

VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

I shall first consider this problem from an ontological point of view, and then try to apply results to special situations, namely, present-day Brazil. One of the ways to distinguish man from animals is to say that man is able to ~~xi~~ lift himself somehow above his situation and take his bearings of his place therein. Granted this capacity man is able to distinguish in his surroundings two kinds of beings, namely things and other men. He feels himself limited and determined by things and he feels himself ~~allight~~ <sup>allight</sup> to other men. His attitude towards things is therefore an attempt to overcome them by understanding them and changing them from things into tools. His attitude towards other men is to join them in the effort to change things into tools. In other words, man's enemy is the totality of things called "Nature", that he is committed to change <sup>into</sup> into the totality of tools called "culture". In this commitment, he is a ~~light~~ <sup>allight</sup> to other men.

If you call his attitude towards things "violence and aggression" and his attitude to other men "friendship", then this sketch, for an anthropologist would indeed define man as a being capable of aggression and friendship. But obviously all this depends on Man's ability to distinguish between things and men. This distinction is nowadays very difficult to be made. If I mistake a thing for a man, (for instance, if I mistake a machine or an apparatus - example given, Government) for a Man, if I invest a machine or an apparatus with friendship, I shall reify myself and change into a fonctionnaire. On the other hand, if I mistake a man for a thing, for instance, if I mistake ~~xxxxxx~~ a bank employe for part of the apparatus or a crowd for an obstacle in my way, I shall have reified other men and shall act violently and aggressively against them. In ~~xxxx~~ conclusion, I can say that aggression and violence is the result of an ontological mistake, namely of my incapacity to distinguish men ~~and things~~ and mistake men for things.

But my relations to other men is <sup>v</sup>dialectical in the sense that I can accept my neighbour as a man only if he does the same towards me. If my neighbour reifies me and I become his object, I cannot but reify him on my <sup>human</sup> terms. In this situation, friendship is impossible and is replaced by cross-violence, called polemic, on the individual level, and war on the social level. In other words, war as violence and aggression par excellence, is the mutual reification of two groups, that means a process by which each group attempts to understand and change the other instead of allying itself to the other.

VILÉM FLUSSER

Now, if I apply this result to the present situation in this country, the following conclusions may be suggested: Brazil is a context where most political, economic, and social decisions, are made abroad, i.e., outside its competence. This means that Brazil is an object of decisions of others and as a whole is therefore being reified by other contexts. It would thus therefore be vain to expect Brazil, as a context, to try and act in a manner ~~of friendship~~ called "friendship" in a preceding paragraph. It cannot but act aggressively and violently. Having been reified by ~~such~~ outside decisions, it reacts reifying them. This explains to my view one aspect of latent or actual violence and aggression in this country. But this explanation needs further elaboration.

If I enter into the relationship of friendship I establish a dialogue with somebody else, which means to say that I respond to him and am responsible towards him. But if I reify the other man there is no possibility of a dialogue, of response and of responsibility. Therefore, in this sense, all violence and aggression is essentially irresponsible. But, in the case of Brazil and similar situations, the irresponsibility of violence and aggression is accentuated by the fact that in theory every act, including the act of ~~of~~ violence and aggression performed here is subject to outside decision. Therefore, if I act here I cannot be responsible and I need not be responsible for my actions. This double irresponsibility explains another aspect of violence and aggression in underdeveloped countries and distinguishes these acts from similar acts committed in the centers of decision. This explains only violence and aggression in this country as far as it is ~~appropriate~~ <sup>committed</sup> against what is understood to be external decisions and against those organs which execute these external decisions though they may act as if they were executing decisions of their own. This type of irresponsible violence is in fact an attempt to break through the relationship with the centers of decision and try to assume an autonomous power of decision. Insofar as this analysis is correct, violence in Brazil and other ~~Latin American countries~~ underdeveloped countries is a classical phenomenon and was always a symptom of a society that tries to enter History in its own right.

But there is another dimension to acts of violence and aggression which is to my opinion either very rare in History or entirely new. To understand this, let me say the following. The type of violence I have just described has an <sup>aim</sup> ~~aim~~, namely destroy the reifying relationship and substitute it for a relationship of friendship. A war to end wars, as our fathers used to say. Although it is irresponsible, it is still rational in the sense of limiting itself to an aim. The new dimension of violence I mentioned could be called violence for the sake of violence. This

VILÉM FLUSSER

l'art pour l'art in violence, this aimless destruction as an evolved method is rather new as a social phenomenon, although it might not be new to the psychiatrist. Undoubtedly, this dimension of violence is active in a majority of aggressions committed in underdeveloped countries and also in some committed here in Brazil. I shall try to explain by saying that it is the result of the convergence of at least two developments, namely ~~one~~, success of the scientific method, and ~~two~~, increasing difficulty in establishing the relationship of friendship. I shall explain this as follows.

The method of science is a disciplined attempt to reify the totality of human circumstances. In this sense science can be said to be disciplined violence and aggression. For science everything tends to be a thing capable of being understood and changed, including mankind. In fact, the so-called social sciences are disciplines that understand and change society as if it were a thing. The success of this method shows obviously that progress can be defined as an increase of the terrain of things and a decrease of the terrain of men.

The difficulty of establishing relationships of friendship is the antithesis of progress. The less there are men, the less there are friends. I can not be friends to somebody I understand and change. Friendship is possible only where there is dialogue, and I ~~can communicate~~ <sup>can dialogue</sup> only where I can get information from the other man. If I know about him I cannot get information from him. I already have it. But science has no meaning in itself. The meaning of science is man. If I can no longer establish human relations because science has reified man for me, then science has, by its own success, defeated itself. It has ceased to be a human activity and has become an ~~automatic~~ automatic process which can safely be relegated to computers and similar machines.

This might seem ~~a next utopic~~ utopic. But some of the violence and aggression occurring at present point to the fact that the new generation is consciously or unconsciously aware exactly of this tendency. On the one hand they are aware that science as a reifying process is in geometrical acceleration, becomes increasingly independent of human decisions and tends to reify everybody as its fonctionnaire. On the other hand, they are aware that the present difficulty of communications is the other side of the same development. In other words, I cannot communicate because I have nothing to say. Science has said everything for me. In such a situation they choose to destroy, in order to prevent the menace of an automatic progress. In conclusion, present acts of violence and aggression seem to me to have two dimensions, a traditional one and a new

## VILÉM FLUSSER

one. The traditional dimension is the attempt to break reifying relationships and substitute them for relationships of dialogue. The new dimension is the attempt to destroy the reifying tendency of science and therefore ~~all~~ of <sup>our</sup> civilization. The traditional dimension characterizes violence in the underdeveloped countries and underdeveloped areas of the central countries, and the new dimension characterizes violence of the so-called élites. But both dimensions are present in varying degrees in all present acts of violence and aggression.