex, as all modern individuals, is desperately looking for his existence meaning, trying to understand the symbolic empty that invades him. His regeneration process is constructed around the free will problem, and the progressive emancipation desire that leads him – in a decadent, infinite spiral- to an eternal return, which is the result of the existence contradictions and

paradoxes, and also the powers’ legitimation and the continuous dissolution of his thoughts, of his soul.

Finally, after a careful analysis of the book, it is relevant to wonder if the human being is bad only by nature, or if it is also important the influence of society. In fact, none of the two options is totally correct or totally wrong, for we have to take into account that men and women, despite their rationality, have also strong instincts. That doesn’t justify brutal actions and conducts, but helps us to understand them.

Nevertheless, the problem here is not the human behavior origins, but the terrible situation of a society, that, even though its great development and “modernity”, is not prepared to accept those people who are out of the “normal limits”: the sole solution is to nullify them, to convert them in operating machines that adapt themselves to the dominant ideology.

Referencias

Andrés, T. *Homocybersapiens: la inteligencia artificial y la humana*. Pamplona: EUNSA, 2002.

Burgess, A. *A clockwork orange*. London: Heinemann.

Calhoun, J. *A behaviorist study on psychology of adjustment and human relationships*. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1990.

Foucault, M. *Madness and civilization: A history of insanity in the Age of Reason*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Pantheon, 1965.

Foucault, M. *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon, 1978.

Prieto, J. *The Skinner's utopia: Psychological bases*. New York: McGraw Hill Publishing, 1991.

Web sites:

www.members.fortunecity.com/stanleysinterview.htm (Stanley Kubrick's interview, 1980).

www.philosophy.org/filomat/df311.htm (Philosophical reflections about A clockwork orange, 2000)

Fecha de recepción: 11 de marzo de 2014

Fecha de aprobación: 14 de marzo de 2014

Viviana Román González

Licenciada en Español y Lenguas. Magíster en Educación Comunicativa. Líder del Grupo de Investigación y Estudios del Inglés y el Español Docente de la UNAC.

Correo electrónico: jroman@unac.edu.co