

## Juan Esteves

Juan Esteves was born in 1957 and graduated in Journalism, beginning to work as a photojournalist in 1985 at Folha de Sao Paulo, the Brazilian largest newspaper at that time. He also worked for other important publications such as Marie Claire Magazine, Elle Magazine, among others. He has collaborated with international publishing houses as Penguin Books (England), Rizzoli (Italy), Édition Autrement (France), Editorial Crítica (Spain), Rive Gauche (China), The University Press (USA).

Since 1980 he has been publishing in different countries, more than 200 books, the majority showcasing his portraits. Since 2000 Esteves published his own books as 55 Portraits (Ed. D'Lippi, 2000), Presença/Presence (Ed. Terceiro Nome, 2006) about great names of Brazilian and international culture such as visual artists, sculptors, engravers, film directors, photographers, writers, poets, musicians, and choreographers. Dedicating himself to the historical architecture of the city of São Paulo, the largest Brazilian city, he published Capital São Paulo and its architectural heritage (Ed. Atitude Brasil, 2010) and Campos Elíseos, History and Images (Ed. Cult Art, 2018) among others.

Juan Esteves has photographs in the main Brazilian collections such as the Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP), Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ), Museum Of Modern Art of São Paulo (MAM-SP), Museum of Contemporary Art of the São Paulo University (MAC-USP), Pinacoteca of São Paulo (Pina\_), Afro Brasil Museum, Itaú Cultural Institute, Moreira Salles Institute (IMS), Chapel Art Collection, Iberê Camargo Foundation, Oscar Niemeyer Museum (MON) Musée d'Elysée, Lausanne and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF) Paris. Private Collections such as Rubens Fernandes Junior, Werner Herzog e Joaquim Paiva Collection.

Esteves has presented his work at Oscar Niemeyer Museum (MON), Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP), Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ), Museum of Contemporary Art at São Paulo University (MAC-USP), Pinacoteca of São Paulo (Pina\_) Instituto Moreira Salles (IMS), Rio de Janeiro, Itaú Cultural, Stedelijk Museum Het Domein, Sittard, Netherlands; Städtisches Museum in der alten Post, Mülheim an der Ruhr, Germany. PS1 (MoMA) New York, USA; Aschembach Gallery, Amsterdam; Point Ephémère, Paris, France, Montreux Art Gallery, Switzerland; Time and Style Gallery, Tokio, Japan; Fundación Juan March, Madrid, Spain, in more than 200 exhibitions between collective and individual shows.



**There is a kind of silent eloquence on faces, which, without acting, acts nevertheless. \***

Who is speaking? This is the question we immediately ask when we look at each of the portraits making up this collection.

The speech, whether given or written, invades the thinker's face, superimposing itself on it. Colors, paint stains and a sort of digitally simulated deterioration comes together with the changes to which the portrait offers itself, sometimes making its subject unidentifiable. Its own enunciation deprives the supposed subject of the discourse of its face.

On the one hand, we experience the playful. Initially, in an attempt to name the portion of the face we can see. Then, through a game of scholarship, in the search to recover each of the

essential quotes in the treasured knowledge, either by recalling the source, or by correlating the assertion dealing with a theme or style presumably characteristic of a given personality.

On the other hand, the tragic aspect reveals itself in the sequence of faceless effigies, of "face-utterances". From the start, it is about the eventual malaise motivated by the impossibility of recomposing the face stolen from itself by the speech given speech. Later, one experiences an astonishment at the occasional incongruity between the statement and the hypothetical coherence represented by the semblance then reconstituted. Perplexity, therefore, when one faces a fading identity, then the bond between subject, speech and face is dissipated.

Once the discourse steals the subject's countenance, the statement privilege allows us to carry out the opposite and less evident route from the utterance to the subject, in order to inquire about the attributes manifested by a given real individual that would allow him to occupy the position of subject of the utterance, a "determined and empty place". In this way, we realize that a multiplicity of

individuals can fill the post of the subject of an utterance. Identity turns into an “embarrassment”, into a “philosophical fable”.

It is true that we recognize correlations between this series of images and the works of Roy Lichtenstein, Sigmar Polke and Barbara Kruger: the treatment of the original portrait, a certain fading, the insertion of the word as a component of the figure, and not just as an accessory. However, we do not risk calling them influences, which would end up by de-characterizing the particularity of this collection of portraits in their own time. We would rather state that the aforementioned correlation is of an inspirational order.

Another imperative feature of this book is the absence of the author’s name on its front cover, a ratification of the observations we made in advance. There is no name next to the title *Essential quotes to live*.

Now, if he is not the subject of the speech, he himself uttered, what is the actual individual? This question has already been answered: it is “the episode of a reflection”, a mere event in the vast historical horizon of our thought, in the temporal unfolding of the so-called Western culture, whose values, gradually expressed in the unfolding of our rationality, call for urgency of “expatriation from Europe”, his private cradle.

