

Interview to Silo in Milan

What follows is the transcription from Silo's interview in Milan on February 25th, 1997 by Carla Caporale, editor of the magazine Nuova Era Meditation. This interview will be published in April in Italian and German, together with a note on the Humanist Movement and the corresponding addresses in both countries. This material was translated from Italian into Spanish and from Spanish into English. We are invited to circulate this interview but not to publish it.

- *What do you wish to tell of major significance to our readers who are on an internal search and are considering what is offered to them?*

- We are facing a very important change, which everybody is experiencing. In general it is thought that these changes only happen in politics, economy and in institutions. From my point of view, the important change is happening in the human being who, among other things, cannot be explained in itself but through its relation with the world. In the present moment, people are experiencing some kind of asphyxia. However, this phenomenon is conveying something very important. Many people think of a general decline in values and of an impoverishment in reasoning. These concerns are justified, but neither the individuals nor the peoples share this lifestyle. What people experience is asphyxia. I believe that historically this asphyxia is due to the internal growth of people. It is as if a child wore a shirt or clothes too small for it, and while its body continues to grow, its clothes grow smaller and smaller. I believe that we are in the presence of a very important growth and people's search, referring to a very important and positive, internal activity, reflects a situation of growth, of enrichment. >From another more external perspective, we are witnessing the incorporation of cultural codes from different parts of the world. In general the supporters of macroeconomics speak of globalization, referring to the economic and communication interrelations. We prefer to use the term "universalization",¹ as this term goes beyond economy and communication. What is happening is that the cultural codes, the religious codes, the different lifestyles are beginning to form a web where all are related. We are not speaking of macroeconomic globalization alone. In Asia people listen to European music, in Europe vanguards of intellectuals begin to accept Buddhist codes and many other forms of search which were once developed in the East. Clearly these things are not transferred mechanically but certainly influence each other reciprocally [...] this is what we call "universalization". This universalization is producing an important change within people, not only in institutions or in economic processes as it is claimed today. This is my point of view on what is happening, looking at the internal growth of people who today are suffocating quite a lot.

- *How did you first think of launching the Humanist Movement?*

- Let's return to the theme of cultural influences. When I was 16, 17 years old, I rode a motorcycle and I began to travel to different Latin American countries; in Argentina it is almost a tradition: Che Guevara had done it 5 or 6 years before me, like many others! Argentina was bound to Europe, but it was bound to other neighboring nations in a distinct way. Therefore it was for me a strong shock to see new forms, new ways of seeing things. It was very surprising for me: Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador; something different to what I was used to in Argentina. This was important. Later I traveled to Europe when I was still quite young..... Then this philosophy, if we can call it this way, was basically about different points of view. In our philosophy, perspective, points of view are very much valued: Who is looking? And from where is one looking? Do the various cultures look from one single point of view or do they look at the same phenomenon from various points of view? So finally, from the beginning of our philosophy there was this issue of perspective, a legacy of the influence of the cultures. Our thought was born this way, through shock.

- *Therefore you have encouraged the broadening of the mind and the development at the same time of the capacity to discern. This is a very positive exercise, in this "market" of the spiritual, the dense, where we are witnessing plagiarism through the works of Gurus or big shots who subject people instead of respecting and stimulating individual freedom. However, we must say that many individuals still prefer to delegate the responsibility of their lives to a guide or a master instead of developing their critical capacity. How many people of your Movement have been motivated for this personal work and what is its dynamics?*

- It is very difficult, at this time, to give the exact number of people who move along these ideas. We count on a structure with very militant, organized people, although nowadays the word organization is quite devalued, and there is also a great quantity of sympathizers and adherents. Looking at the structure, I believe it is growing vertiginously at this time. I believe that we are some thousands, not hundred of

¹ This term "universalization" is not totally correct. However I don't know of any other term that translates the "mundializacion" of the latin languages. NdT.

thousands, probably 50 to 60 thousand people working in the world today. Whereas if we look at the sympathizers and adherents, this number can be easily multiplied by 10. What happens, since it is all very elastic, is that people come and go, sometimes because of work-related reasons, of family, among other things; many sympathizers cannot maintain a rhythm of militancy like others. Therefore this phenomenon of having people come and go is very elastic...

