

Sobre infância, saúde e gênero: discursos biomédicos na mídia impressa de 1990

On childhood, health and gender: biomedical discourses in the printed media of 1990

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Resumo: *Apresentamos, aqui, a análise das sessões saúde do jornal Zero Hora do ano de 1990 – ano de publicação das leis nº 8.080/90 e nº 13.257/90 –, buscando evidenciar sentidos de Gênero, Saúde e Infância ali veiculados. Utilizamos como instrumentos teórico-metodológicos o Construcionismo Social e as Teorias de Gênero Pós-Estruturalistas, com foco na Análise de Discurso. A partir de eixos temáticos, refletimos sobre as (des)articulações discursivas veiculadas no jornal com os princípios do ECA e do SUS, no intuito de compreender os sentidos dados às temáticas evidenciadas naquele cenário.*

Palavras-chave: *infância; mídia; gênero; saúde; políticas públicas.*

Abstract: *Here, we present, an analysis of the health sessions of the Zero Hora newspaper of the year 1990 – year of publication of laws 8.080/90 and 13.257/90 – seeking what meanings of Gender, Health and Childhood are communicated there. We use as theoretical-methodological instruments the Social Constructionism and post-structural Gender theories, focusing on Discourse Analysis. From thematic axes, we reflect on how the discursive (dis) articulations conveyed in the newspaper with principles of ECA and SUS, with the intention of understanding the meanings of some discussions evidenced by that scenario.*

Keywords: *childhood; media; gender; health; public policies.*

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Introduction and theoretical input

We intend, with this research, to evidence the possible processes of subjectivation involved in the construction of the concepts of childhood, gender and health in 1990, through the analysis of press. One of the most influential media in Modern days, the newspaper still fills a space in the discussions on production of subjectivity and in the way our society is organized and, consequently, produces meanings in everyday life (THOMPSON, 2014; SPINK; SPINK, 2006).

The first steps of investigation consisted in analyzing how the vehiculation of the concepts of gender, health and childhood happened in the health section of the newspaper *Zero Hora*, in 1990, until the date of publication of Law n° 8.069 (BRASIL, 1990a), July 13th of the same year, regulating the Statute of Children and Teenagers (ECA). In that same year, were approved the Law n° 8.080 and n° 8.142 (BRASIL, 1990b; BRASIL, 1990c), talking about the principles and guidelines of the National Health Service (SUS) and social control. Therefore, we will approach how key concepts were discussed and disseminated for the understanding of these laws, expecting to be approved, with subject views so different from the ones in power at the time.

1990 was an important and contradicting year for the country regarding the publication of public policies and the phase of re-democratization that was in course. That is because the aforementioned laws were approved in a context of adoption of numberless neoliberal state policies. Even with a legislative change for a democratic model, the cosmovision of liberalism ruled not only national practices, but also the subjective view of society as a whole.

Souza (2016) understands that the approval of the Statute of Children and Teenagers and the Organic Laws of Health were only possible due to the process of re-democratization Brazil was experiencing at the time. The restoration of democracy happened in a moment where a small part of the population had much more than half of the means of production; In this scenario, there was a new order of public policies, due to a social economic crisis the country was going through. The high

mortality rate and the AIDS epidemic, which took place in the 1980's, were the result, also, of extreme poverty and lack of attention to health (RODRIGUES, 1992).

In 1988, with the approval of the Citizen Constitution (BRASIL, 1988), different rights were given to citizens, along with the guarantee of democracy and the possibility of people's interference in the legislative power, through many strategies of social control foreseen by the law. In this time period, President Fernando Collor takes over, in 1990, with a neoliberal agenda, which included opening up to the international market, the privatization of state companies and mass dismissal (RODRIGUES, 1992). According to Bueno (2012), facts indicate that some citizen rights, such as the strike, were not respected, even after the approval of a new Constitution.

An example of the difficulties caused by this political contradiction is the fact that, still in 1990, President Collor veto all the articles that dealt with social control, part of the Law that spoke about the participation of the community in management, through Councils of Health. Law nº 8.142 (BRASIL, 1990c) which included these decisions, only was approved in December that same year. For all of these reasons, we understand that 1990 was a landmark regarding public policies, and, because of that, it must be a target of research not only in the field of History, but also other fields willing to search for problematizations experienced in the contemporaneity.

