



Pleasure as raw material for work and leisure

Ernani Maletta¹

We are now living a historical moment in which the ways of being in the world, of acting, of evidencing ourselves, in short, of being and living, are oriented against binary “oppositions”, dichotomies and dualities that have been leading the daily scene, all over the world.

Binarity presumes that the identity of something is restricted to only two mutually exclusive possibilities, whose picture could be a straight line segment on which we should position ourselves as close as possible to one of the ends and, therefore, as far as possible from the other. These extremes are considered “opponents” - a word I do not agree with -, as if Apollo reigned in one of them, representing what is conventionally beautiful, correct, balanced, predictable, adequate, symmetrical, which in this way would not interrelate with Dionysus, linked to excesses, imbalances, irregularities, unpredictability, dissonances.

Based on this way of apprehending oppositions – a mistake, in my opinion – conventions shape us strategically. When we appear in this world, we do so at any of the infinite inner points of this line segment where Apollo and Dionysius remain in opposite ends, and there would be no reason to long to be attached to just one of them, to the detriment of the other. However, conventions impose on us a “straight line life”, in which living implies walking towards one of these extremes, moving away from the other. Similarly, our objective in life in the present time would be to walk towards the future, moving further and further away from the past. And, if we mean to fully live or experience “something”, we must distance ourselves as much as possible from the “not something”, considered its opposite.

¹Doctorate in Education at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. Post-doctorate at the University of Bologna (Italy). Professor of Theater and Postgraduate Studies in Arts at the School of Fine Arts at UFMG. Scenic and musical director of theater performances in Brazil and Europe.

In steadfastly rejecting this idea, I must first share my conviction that we confuse opposition with denial. The “not something” is not the opposite of “something”, but its negation. Opponents – Apollo and Dionysus – do not deny each other, but are reciprocally enlightened. Unlike negation, the existence of one depends on affirming the existence of its opposite. Therefore, I think that the most accurate picture for each of the circumstances that make up life should never be a straight line, but a circle, like a ring, bearing no extremes that I necessarily move away from when I move on. In fact, if we settle ourselves at any point in this “ring-life”, the more we walk into it, to get away from that point, the more we will inevitably get back to it. Walking towards the future implies continually revisiting the past.

In many ways, we realize that work and leisure are exemplary regarding these denials and oppositions. A huge number of people may perceive each one of them at the extremes of a straight-line segment, establishing the impossibility of an approximation. I do think that, in such a case, for these people, unfortunately, the work is faithful to its etymological origin “*tripalium*”, an instrument of torture; hence, the denial of leisure.

On the other hand, there is also a big deal of people – and I optimistically believe they are the majority of humanity – for whom work is the moment of creation, achievement, reaching goals. Therefore, it is a source of pleasure. The need to produce, to achieve a result, creates a tension, which vanishes when this need is satisfied and... Here is the pleasure! Exactly what we look for in our leisure time.

This is not to say that work necessarily turns into leisure, and I think we gain nothing by reducing each other. On the contrary, perceiving them as opposites that lighten up is very valuable, as far as they are close in the rings of life, as distinct faces of the same organism whose raw material is pleasure.

It is nothing new that, quite often, the leisure of some is to watch the work of others... that many people, in their leisure time, choose to do activities that for lots of others would be hard work. There might not be something that can really be absolutely perceived as one or the other. And, it doesn't matter whether what we do is exactly one or the other. What matters is the pleasure, yielded by both, without which, I think, living is worthless