LOOSE WORDS

This is the first article from a set of notes that I archived nearly a year ago, in a brief moment agitated by ideas resulting from a working life. They are the consequence of concerns in different areas, where they come to live and mature. Only now they manifest. The notes are entitled Loose Words.

HAVING TO CREATE

The gadget

Creating is a requirement of the human condition (01). More than that, it is a life imperative. Life is life only if it creates the molecule (02), the beast, the man, the being which invents step by step, day by day, in small and big things, something it needs to stay alive: creating a surplus that joins what it was for the sake of what it will be. Man, always remembering what he was, conceives what he will be in one or a thousand ways.

Girded to an 'indolent reason' (03), there are tenacious life forms (04) that change little or nothing for eternities, remaining lazily as they have always been in the face of contextual changes in which they limit themselves, if preferable, to sleep on their backs or, in the worst case, to move from place to place, letting themselves be carried by the winds or currents and tides. There are other forms of life, of course, that, misfit with "the waste of experience" (5), continually reinvent themselves, unfolding into creatures that soon differ in face of radical imperatives. Like many others, there are dull people who keep such as they always have been, never changing (06). Others, not so idle, use their heads for noble purposes: like Saint-Exupéry (07), they grow wings and fly.

When we do not create, part of what we know and much of what we have sinks into the abyss of memory, where more and more vanishes what remains of us. If we do not create, if nothing is left of what we have made, we will be devoured by oblivion (08), banished, diluted in the foam of the days. That's what will happen to most of men who were born on the surface of the Earth and the many who will be born in space. That's why (there are those who scrupulously defend it), the right to indifference is legitimate (09), the right to the welfare of laziness (09). Fuck the future! What matters most is living the present well...
Thanks to his head, Man will certainly be able to inhibit the drive of life. If he does such a thing, if he does not create, he will cease to be a human being. Is that what awaits us? If not, what must be invented? All in all, when will we have the right answer?

From the primordial molecule to the final chordate and beyond

What does eternity matter if life hurts us so much, something we will never forget? As in the concepts we use to understand each other without mistake, it is common sense what we feel, we and all the others. In this case, we know and feel that only in the coffin’s rest will we stop thinking about life. That’s so, it will be so and so it will have to be. No longer will we live in eternal rest. It is true that we have this right, but our duty is another.

The duty that life imposes on us is deterministic: we have to live. But the determination to live was generated at the outset (11) (12) and in full freedom by choosing a way appropriate to the circumstances, as a result of a knowledge made of experience. However other choices could be made with good results. If some do not do it, others will do so and life goes on, either in a simple or in a complicated way, always capricious, always devout, yesterday, today and forever.

The evolution of vertebrates was conditioned by the way in which feeling the environment determined the intent of progress. This intent was fed by the trend that led all to conceive a convergent process that, more and less, would serve all individuals and each one in particular. Was this what would lead them, with admirable solutions, to create the perfect machine? (13) For what? Why in the human species in particular? Why in the most successful of them all? (14).

That is why they force us to step forward, to risk, even if laziness or caution invites us to do nothing. In decisive moments there are cases when only intuition saves us: the third eye we have, which, without seeing, sees further than the other two. In both cases, I see the thing first and only then wonder what it is. Either I recognize it soon or soon I start listening to what the thing tells me.

There are those who insist on telling me something I have never heard, leading me to see the world with eyes that are not mine. This is the case of scientist Alexandre Quintanilha, who strives for “human improvement”, at the “frontier of the future”, an extreme place where the creative man dares to “play with the gods”. Such a joke is paradoxically foolish and meritorious because neither he nor I nor anyone with the least common sense can be certain that it will be so. He
assures us, however, by throwing the clay at the wall, that “we will soon create “trans humans” having physical and cognitive abilities designed not only genetically but living in permanent connection to computers, creatures with physical and cognitive abilities far superior to those of today’s humans (15). He is not the only sage to declare that it will be so, many others say the same without hesitation. But Quintanilha carefully adds: “But this is a question that I leave to those who have more imagination than me”. We have no more imagination than he does and so start thinking that, if it is something possible, it will certainly happen.

