

THE SPECTACLE OF LIFE IN ASSISTED HUMAN REPRODUCTION: A SHORT ESSAY¹

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Abstract: Set in the Spectacle thought by Debord, this essay was born at the crossroads identified by the connection of two dimensions of knowledge: the assisted human reproduction and the Consumer Society. It has as hypothesis the colonization of a space historically thought as something private, by the Economy, as well as, the disrespect of a lot of important juridical duties. The article touches some important aspects linked to contemporary family's structure and practices, the postpone of parenthood project, the promises of happiness made in the scenarios of assisted human reproduction and the existence of risks that, although, usually not informed, fill such social contexts. Critical perspective and bibliographic analysis were chosen as method. The research concludes that is necessary to respect fundamental rights, especially, life and health, the best interests of the child and the protection of the consumers.

Keywords: Consumption. Law fragmentation. Human assisted reproduction.

¹ This paper was produced during the project *Consumer protection adrift*: an attempt to measure the state of the art, in the jusconsumerist protection, in the Brazilian Superior Court of Justice [407142/2018-5] financed with resources of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development – CNPq.

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Human reproduction is a succession of events generally beginning, at least for now, with the union of male and female germ cells and ending with the successful birth of another live human being. This process went through an apotheosis of change in July of 1978, when the world first heard of Louise Joy Brown – the world’s first test-tube baby – and since then it has provoked many smiles of joy, but it has also become an enormous marketing opportunity.

In the next few pages we will quickly explore the challenges of human reproduction and the questions arising from the intersection of (a) the changes of configuration of Brazilian families (b) the rising demand for assisted reproduction (c) the market expansion and the legal limits it almost crosses and (d) the non-disclosure of common risks involved in the medical procedures.

The plan described presupposes that there is no doubt that the architecture of contemporary families has been heavily influenced by a important part of “promethean” technical advances in genetics, biotechnology, robotics and trans-humanism ad, at the same time, that important mutations ascended from the fractures opened by the friction between Law and Society in the fields that were earlier sowed by the Pandectists with the seeds of conceptual purism.

One of these important mutations is the eudemonist family.

For them, the most important thing is the way in which they exercise their freedom, with or without legal permission, in multiple spaces of coexistence, tenderness and affection spread through the phenomenological dimension.

Eudemonism and technology

Since 1988, in Brazil, a family does not presume marriage anymore, as previously determined by our laws. The formation of a family does not presuppose sexual relations, or even

people of different genders. The fact is that, nowadays, normally patriarchic factors seem to have influenced the fall of the model of family that submitted wife and children to the head of the family – the man – who held the power of ownership over his family. In the current Brazilian legal structure of family, children are not even necessary. Double income, no kids: one in five couples, in Brazil, has no children and feel no obligation to have them.

Children, today, are almost always – specially among the most cultured strata of society, we conjecture – derived from projects of life conceived through the whims of Libera. In case children are dreamt of, desired, or chosen, the recent technological advances allow for the overcoming of biological limitations that were, up until recently, insurmountable.

Actually, we all know that the technical advances have changed the natural presupposed causal relation in the field of reproduction, allowing, for instance, procreation with no sexual contact, the dissociation between genetic ascendance, motherhood and gestation, and also, egg fusion.

Along with it, women's emancipation has also influenced human reproduction. Pregnancy keeps being delayed and thus made more difficult. Data from Brazil's Health Ministry show that the percentage of mothers at the age of 30 or more has risen from 22.5% in the beginning of the century to over 30% in 2012.

Well.

It is evident that assisted human reproduction may make viable the exercise of parenthood in this and in other innumerable contexts, prescinding even the use of gametes or another person's uterus for the experimentation in independent productions or in co-parenting, even though these phenomena have been receiving legal support influenced by ideological, religious, geographic and political points of view. We also cannot ignore inherent risks associated with birth power, especially those related to the questionable availability of Family status.

But we don't want to get into that subject now.

Let us go back to human reproduction and the practices emerging from the field of genetic selection, in situations in which there are very thin lines dividing the expectations of parent candidates and their projects from practices that are dangerously close to those of eugenics. And when this does not happen, the mapping of genetic profiles from donors and providers of gametes emerges as another troublesome question in Brazil: people have had their physical, intellectual and genetic characteristics listed in catalogs that up until recently listed phone numbers and addresses.