We will also approach here, as well, the problematization of meanings of care and family disseminated in the newspaper, looking to understand how they relate with each other and as research theme. Not forgetting our base documents, ECA and SUS, we will look towards media and try to understand how the crossings of gender fill space in the construction of subjectivity (GUATTARI; ROLNIK, 1996) regarding family and care in childhood. As theoretical background to discuss this subject, we chose Social Constructionism (GERGEN, 2009; IÑIGUEZ, 2002; SPINK, 2013; SPINK, 2013) and Gender Studies in a post-structuralist approach (BUTLER apud SALIH, 2013; LOURO, 2003; STREY;

CADONÁ, 2012). With that world view, we understand that the subject is built in the relationships they establish and in the way they give meaning to them, being the role of science to investigate in history how certain subjects were invested by different mechanisms of production of subjectivity. Through this epistemological base, we understand the importance of studying the Present Time (PADRÓS, 2004), with the intent of proposing new outlooks on how we give meaning to our relationships and conceptualizations.

As a guide for our research, in order to understand objects of study, we make use of Social Constructionism (GERGEN, 2009; IÑIGUEZ, 2002). This choice came about because we understood that the themes studied here need to be seen as social constructs, originated through a long and dialogic process that involves the relationship of subjects with the world, being marked by times and places. Therefore, this theory gives us support to discuss the production of subjectivity which involves and is a consequence of this construction, having influence on how we live today and how people relate with themselves and with the world.

One of the main authors that write about the construction of childhood, as well as family, is Philippe Ariès. In his researches, he highlights the close bond between this process of discovery of kids with Christianity and art. Through the analysis of medieval paintings, Ariès (1981) portrays the evolution of the representation of childhood. According to Souza (2016), it is essential to go back in history to understand the present, this being also a product of a hierarchized society, not only nationally, but globally.

Until the end of the 13th century, there still wasn't an image that represented childhood. That didn't mean that image was absent at that time, but that it was different to what we know today, because children were closely linked to the adult, being perceived as a miniature of them. There is a slow process until the differentiation of these phases of development, that was postponed by the demographic conditions of the time, where the child mortality rate was extremely high. It is only in the 18th century these conditions start to change. With the adoption of some

contraceptive methods and an improvement of life conditions, the indifference towards childhood began to change into a valorization of that period as something pure. During this process, we can quote the image of angels and baby Jesus as contributions to that notion (ARIÈS, 1981).

In the national scenario of public policies, we must go back to the baby hatch, an inheritance of Colonial Brazil that only ended in 1950. Device that allowed the abandonment of children on nunneries to carry on with their care, the hatch can be considered the first initiative to join public with private, since, through a law, municipalities could only exempt themselves from the obligation of taking care of these children, that were under the responsibility of these institutions (CRUZ; HILLESHEIN; GUARESCHI, 2005).

Another important factor to be highlighted is the formulation of the concept of job as being ennobling. Brought with the European migration, the institutionalization of this concept was the beginning of reservation of workforce, which resulted in many children and teenagers in the streets. This movement was considered the cause for a raise in criminality, and, therefore, with a hygienist logic, government directed these youth for Houses of Correction, beginning, thus, the kidnapping of subjectivity of this audience, with the proposition of prevention, aiming to educate them for work. At that moment, it is already possible to understand that existed the creation of two distinct childhoods. The first Code of Minors, from 1927, reinforces that when it makes a distinction between minors in an irregular situation, being characterized as abandoned, delinquent and **addicted**. It is in this time that the term **minor** is adopted as a synonym for childhood. We cannot forget the role the school had as a manufacturer of docile subjectivities in this scenario, since it embodies scientific discourses, such as Psychology, with the goal of measuring, testing and quantifying the students. It is in the period between 1931 and 1934 that it definitely inserts in Brazilian schools, through testing, also helping in this process, fulfilling a role of separating the abled from the disabled, accentuating even more these differences (CRUZ; HILLESHEIN; GUARESCHI, 2005).

