"ON INNOVATION"
Between the flight of a duck and the finger of a fool, some ideas on innovation
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It could be said without the risk that generalisations often incur that the great products or inventions we deal with on a daily basis are a significant departure from the objects initially designed. Very often all that remains of these are the names, the idea, and what reaches us now is a series of additions or a growing sum of small but good modifications, which encouraged optimisation, improvement, or adjustment to successive and new experiences, requirements that people expect of these products and even spaces. Therefore, we can accept that adding, introducing new visions, new positions in relation to what has been established, offers the possibility of updating and renewing the actual product, often to the point where it becomes new objects and sometimes shifts in paradigm.

Nowadays innovation is perceived as a validation and acceptance process, of knowledge, of the growing number of small alterations and subtle modifications that countless anonymous users blithely create in the objects, spaces and products they "invent" through use and interaction. Frequently, it merely seems necessary to gather all that information to innovate any product.

More than through the checklist that many "Innovation" experts insist on drawing up and enforcing from on high in their air-conditioned and well ventilated offices, we believe that it is through the analysis of the interactions and the emergent idea of group living that innovation occurs today. This requires collaboration, cooperation and the integration of the different ways of seeing, of experiencing and of perceiving the spaces and products that we come across daily, many of which (we know all too well) are not necessary at all. Accordingly, the group ideal, in the creation, verification and validation of the thought process, may be the way to a sustainable and innovative– "innovation".

It seems that no one innovates alone anymore, nothing is created in solitude and what demands reinvention is the concept of solitude itself. So the team is the stronger driver, currently superseding the self, the individual, in terms of innovation. Collective life, the appropriation and transformation of a product, the social amalgamation that can be observed, is not compatible with the ideal of innovation of products and companies that are static, wise and "scientifically innovative", custom made for us by others who have no clue what we want - and especially who we are!

The truth is that use, the action of human beings on the elements / products is complex and undefined. It fosters change, invention, refusal, and companies have to be able to live with this unknown that does not represent the market, but the people who make up that "market" which is more surprising than the former. Let us take a look at the "invention" of the new language produced by SMS. This new means of communication and of living that became standardised in order to change again. We are sure that this was not the original intention of the person who "innovated" or "invented" – we prefer to say "made this function available".

We can accept that, though it is true that in human beings thought is individual, creation is the result of a collective involvement and a global exterior view, and the product of something more than the sum of its parts. For this reason, companies, products, identities, their brands, their spaces, are always something more than the sum of a series of characteristics or functionalities.

Drinking from reality, from the fortuitous, from the "inconsequential" could paradoxically be one of the routes to creating, innovating, offering (and we should be gentle in the offering)…the products, services, images and concepts that society needs. "Everything has been done" – they tell us. And it appears to be true. But, we can say that we can still establish other connections, links to many modes of thought, of life, of ideal of life, of understanding, of experimentation, of alternative experiences, which can validate or reject, unite or separate. Perhaps with everything that exists (and that is a lot already), we can still dare to help build an ideal of "happiness" that will never be completely achieved.

The industrialisation of the last centuries and the growing derivation from industry to finance produced a closed lexicon with quite a defined language in Portuguese companies. This is why innovation is lacking ideas, it has been more formal than substantial, it is aimed more at other companies than at consumers. It is more of a certain measure to attain a position and "reward" than to solve or understand a problem that society will experience, in other words, it seems work is conducted more in the past than in the future.

Lao Tse, a philosopher from the 5th century BC claimed that to hit a flying duck it was necessary to aim ahead, at empty space. It is that view of aiming in front, at a "void", to a field where there is not yet a person (or duck), which we need to instil in our future entrepreneurs in order to create "innovative" companies. Mao Tse-tung put it another way when he said that when pointing at the moon, a fool would look only at the finger.

The paradigm of innovation seems to be between a bird in flight and the finger of a fool. The high quality research that some universities want to develop, complaining of a lack of support from public services and many companies in particular, is a matter of concern for all of us. Meanwhile, the list of complaints entrepreneurs have about the huge gap between universities and the productive and industrial context of this underdeveloped country riddled with vices, where the ideal of production and efficiency appears to be an abstract concept, leaves us with low expectations for the future success of this matter. This means it will take some years to hit the duck in flight and until then, instead of employment subsidy, we will increasingly be subsidising the growing unemployment demonstrating that we dare to innovate in this matter too!

Today we think that the big driver of development is the network, teamwork, and this supersedes individual work. Society today is structured by networks, by communities "that devour" different cultures and with a maximum permeability. In this society of hyper communication, it does not seem possible to own truth by oneself, and the knowledge borderline, the frontiers, in this matter are also not definite and invite us to a continual change, to innovation and even to a break with tradition.

While it is true that in tradition the future is the repetition of the past, today the future presents itself as a territory to be conquered, an unstable equilibrium between "being" and "having" in successive discontinuities, where we are only offered one place to fit into, or rather, to win.

Today, we live in a multiple reality, as Ítalo Calvino tells us, where societies are organised and structured as if they were networks. It is that network and the need to understand it that we must study to comprehend the new innovation, without inscribing it with past innovation and tradition. The creation of a productive, emotive, functional network…is our fundamental condition for survival. It induces innovative solutions because they derive from other fields of

knowledge, they result from other approaches, other books, other experiences and other divergent methods of working, of discovering or researching.

The knowledge of today is not compartmentalised in exclusive scientific areas of expertise. There is a growth of new study topics and fields of knowledge that globalisation and the ease and availability of information provide us with every day. And every day reality makes us more ignorant within a particular topic, which was just invented today and tomorrow will be a global success by sharing and accession, often emotional and usually for the mere fact belonging to a group or virtual community that always ends up being real.

The need to dominate so many areas of knowledge, which Renaissance men also strove for, is surely a harder task now (but let us face it more stimulating), given the emergence of a new vision of the human being, more complex and less standardised, more structured into multiple networks, multiple communities, multiple places.

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