**\* Père de Cressolles, *Vacationes autumnales sive de perfecta oratoris actione et pronuntiatione*. Paris, 1620.**

**Alessandro Francisco**

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**Feeling without image is blind, and image without feeling is void.**

**Benedetto Croce**

In his book “Panégyrique” published in 1967, French philosopher and filmmaker Guy Debord wrote that “quotations are useful in periods of ignorance or obscurantist beliefs.” More than 50 years have gone, and, without much rigor, this “society of the spectacle” continues with a deliberately anti-cultural and large-scale production that, in a way, validates the permanence of this peculiar phrase, leading me to collect others together with its thinkers. There is no one who does not formulate a quote once in a while during a crisis, with or without humor.

This intermediation is not exactly a power exercised over our society, although it is impossible not to notice it. But we are interested in another idea: as a Marxist, Debord thought that the capitalist attitude led to consumption and to the accumulation of images, a process that goes through our political and religious relations. An idea that, according to him, was strengthened after the social struggles of 1968 reaching the development of today’s society.

Our actions in the last decades have ratified the world of consumption while the means of communication have become digital, leaving us a profusion of images without parallel. As the diffusion of celebrities, as well as tragedies, gained significant proportions in their spectacularization, we are not surprised that although living in this chaotic and turbulent state, the jokes systematically arise dealing with serious matters. Perhaps these will become our “quotes” when the world will calm down one day.

It is interesting to see how the most intellectual thought that crossed the middle of the 19th century and the 20th as a whole, is so current and so provocative, forcing us to pay more attention to texts and not only to images. The popular expression “A picture is worth a thousand words” is no longer so accurate.

It is in this sense I appropriate fragments of thoughts that are already consecrated. To paraphrase Didi-Huberman, these “splinters” of old photographs and ideas to suggest something never written to me, seeing the quotes as dialogical proposals between images, metadata, and texts. What they can mean and how they can be re-signified by giving another dimension through my arbitrary cuts that sometimes distort their syntax in the light of the contemporary trauma between my opinion and

that of the reader, which we traverse together through visual simulations and the dismantling of general credibility of the establishment.

A little pessimistic idea... Perhaps these messages would be use-ful if understood lato sensu? It is a question to be answered. At least it takes us to the discussion (not profound at all) of certain concepts and the desire to understand or overcome it through a playful pro-posal. Our daily life is inserted in them, their anguish, their fears, and provocations.

The quotes we see on the internet, on social media, websites sell ideas but do not clarify their content, are largely apocryphal and rarely bring their sources. These phrases are projected and repeated without knowing what context they are in, and they are located just as the pro-fuse images pass through the same paths.

Paradoxically, taking advantage of a cultural production that is not virtual and whose search is complex, I use an app, something that automatically processes data that is not complex at all. It is also a sim-ulacrum of art. One more among those we encounter daily, image-cre-ating devices, formerly a privilege of the elite, now accessible to all, to such a mass society and these members already studied by some thinkers such as Spanish Ortega y Gasset or French Michel Foucault.

Essential Quotes to live is a title inspired by this phrase from Debord. It is our last resort, as the Cambridge Dictionary: "if all oth-er methods fail." Without consent to colonialism, the option for this language is in the global journey that thoughts take through social me-dia, especially visual ones and in the breadth of search and research it offers us. I am not a thinker, writer, or philosopher. I am a visual artist. Although, I cannot conceive of one without the other. Perhaps, as the writer and philosopher Benedito Nunes said in an interview, I must be suffering from the Relativism's disease. It was with this type of humor that this book was born seeking to broaden its range of understand-ing and discussion, to resist the general chaos we live in today.

Words and images are signs, separated or united and have their part in the imagery built here from the thinkers of the 19th and 20th century in a specific section of their metaphysical elaborations, which are compared with our time. The now, the already, this absurd entan-glement that we have experienced, since this short period that pre-ceded the current administration of the country and the uncontrolled pandemic that settled in the authoritarian rhetoric of negationism, where culture, art and especially the citizen, become abject. Where racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and misogyny

increase daily with-out shame.

So, when we read a phrase by Sigmund Freud: “What does a wom-an want?” among others in this book, it reminds us of the struggle for a less misogynistic society, where femicides are absurdly commonplace and confronts us with it. In the book Sigmund Freud: Life and Work, by Welsh Ernest Jones, a psychoanalyst, the clipped quote is the big question that he had failed to answer despite his 30 years of research “on the female soul.”

Why don't you write? Write! Write is for you! wrote essayist Hélène Cixous in her 1975 *Le Rire de la Méduse*, an ultimatum, an exhortation for women to use writing with authority. Something she called “white ink” and “female writing”. We can add a phrase from 1918, “Freedom is always and exclusively Freedom”, by the philosopher and revolutionary Rosa de Luxembourg, extracted from her book *The Russian Revolution*. The statement is completed with “for those who think differently.” My generation, as the reader may have already noticed, was forged in a mainly Eurocentric, white, and masculine thought.

In the book by Hélène Cixous, the introduction is also by French Jacques Derrida who in the 1960s brought the idea of deconstruction to philosophy, a criticism of the complexity of previous philosophical assumptions. I cut out a provocation from it: “We have no language, no syntax and no lexicon”. It is in a paragraph of a lecture by him at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, United States, in October 1966, published later in a book. He says it makes no sense to dispense with the concepts of metaphysics to attack metaphysics, because we do not have a language, syntax or lexicon that is foreign to history. In short, we could conjecture that ontological thinking permeates all our digres-sions in a continuous flow, which allows us here to subvert the order.