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According to Guareschi and Hilleshein (2007), it is necessary we understand the image of childhood is, until today, narrated by adults. Since the Latin origin of the word, childhood is related to the absence of language. In the history of building childhood, we can find the idea of child as an incomplete being, which will only be concluded when he/she reaches adult life (SOUZA, 2016). We highlight the contradiction of this thought with the liberal proposal that stimulates meritocracy, and, thus, the idea that the subject is a product of their own efforts from infancy to their economic and social mobility. We remember that, in a society marked by inequality, which do not offer, through the effectuation of public policies, subsidies for that to happen, this belief ends up making the individual responsible for their own failure.

In this sense, we understand that ECA comes as a form of equalizing unequal childhoods. We cannot deny that the Statute has many advances in relation to the social policies previously published, as recognizing children and teenagers as people with rights and replacing the term **minor**, in an attempt of decriminalized the poor childhood. However, it does not impede from being a compensation to resolve the dichotomy Normal Childhood versus Risk Childhood, reinforcing these differences (BRASIL, 1990a; CRUZ; HILLESHEIN; GUARESCHI, 2005).

Instrumentalizing children and teenagers on their own rights is one of the most effective manners of putting the Statute into practice (VIANA, 2016). That is how, through the production of autonomy, that public policies like ECA and SUS found tools to be more functional legislations. We also highlight that, through similar mechanisms to those discussed here, with Modernity another world view was instituted, based on biologicism, where concepts like **healthy** and **sick** had only one definition, and everything outside from it was pathologized and/or prejudiced, remaining in the margins of society;

The concept of gender was also built in a similar context. Had as a synonym of biological gender for a long time, it is understood by us as a process, a development, built by discursive acts, being something we do, and not something we are. The system of absolute truths that transit in

this field of knowledge is a vehicle that oppresses certain groups, which happens with women and LGBT people (lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders), among others. Gender identity is not something we are completely free to choose. We can only interpret the current norms of gender, reorganizing them. In other words, we fit in one way or another within the options that are presented to us since we are little. On the other hand, we do not deny the existence of forms of living gender that are subversive, escaping the so-called normalcy (BUTLER 1987; 2008; SALIH, 2012).

Viana (2016 apud FREIRE, 1981, p. 30) highlights, when talking about the emancipation of the subject through education and their influence in building childhood and ECA, that we should not face inequality as a destiny, but a result of an unfair social configuration that generates violence and oppression. The importance of the subject to be aware of the lack of ending and historic determinism of their subjectivity, to be free from the constraints of social conditioning is, therefore, primordial for us to reinvent practices of our daily lives.

Method

The research has a qualitative nature, with a document outlining. In order to perform this, we investigated, in the Health section of the newspaper *Zero Hora* in the year 1990, the meanings of Gender, Health and Childhood disseminated there. All the archive containing these publications is available for the audience at Museu de Comunicação Hipólito José da Costa, in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, place where we photographed the pages of the newspaper, which, later on, became the corpus of our investigation.

For the collection, we adopted keywords to help us in the criterion of inclusion of news, chosen from the theoretical background used and what is defended by ECA itself, being: Family, Child, Childhood, Pre-Natal Care, Pregnancy and Baby. The only exception, that does not follow ECA's vocabulary, but was included as a criterion, is the word **Minor**, because, since there already is a familiarization of the researchers

with the materials and this term being widely used when talking about childhood, we understand that the exclusion of this term would entail the loss of important data.

Still, we chose to make the research with the months precedent to the publication of ECA. Therefore, we included the months from January to July 1990. The Health Section of the newspapers are divided into daily news and the column **Live Better**, where a healthcare professional answers questions from the readers. On Sunday, in addition to the health section, there is also the editor's section "Science and Health".

The analysis of the discursive practices for the understanding of everyday meanings given to childhood, family and gender issues in the year 1990 was inspired in authors that articulate the discourse analysis with a constructionist perspective (SPINK, 2013a; SPINK, 2013 b; SPINK et al., 2014; SPINK et al., 2013).

The selection and later analysis of the material was made, firstly, by each one of the five members of the research group, individually. Then, the selections were shared and, then, in a group, selected the 33 texts to be analyzed.

For the analysis of the materials, we created a table taking into consideration the goals that were present in the research project (Table 1). In addition to identification data, as title, date and keyword, we included a space for identification of what type of discourse on gender, health or childhood appeared in the news, which were the (dis)articulations with SUS and ECA and how it approached the relation of care and family.