Humans have turned into merchandise.

Life has been offered and sold in websites and billboards, enabling the experience of the genetic fetish of filiation, especially when we have in mind the selected group that can afford these experiences.

In Debord's *La société du spectacle*, human beings are spectators who experience with each choice they make situations oscillating between contemplative states and some low level of interaction, with choices that are not always their own selections, among them, obviously, parenthood.

In Brazil, long before assisted human reproduction started being available to the general public, television exploited the idea, as of the image was a curious precursor of reality.

In 1990 the *novela* "*Barriga de Aluguel*" premiered. In vitro fertilization and surrogacy permeated the plot in which the biological mother of the child, and author of the parenting project, fought for custody with the surrogate mother, who became a step mother of the baby. In 2012, the *novela* "*Fina Estampa*" told the story of a woman whose eggs were manipulated, without her consent, and implanted in another woman's womb, who desired a child and wanted to have one naturally, in spite of her diagnosed infertility.

It is curious to note how both stories ended in dramatic

legal battles that questioned who were the real parents of the children, even though themes such as the ethical and legal limits of assisted human reproduction or the complexity of experimental parenthood projects were never discussed.

From fiction to daily life, it is important to note that television tends to describe the technology involved in human reproduction as extremely simple, accessible and harmless – using images of smiling women and children – with no reference whatsoever as to the extremely low rates of success and the high financial cost commonly associated with the procedures.

This is an extremely relevant matter.

A lot of dramatization and almost no information.

Even though in Brazil there are recognized principles of (a) consumers rights (b) the myriad of rules listed in consumers legislation with the mandate to warn, communicate, explain, guide and give notice, and (c) the normative power of the principle of the child's best interest. And we are not even talking about the preoccupation with human dignity when we notice that lives were turned into consumer goods.

With permission from Law, or at its margin, almost always walking a thin line or taking cover in uncertainty zones, the Market has expanded and colonized human reproduction with its practices and discourses.

It is hard not to notice how economic rationale has infiltrated the practice of medicine in this field also. Diagnosis and therapies, pharmaceutical drugs and prosthetics, equipment and children are sometimes talked about as if they were clothes, shoes, cell phones or television sets.

Infertility, from the 1960's and into the 1980's, was thought of as a pathology to be solved through adoption, but later became known as a personal problem for which there are obviously solutions that can be bought or financed.

In support of this fact, we have that in Brazil, in 2015 alone, 141 human reproduction clinics have implanted 73472

embryos. However, we do not know how many babies were born.

Human reproduction became a product to be consumed.

Colonized by the market, and less and less spontaneous. Specialists commonly are suggested by Gynecologists in the private sector. People submit themselves to very costly procedures and high probability of being unsuccessful. Also, we must not forget how common are the diagnoses of “infertility with no apparent cause”.

At the same time, it is possible to identify reports showing that medical research about the causes of infertility or low fecundity rates are not encouraged enough: it seems that it is much more lucrative to invest in sophisticated techniques of reproduction, mostly because, apparently, the cure for infertility is a one-time sale, and assisted reproduction is a service that can be bought many times over, even in the successful cases, because there is always the possibility of a new child.

There are many other ethical issues masked by the spectacle of assisted human reproduction. The harvesting of eggs is preceded by hormonal treatments with many risks, including, in the most extreme cases, the death of the donor. Gamete donation might be followed by infections. Monitoring of embryonic implants require invasive exams. The rates of failure, ectopic pregnancy and miscarriages are high. Multiple gestations and premature babies are also very common scenarios. And the issue of the destination of left-over embryos is rarely discussed.

And what about the physical and mental health of people searching assisted reproduction, men and women who have only experienced anxiety and frustration through their innumerable attempts of fertilization? What about people who have a hard time owning their life stories and cannot tell if the emptiness they feel is because of the absence of children or the illusion of rebuilding a marriage corroded by time?

Perceptibly, from our point of view, a lot of what

happens in Brazil does not consider some very important issues of the Law: information, prevention and precaution.



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