What served the Italian writer Antonio Gramsci, in the 19th cen-tury, is still valid? His phrase seems current: “The old is dying and the new cannot be born.” He referred to the gap between the death of one sovereign and the enthronement of the next, which brought a wide variety of morbid symptoms. A moment, according to him, when previous generations expected changes in the monotony of the government. Nothing closer to the last years of our national policy. A buffer government with harmful characteristics that preceded one of the greatest disasters in our political history. The new cannot be born and the old dies forever maintaining proselytism.

The “monotony” in the maintenance of certain circumstances, which seems to obliterate the

possibility of imagination and thinking, needs to be stimulated. However, courage and humor are needed. Some-thing difficult to demand from a writer like Gramsci who wrote his text in the prison of Turi, in the region of Apulia, remaining there from 1926 to 1937. But the understanding of this character is relative when we think of this aphorism by Arthur Schopenhauer “Boredom is just the reverse side of fascination”, to which he added “both depend on being outside rather than inside a situation and one leads to the other.” Interestingly called a pessimist, since he saw the world as “the product of a blind, insatiable and evil metaphysical will.” There are those who still think so today.

There are few intellectual women that we find prominently on the network without having to resort to academic websites. Undoubtedly, one of the most famous is Simone de Beauvoir, a sharp critic of society and her time establishment. “This world has always belonged to the men” makes up a paragraph from the introduction to her 1949 book *Le Deuxième Sexe*. For her, this has always been a world of men and none of the reasons given for this seemed adequate. The book was a game changer. The idea of “The woman as the Other”, title of her introduction, brings a relational theory of femininity when affirming that “the woman is everything that the man is not.” More importantly, she encouraged the discussion of gender, something still so contemporary, writing that it was not an essential characteristic of people but something that emerges through socialization.

Simone de Beauvoir was a companion to the French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, for whom “all philosophy is practical.” She may have criticized the statements of Dean Karl Marx. One of them, cut out here, “Social progress can be measured exactly by the social position of the female sex” is found in different versions, exchanging “female” for “fair” but ended by “the ugliest one included,” something unthinkable of heard today, but unfortunately also said by heads of state and ministers.

Although Marx anticipated the discussion with “Anyone who knows anything about history knows that great social changes are impossible without female leaven” here extracted from his correspondence with Friedrich Engels of December 12, 1868, it is known that feminist theories sometimes antagonize with the Marxist view on feminism.

It is interesting to note the posture of Canadian feminist and activist Shulamith Firestone (1945–2012) in her book *The Dialect of Sex – The case for Feminist Revolution* (William Morrow & Co, 1970) where she argues that “the biological sexual dichotomy, particularly the division biological reproduction work, is the root cause of male domination, exploitation of the economic class, racism, imperialism, and ecological irresponsibility. “The author was a pioneer of the radical feminist movement.

Karl Popper, a Viennese thinker, had already written “Our ignorance must necessarily be infinite”, although “our knowledge may be only finite.” Which brings us to our pandemic moment. The specialist doctor in infectious diseases Carlos Magno Fortaleza, professor at UNESP, in an article for the Journal of the Society of Tropical Medicine asks how epistemological disputes relate to scientific responses to the coronavirus pandemic? It recovers the curious concept of agnotology, by science historian Robert Proctor, professor at Stanford University, who refers to the study of the production of ignorance (especially through scientific research). How can we not associate this idea with our current denialist situation, of certain governments, doctors and a good part of the population?

“All societies make their own imaginaries (institutions, laws, traditions, beliefs and behaviors)” wrote Cornelius Castoriadis. He divides them into autonomous societies, those in which its members are aware of this fact and heteronomous, in which they attribute their imagery to some extra-social entity, such as God, for example.

But how to understand this when we read that “the old-fashioned idea of God has become incredible or implausible” an excerpt from Alan Watts’ text that considered the issue as a difficulty for us in the modern world.

Specifically for us, here below the tropic imagination, Claude-Lévi Strauss’s ethnographic analysis when discussing the differences of the Old and New World is not favorable even today: “Our system is the height of absurdity”. 1955 assertion when he published his *Tristes Trópicos*, after a period in Brazil, between 1935 and 1938, as a professor at the newly created USP, a long journey between a São Paulo still provincial and lands of diverse Brazilian ethnicities.

But Lévi Strauss also brought a poetic vision. And we know that love and poetry, like art, saves us or drives us crazy, as the brilliant Michel Foucault warns us: “Madness is the absolute rupture of the work” and Susan Sontag reminds us that “Interpretation is a revenge of the intellect upon art” although we can go back in 1880, when Friedrich Nietzsche wrote in his diaries that “there are no facts, only interpretations”. We move on, then, with the blessing of this brilliant thinker: “There is always some madness in love” as well as “there is always some reason in madness.” To paraphrase it petulantly: *Essential Quotes to Live* is a book for All and None.

**Juan Esteves**