Table 1 - Instrument for corpus analysis.

Title:			
Date:	Keyword:	Page:	Editor:
What is it about:			
Discourses on gender/health/childhood:			
Articulation with ECA/SUS:			
How it approaches care and Family:			

Source: Made by the authors (2018)

The construction of the instrument of data collection happened based on classic presuppositions of Discourse Analysis, such as **acts of language, discursive practice, enunciator, discursive legitimation, speech acts, meaning and text** (IÑIGUEZ *et al.*, 2004) and in the explanations of authors of Discourse Analysis and Social Constructionism that propose the construction of Dialogic Maps as a form of elaborating the reading of a corpus, through epistemological perspectives of this study (SPINK *et al.*, 2014).

The elaboration of the map is given through an immersion of the researcher in the document analyzed, through previous knowledge in presuppositions of Discourse Analysis, of subject and world views they carry with themselves, through the goals of study and the macropolitical processes that transversalize the material. From that, we build a path for the analysis, which do not have the pretention of being replicated, within an ideal of neutral and objective science. However, the method is build based on scientific knowledge, and the articulation between theory, tools of analysis, reading of the social field, articulated to the material and the discussion among the members of the research group evidencing the seriousness and meticulousness of analysis.

Spink (2013) highlights the necessary care with the research with materials of public dominion, describing the importance of not adopting a linear thought when analyzing a historic context, since the reality is only not made by events and dates, but also by the meaning given to these events by the subject. Everyday life is not something given, something natural in a human's life, but rather something built through meanings. According to Hennigen (2006), the subject gives meaning to their daily lives through discourses, which he uses to know himself and the world. In this process, he takes them as truth, and, when he recognizes himself in them, he (de)constructs the world and himself.

Media is a part of this process, as it is one of the most important outlets of subjectivity production. We also know the world through what we read on the newspaper and watch in soap operas. Despite not being possible a communication with the interlocutor (in the case of press),

the subject reading a newspaper has the possibility of giving meaning to this content in different ways. Because of that, we highlight that we are not passive facing media relations, being always possible a movement of resistance and questioning the truths written in it (THOMPSON, 2014).

Through the construction of tables, we elaborated three thematic axis, based on Spink et al propositions. (2013). Among them, we chose one to be presented in this article. We highlight that, to make easier the reading and understanding the text, we chose a small amount of news and advertisements to be an example of the universe in analysis, being the most representative for discussion and that enabled the articulation among the big picture and the parts analyzed.

(In)visibilities and the biomedical discourse of developmental psychology

Throughout the analyses, we could determine that the 90's decade in the 20th century is marked by the positivist and biologicist discourse, about health practices. The issues discussed in the field of childhood, in its majority, speak about themes related to the human development, which is understandable, since we only analyzed articles related to children. However, we ask, which subjects are emphasized by the authors of these news and by the healthcare professionals that spoke through them? Which meanings on the processes lived by children were brought by these newspapers? Of which children they were talking about?

Firstly, it called our attention that a good part of these news reports talked about early childhood, more specifically, newborns. About the education and health of these children, the discourse on how to take care falls on common dichotomies of biologicism: healthy versus unhealthy, right versus wrong, etc. In an attempt of classifying and framing subjects in discourses and modes of acting, the positivist science ended up creating dichotomies like these, which, throughout the 20th century – and what we already lived in the 21st century – has been excluding subjects

that do not fit into these dichotomies (GERGEN, 2009; BUTLER apud SALIH, 2013).

In the newspapers, the “aid” for families to take care of their children is extremely prescriptive, in other words, it shows a “correct” way and the consequences of not following these prescriptions. In some news reports, it is possible to see the rejection to the new family configurations of the time, such as divorce and distance from the original family.

For example, in one of the news reports, titled “Problematic Children: the way out is the psychiatrist” (ZERO HORA, 1990, p. 23) it is possible to see some of these issues present in the newspaper’s discourse, who published the report, and professionals that were interviewed and gave information to the subject. It is a text on the growing number of the demand for children and teen psychiatric service and the cause for that demand.