- *How is this structure organized? People come, meet?*

- They are invited to the weekly meeting. For us the weekly meeting is extremely important, because there, among people, personal works can be done. Here we have a paradox: it seems that when we speak of personal work we refer to something strictly individual or isolated, like "looking at one's navel." We explain to people that it is the other way around, that people can discuss with others about psychological problems, relational problems, couple's problems, work problems, family problems, and the problems of the world in which we live. Because the perspectives of different people enrich the vision of each one. Because it can happen that someone who is working alone may enter a microclimate" without references, without other points of view. An individual in this situation may think that he/she lives in the best of the worlds. Then, when she/he goes down to the street, she/he meets the reality of the world. When we speak of personal work, in the weekly meetings, we means that we are trying to include the various points of view of different people.

Logically we give a reference: the Guided Experiences. In these experiences various allegorical expressions of people's lives are represented and the participants try to imagine themselves in that situation. Once the reading is over, a long discussion begins on how each one was able to imagine oneself in these resistances, difficulties, and how each one was able to resolve those images etc., it is a very enriching exchange. After this, people propose activities. These are activities related to various fields, there are people who come from the cultural field, there are people with political, labor, unionist interests, etc.

The Movement embraces all possible interests of human expression, because we are not indifferent to what happens in the political arena, in the cultural arena, in the work place. There in the meetings activities for the week are organized.

- *What kind of activities? For example, in the field of culture?*

- For example: today there is a tendency to organize what we call "Humanist Clubs" which are artists clubs, like for example in Germany where artists who are not part of institutions regroup. We work a lot in the social base, in the neighborhoods, it is striking to see how people are seeking to express themselves in what we call the Neighborhood Papers: people arrive with their poetry, their writings, they speaks to us of their difficulties to exhibit their works. We find many problems in the artistic expressions of the base. This is why we organize these clubs, these kinds of cultural laboratories. Many times this is organized in neighborhood locales and it is there that people take their frames, their productions. On the other hand they can publish their writings in the neighborhood papers which are our media of diffusion. Something very humble, very much of the base, there is no intention to monopolize the field of culture, but rather to produce an opening from the social base.

- *Therefore people look for a space to experience and to communicate. However, to be able to understand each other truly there is a need to follow a code of conduct accepted by the participants so that the encounter may not be at the mercy of impulses, destructive feelings that are in the human experience. What is your code?*

- In a certain way, our literary productions allow people to learn how to relate to one another. While reading such works people find an interesting way to communicate. What is happening is that new literary productions are being produced in our Movement in such a way as to produce changes in the relational codes, which are becoming broader. This situation produces a certain disorder because it introduces new points of view, other cultural ways of experimenting things which, all included, diversify the classic way of seeing the reality of a given culture. The codes because they are broadened, diversify and also produce a momentary disorder which later, once the initial destabilization is surpassed, become naturally recorded in people's consciousness.

For example the Guided Experiences consist of an entrance, a movement of images, a conflicting knot, a resolution of the knot and an exit. With this simple technique guided experiences can be elaborated and the rest is a matter of creativity..... And people can produce and do produce beautiful guided experiences. Thus these codes are broadened and things get disorderly.

- *Consequently, I gather that there exists a real possibility to create citizens of the world.*

- Yes.

- *Have you studied psychology?*

- No.

- *Then what is your cultural background? Is this ingenuity yours?*

- If we can call it ingenuity, yes, ingenuity (laughs) I believe that I am reflecting a bit on the moment in which we live. What is happening to people, what we experience. One is a little bit like a medium for the voice of the people (laughs).