Another wise personality in the threshold themes of the human being, Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, prefers to see this issue from another angle (16). His formation is another. He has been working in various fields of knowledge: law, sociology of law, economics, anthropology, globalization. He ventured in other matters: sociology of absences, emergencies, ecology of knowledge, abyssal line, post-abyssal thinking, epistemicide (“the killing of knowledge systems”), inter legality, the heterogeneous state, indolent reason, metonymic reason, social fascism. Besides, he is a poet.

Sousa Santos aims at answering the most urgent questions of our time. A wandering sociologist, he is dedicated to serving the great causes of humanity, fighting for the rights of the oppressed. He seeks to innovate methods of resistance against capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. He urges us to “learn to travel southwards by meeting the numerous heterogeneous analytical spaces and ways of constructing knowledge. Letting the South speak as South has been subjected to a process of silence exerted by knowledge produced in the North” (17). The colonial past of the modern state in the southern hemisphere reinforces this attitude. That’s why the justice practiced with ‘inferior people’ cannot but be inferior. His approach to epistemology is close to that of Edgard Morin, but not so extensive, not so septic.

This results in the principle that there are excesses or deficiencies in indigenous justice practices. “Indigenous justice has always been part of constellations of social and economic relations alien to the possessive individualism of liberalism, the primacy of individual property over all other forms of property, and the logic of unlimited accumulation and commodification of life that underlies capitalism.”
In one of the “vagrant conversations” in which the Portuguese philosopher Agostinho da Silva succeeded in making himself heard, journalist Adelino Gomes challenges him to answer to certain unclear questions (18). As the theme of the conversation and starting point, the journalist proposes the contradictory problem of freedom and destiny, pointing out that the human being is already conditioned by genes. Crossing his arms, the unstoppable sage replies that ‘we never know when the match is. At the starting point of everything in the world? We consider that departure is the moment we were born, that’s to say, an eternity ago. At the beginning of all that is in the world, freedom and destiny coincided, that is, something that contains both, so mixed, so simultaneous, so similar to each other that it is impossible to distinguish them...’

The conversation changes. The journalist now talks of genetic engineering saying that such a thing means that “(...) there are men quite strong to command and men quite weak to obey.” Agostinho da Silva responds that when man creates any kind of machine, he has to decide in what direction he will embark it. Each of us as a man, he says, is an entirely exceptional person. The same is true of the nations, so Adelino replies. Answer: Understanding this is completely beyond our reach, we tend to see as a phenomenon that which is only appearance. There is now talk of determined chaos, something that may later reach the clear and definite shapes of Euclid’s geometry. Questions the interviewer: “So what chaos was our country born of?” Agostinho responds that, in a peninsula where there were lots of different people, the Portuguese discovered that there was a country the existence of which no one had seen before and would be later called Portugal. Hearing this, we soon guess that the same is taking place now, by fate. They then talk about the Portuguese Fifth Empire, about related things, about great poet Camões, the Island of Love and other national myths. The philosopher finishes with saying that we may conclude “(...) man will understand that capitalism exists, but not forever, to make more profits, to deduct us more interest, to make us pay more debt and borrow more money. All this will finish at a time when economy will disappear completely, where there will be everything for all ”. A golden age will come almost certainly, people will then stop working, everyone will be fed, taught and educated for free. Then the interviewer starts telling this story: a colleague of his, Fernando da Costa (19), disciple of Augustine, a little more pessimistic than the master, published last week an article about the invasion of Lisbon by supporters of Futebol Clube do Porto, in which he put in evidence that Portugal is a country far from being able to fulfill this utopia, as far as the football is assimilated by fanatics to the armillary sphere of the Portuguese flag rolling on green grass. Agostinho replies “yes, sir, but there are much worse games on the field (...) the bank games, for example, the politicians’ games”, who deny the truth of similar issues. He knows well enough that football has been
invaded by capitalism, like many other games. And concludes saying that “... the best way to be revolutionary in Portugal is to be a conservative of the thirtieth century”.

All told, teach us each of our esteemed three sages to be optimistic, to believe that the future of mankind will be better than his past. The history of the evolution of species (20) does not contradict this belief but, in doubt, old Charles Darwin (21) does not dispense with irony, saying that the human being is just a worm.

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21 – Charles Darwin

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