When describing these phenomena, the newspaper repeatedly uses words such as illness, disorder and issues (ZERO HORA, 1990, p. 23), describing what seems to be the deviation of something that only presents two possibilities: the norm or the pathology. In addition to that, also is made a relation of this raise in demand for psychiatrists with the education and the moment the children were living at the time. The newspaper, through the discourse of professionals invited to speak, criticism to new family configurations and the education that “in the name of freedom is made licentiousness to children” (ZERO HORA, 1990, p. 23). There is, in the middle of the newspaper, a rejection to new forms of living, and an attempt of fitting family to norm, highlighting the consequences in case they choose the contrary. It is worth highlighting that, according to the positivist logic, the newspaper authorizes only a few people to speak on these themes. Within the health area, we observe the prevalence of the pediatrician and the psychiatrist to speak on themes such as the development and the relationship of the children with the parents. Including, some news speaks on events geared towards health-care professionals with talks led by psychiatrists.

Consequently, by the valorization is given to the scientific discourse (FOUCAULT, 2002), it was praised with their spokesperson, the scientist, the expert (FOUCAULT, 2002), excluding popular knowledge and all the knowledge generated by the community.

We still put here in question the applicability of the principles of ECA in a context where remainders of a hard science still have a bigger status. We believe that the contradiction between the view of childhood found within this axis in question, crystalized and still marked by the discourse of difference, is contrary to what the statute advocate, which thinks in the construction of childhood as a concept under development throughout time (CRUZ; HILLESHEIN; GUARESCHI, 2005).

About the aspects of gender, the binary logic printed in the newspaper is reinforced in the exercise of spreading utterances that deal with parental roles and childcare. Within the family, ZH highlights motherhood and fatherhood through the (re)production and/or demarcation of different roles.

Maternity is extremely valued in the news reports, as it appears in a great extent to analyzed columns. The mother is brought as the main care agent when it comes to childhood and there is a strong emotional appeal involved in the discourse to keep this logic standing. One of the news reports highlights that “pregnancy continues after the birth” (ZERO HORA, 1990, p. 25).

One of the strategies used to sustain this form of understanding and feeling the world published by the newspaper is the use of the biologic discourse. The valorization of breast milk appears as an alternative to link even more the maternity to a labor of love and instinctive protection. Specialists at the time, who were gaining space in the pages of a newspaper, affirmed the benefits not only physical for the child, but they would also sustain that the baby fed by breast milk would not only receive the biological food, but the affection necessary for their development, and that such actions would deepen their connection to their mothers.

All of these issues would make the woman responsible for the childcare, since, in that scenario, the maternal/paternal role were directly

linked to the biologic sex. An example of that is one of the news with the title “Mother and baby should always be together” (ZERO HORA, 1990, p. 25), where they spread the idea that the mother is responsible for the physical and emotional health of a child. The column also talked about the newborn not having autonomy, having needs that only a mother can provide and that their communication is basically linked to her.

Badinter (1985) says that motherhood wasn’t always understood and invested the same way, and that, in order to understand it as an invented phenomenon directly linked to the context it was narrated, it is important to recur to History. The practice of breast feeding made by wet nurses, common in previous centuries, is one of the examples that put in question the maternal love as being a biologic characteristic, innate to every mother. The awful health and hygiene conditions that showed an almost non-existent investment on childhood in 16th and 17th century takes us to highlight how concepts like motherhood and childhood have been changing through time.

The column Live Better, where, at times appeared questions to the writer questioning habits of child care, is one of the proofs that there isn’t only one maternal attitude, the own newspaper is a registration of that fact.

In fact, there are different forms of expressing care and discourses authorized by science uttered by specialists that want to standardize these different manifestations of maternity. In an attempt of recognizing these different manifestations, science makes a similar movement to what we already discussed with dichotomies, and this form of care are rated in groups, considered “normal” or “risk” (STREY; CADONÁ, 2012).

Within these arguments, one of the images of care in a child’s life ends up being erased. Paternity, in the news we had analyzed, was not as present as maternity was. Fathers appear a few times as a parental duo when talking about raising older children, not newborns. In the news reports, the newspaper talks about pregnancy and the care during this period, and, even so, the father role was not highlighted.

Saldanha, Muhlen and Strey (2012) point towards the advances in the contemporary world, with the decline of patriarchy, mainly motivated by feminist movements, have been causing changes of scenery in the modern family landscape. In a different rhythm from motherhood, the concept of fatherhood have also been changing, as well as the role played by a man in society.