- *How long has the Movement existed?*

- About 30 years. The beginnings were very slow.

- *Therefore the beginnings were almost at the family level?*

- No, it began in political science, in the country where I live, in Mendoza. In that moment with students of political science, of psychology, with some psychologists we began to form somewhat in that environment, that of psychology, the environment of political science.

The journalist asks the addresses of the Movement in Germany as the interview will be published in the German issue of the magazine.

- *Have you ever been attacked by the spiritual, political, charismatic leaders?*

- No.

- *Truly virgin!*

- (laughs) It is people, common people, who are growing.

- *What is your position vis-a-vis religiosity?*

- We distinguish between religion and religiosity. The religious feeling can be experienced through liturgy, sacred books, rituals, etc. or not. The religious feeling seems to be a very important source of energy. It is what motivates the search in the spiritual field. There are many people who move in the spiritual field and insist that they do not belong to any religion; however their religiosity is great! For us this phenomenon cannot be discarded or disregarded. Obviously it cannot be disregarded! And in fact some of our people love to discuss these themes of religiosity, inspiration, search....

- *Have you also read religious books like the BAGHVAD GITA, IL VANGELO?*

- Yes I have.

- *Did your readings open you up to the religious themes?*

- In many other books you find the bases of the cultures which are very important for us.

- *Did you make a critical study of religion, of the religious feeling, of the religious laws?*

- I have produced a small work, which is in fact an exegesis of the sacred texts from various cultures. It is called Myths, Universal Roots (to be published soon in Italy) and it goes back to the SEDA VESTA, THE BAGHVAD GITA, to the elements that were recovered from the cuneiform writings of Babylon, and to the myths from Meso-America as they appear in the Popol Vuh....

- *Other elements of the religious feeling are meditative practices. Have you done something similar?*

- In a small specialized, working group, with psychologists friends and others, we have studied various religious procedures, the procedures of rituals. We have verified how in the Muslim oration, for example, independently of their religious inspiration, there is a form of breathing which begins diaphragmatically and rises later, producing a type of oxygenation that is different from what is produced in Western oration where the body is in a sitting position. Likewise, the Dervishes, with their movements, cause a depression in their semicircular hearing channels, some kind of a dizzy spell, and in this state of instability they experience new psychological phenomena. We have seen how in the Umbanda, the Macumba and in the Candombe, because of precise rhythms matching the heart beat, and the use of cachaca--a strong alcoholic drink--and of very strong tobacco, people enter in a trance in which they seem to be possessed by certain spirits.

In many religions of the world, we have found similar psycho-physiological mechanisms causing "openings", to give these phenomena a name. In certain occasions, these are openings to creativity, while in others, they open the door to confusion and internal disorganization. We believe that part of this search--including this sort of "chemical culture" that circulates in the cities--takes the road of confusion, of disorder. When I say "chemical culture" I am not only referring to drugs in particular, but also to the whole pharmacology pushed by the large pharmaceutical companies.

For this reason, we soon find the average citizen consuming a considerable amount of psychotropic drugs. Sometimes one takes those psychotropic drugs to get inspired, looking for other possibilities.

Well finally, your question was whether we had developed something regarding ceremonies, rituals from various religions. Yes, we have developed something and we also relate it with questions that are not strictly ceremonial, but that are happening in our contemporary society. We cannot consider a rock festival to be a rite, however..... Also whoever takes drugs cannot be considered in a religious search, however..... Therefore we also witness all these mechanisms which explain so many phenomena in our suffocating society. The system is not in conditions to resolve these problems.

We need to confront them in a different way, it is necessary to give a new opening to the new generations; otherwise it WILL be complicated.

- *It will be like a suicide, if the new generations don't know how to confront this asphyxia.*

- This is it; also the system is telling us that people are too many, that every day there are less jobs, that the cities are overpopulated, that therefore, it is better that the new generations commit suicide!