

Editorial

Talking about his work, Paul Cézanne once said he would like to produce a painting “for the museums”. He, who was one of the founders of modern painting and whose ruptures opened up to the vanguards of the 20th century – obsessive in his quest for perfection and permanently unhappy and anxious about the quality of his pictoric production (such as Émile Zola portrayed him in his renowned “L’Oeuvre”). From an author systematically relegated to the “salons of the refused” by the academics at service and ostracized by critiques and general public, this explicit search for the construction of a new classicism cannot but express his refusal in seeing creation, in this case aesthetic creation, as something conjunctural and ephemeral.

In a completely different plan, during his ten-year-long imprisonment in Mussolini’s jails (from where he only got out to die) the communist militant and theorist António Gramsci produced an outstanding intellectual work, namely under the form of scattered notes now gathered in a book entitled “Memórias do Cárcere”, with the aim to prepare a project that would never come to light. Yet, though unknown and unedited for several decades, Gramsci’s intellectual production fulfilled the main purpose of his activity in prison as he put it in a letter he wrote shortly after his detention: to produce something “for ever”. Gramsci uses the German words “für ewig” referring to Goethe’s notion of disinterested erudite work.

With both these examples I mean to stress the idea that creation (aesthetic or scientific), as a human

being’s intrinsic need to accomplish the “expression of one’s self”, is inscribed in an anthropological dimension that cannot conform to the notions of ephemeral, immediate, useful or conjunctural. Creation presumes a long time-span, which includes not only memory, but also a view of the future and the capacity to express a coherent narrative about one’s trajectory.

Ours is a time of ephemeral, conjuncture, precariousness, usefulness, short-termness. From this perspective there is neither past nor future, but rather a mere horizon line defined as follows in one of Cormac McCarthy’s novels (2007, p. 112): people were always preparing themselves for the future. I didn’t believe that. The future wasn’t preparing itself for them. The future didn’t even know of their existence”. This culture of the “new capitalism” produces human beings adapted to total uncertainty and tends to deprive them from the possibility to live in community and think and act as craftsmen, that is, in Sennett’s words (2007) “to make something well, even if you get nothing from it”. And Sennett adds: “only this type of disinterested commitment can emotionally exalt, otherwise people will perish in their struggle for survival” (p. 133).

The publication of this third number of *Sísifo* Journal is simultaneous with the process of global evaluation of research units and centres, namely in the field of Social Science and Education Sciences. Both the institution and the researchers (as a team or individually) see their activity externally scrutinised and analysed on the basis of a retrospective

examination of a self-evaluation nature. Nothing should be considered more common and desirable than viewing this process of explicitation and critical analysis as something absolutely necessary for the development of a fruitful and relevant research activity, capable of optimizing the scarce resources available, once it is conducted rigorously and clearly, following previously set and shared rules and with enough time to accomplish it. There is high need for external, regular and demanding evaluation; however, it will only gain full legitimacy if it is accompanied by the implementation of favourable conditions capable of enhancing scientific activity, which to be fruitful in terms of production of new and socially relevant knowledge requires conditions not yet provided by the institutions supposedly responsible for that.

“The new culture of capitalism” entered “quickly and deeply” into the policies of those in charge of investigation, though obviously on behalf of “modernization”, “productivity” and “competitiveness”.

Criticizing such “modernizing” intents does not mean defending the “status quo” nor does it mean satisfaction with what has been attained so far. It is rather the expression of concern and awareness about the negative impacts of the imposition of incentives towards scientific production based on the “publish or perish” academic motto. The field of scientific production tends to become a land ruled by a kind of Darwinism, of serial production, Taylorized, and grounded on a proletarianized “labour force” subjected to increasingly precarious forms of work.

Financing restrains and conditions not only the themes but also the results of what is to be studied (in France, people used to say that the creation of the Goncourt prize made a certain literary style flourish to try to match expectations). Instead of forming a community of peers, researchers become rivals and tend to value immediateness, trying to get the most with minimum risk. The bibliometry that governs evaluation contributes to promote different redundancies and to dissuade disinterested production by depreciating the “classics”, which happily hasn’t

been able to prevent Plato from being continuously quoted even if he hasn’t published anything for the last five years...

In this context, the trend towards specialization and fragmentation of scientific production gets even stronger, which paradoxically makes research useless and research work alienated.

This trend leads to a situation classified by Karl Popper (1999) as tragic or even desperate. Moreover, it induces everywhere “the young scientist eager to follow the latest fashion and the most recent slang (p. 98). Doctoral students have been increasingly subjected to training, rather than introduced to the tradition of “being caught and guided by great and apparently insoluble enigmas”.

Persistence of such trends — which *de facto* despise science by undervaluing its creative nature, a tradition of criticism and the production of not immediately useful knowledge — will lead, in Karl Popper’s words, “to a spiritual catastrophe comparable in its consequence to nuclear armament” (p. 99).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- MCCARTHY, Cormac (2007). *A estrada*. Lisboa: Relógio de Água.
- CREHAN, Kate (2004). *Gramsci, cultura e antropologia*. Lisboa: Campo da Comunicação.
- GRAMSCI, António (2004). *Cadernos do cárcere*. Volume 1. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira.
- POPPER, Karl (1999). *O mito do contexto. Em defesa da ciência e da racionalidade*. Lisboa: Edições 70.
- SENNETT, Richard (2007). *A cultura do novo capitalismo*. Lisboa: Relógio de Água.

RUI CANÁRIO

(Lisbon, 31st July 2007)

Translated by Filomena Matos