Despite these changes, the reference of family found in the newspaper is still about a husband, wife and children, the same that is still predominant in contemporary western societies. Marcondes (2012) discusses how social relationships originated in this model of family arrived from a dichotomic division of gender between the public and private sphere. The private sphere was socially attributed to the woman, which would have the work of taking care of children and the household organization. In the public sphere, the responsibility for maintenance would be delegated to the man, who would exercise authority over the woman, providing for the family and exercising social activities, such as work. This is a model based on gender asymmetry, where the male is dominant over the female, and which left marks in social relationships that we can still see today. The news reports analyzed reflects this disparity of gender relationships based in the difference. To the man, the care for children wasn't attributed, not having an appeal for science to strengthen a feeling of father instinct, since it never was a part of the history of fatherhood. The father appears in some news reports related to older children, already in a school age, when his authority can be claimed in the child's upbringing.

In the case of ECA, around the question of responsibility with the child, we never see the reinforcement that the care should be exclusive for the mother or having any type of gender distinction regarding that (BRASIL, 1990a). However, that does not guarantee that this disparity do not happen in the applicability of the Law. Would it be possible to put into practice the statute with a strong production of subjectivity working in the sense of reinforcing the magnitude of motherhood and the invisibility of fatherhood?

Conclusion

The late 1980's and early 1990's had as characteristic a landmark regarding the approval of public policies. In addition to the Federal Constitution (BRASIL, 1993) and the Federal Laws worked in this article, SUS and ECA, in 1993 the Organic Law of Social Service (BRASIL, 1993) was approved. All these laws have in common a rupture with the previous world and subject views. Our research had the intent of questioning and answering, among other questions, this one: is it possible to put in practice the principles of ECA and SUS in media publications at the time?

We should highlight that the media situation is only a cut-out of the reality lived by the population in 1990, therefore, our analysis does not represent the only truth about the context of that time. It is not our intention to close the discussion, or ended with the analysis materials, but rather open up a reflection for a complex reality that interferes to this day in the way two important public policies are put in practice in our country.

We know, as we discussed before, that the best way of applying policies like ECA and SUS is through the instrumentalization of the audience. It is in the autonomy that these laws acquire strength (VIANA, 2016). In the news reports we analyzed, mainly the ones about the way the State deals with healthcare in childhood, we found an authoritative way of intervening, something completely different from the two laws we studied.

The own emphasis in a biologist discourse, which authorizes only the medical professional to speak about questions of child development, as an expert, puts in question the principles and guidelines of SUS. We know it advocates a multidisciplinary work, where the own user is considered the biggest connoisseur of what is happening, and, therefore, the information is not given in a prescriptive manner, as we saw in the newspaper.

In relation to gender issues, we could see a disparity about the visibility of maternity and paternity roles. Even though society has evolved, still dichotomized and crystalized, these roles reflect a reality where

ARTIGO

mothers are still seen as the main caregiver for their children, while fathers are responsible for providing sustenance for the household.

Guattari and Rolnik (1996) highlight the importance of the analysis of production of subjectivity using the example of when a powerful nation, like the United States of America, wants to establish the possibility of economic expansion in a third world country, it will begin to work in subjectivation processes. We can bring that to the research thinking that for public policies to be implanted successfully, one of the ways of working the production of subjectivity at the time was through press, which, as we saw, was opposite, most of the time, to what the laws were about.

To conclude, we made a reflection on the process of research and its goals, with the feeling it does not need to end here. In the research universe, we often faced barriers and practices that go against our world view, which takes us to feelings of frustration. Unfortunately, many researches end up being made only in paper and do not fulfill their goals, never returning to those who need it: the community.

We believe research must not end on itself. Our results must be incorporated to our practices, debated by professionals of the area and (why not?) used as justifications for good extension projects. For example, one of the ways to take research outside of the university would be to transform it in a community program to discuss with healthcare professionals about the origins of SUS and the repercussions in their current practices. Thus, research fulfills its role as a gamechanger.

“If you can look, see. “If you can see, notice”, said José Saramago (1997, p. 9) in *Blindness*. In other words, we have the tools to change the reality we live in, and now we need to use them with more intelligence. Otherwise, we will continue to see without noticing.

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