

TROTSKY E OS BANHOS DE ESPUMA - TROTSKY AND THE BUBBLEBATHS PAULO COELHO - 1988

After visiting over 170 stands at the 3rd International Book Biennial in RioCentro, an exhausted 10 year old boy commented to another boy his age: “the drawings are beautiful, but I did not see any video game”.

For this boy, an uncompromising portrait of his time, the thousands of books with their colourful covers must have felt very similar to what Jorge Luis Borges described in “The Library of Babel”; that is, that there was something important there, but that he did not know what it was or how to find it. More than an angry complaint, the boy’s remark is a true synthesis of the danger that threatens all those who produce culture today: the divorce between the medium and the message, between the content and the form.

In terms of consumption, there should be no difference between a book and a can of guava juice. Both are intended for the public and both should deserve a similar marketing treatment. It turns out, however, that the writer usually considers himself a separate entity, much more serious and more important than the one who mixes guava with sugar, boils it and makes a delicious sweet treat. I cannot understand this cultural superiority, that only results in a growing distance from the rest of the world and creates a universe that is increasingly more restricted, full of chiefs and few Indians. When the boy went along the stands looking for a video game he does not find in the electronic cartridge the various beautiful things that are trapped within a book, because the owners of culture refuse to expand their universes and diversify their institutionalised ways to consider what is hidden in the human mind. If this same boy, however, were to pick up these things from the pages of a book, he would not recognise them either. This is because the writer never thinks about the pleasures of a good guava: he serves his technically perfect product, but without sugar and without humour, as if pleasure and popularity are negatively affecting his prestige. And apart from the pleasure, it also takes away any possibility to reach the millions of people who, already bitter after many hours of hard work every day, seek a little fantasy, joy and fun in the rare moments of leisure.

McLugan once said that the outbreak of independence wars on the African continent two decades ago was not the result of great philosophical works about the need for liberation. To him Trotsky, Engels or Jefferson were of little importance compared to Hollywood films, showing beautiful, half-naked goddesses in lavish bubble baths, surrounded by marble on all sides. When people saw these baths, they discovered an immense universe of luxury, money and power and they ended up feeling aggrieved. The revolution, which is an abstract idea, had a concrete objective to be achieved: a foam-filled bath tub with beautiful women. The world has freed itself from its exploiters because desire will always be stronger than ideology.

And there it is. When culture distances itself from pleasure - and consequently from the public, it creates an abyss and announces its own death. It does not perceive the importance of desire or still thinks that the author is more important than the guava producer. There is an urgent need to close the gap that separates the 10-year old boy from the books at the Biennial. The boy will continue to like video games but - through pleasure - he will discover that books, even written 600 years ago, can still bring something new and important. As long as these things are said in a light, appetising and invigorating way, as the anonymous guava sweet artisan tells us with joy.

(unauthorised translation - for information only)