

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR PH.D. RICARDO ANTUNES (UNICAMP - CAMPINAS-SP)¹

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Professor Ricardo Antunes was at the Maringa State University (UEM), in 2018, to give lectures at events developed in partnership with Psychology Department (DPI) and Subjectivity and Work Interinstitutional Laboratory (Known in Brazil as Laboratório Interinstitucional de Subjetividade e Trabalho - LIST). On this occasion, he was willing to grant an interview to the LIST, which follows transcribed and edited⁴.

Presentation: Full Professor of Sociology at the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences of Unicamp. He is a Visiting Professor at the University of Venice / Italy and Member of the Scientific Committee of the course. Between 1997 and 1998, he was a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of SUSSEX, England. He taught postgraduate and undergraduate courses besides conferences at various universities in Europe (Italy, Spain, France, England, Portugal, Switzerland); in the North America (USA) and South America (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Cuba), and Asia (China and India). He coordinates the Work World Collections (Boitempo Publisher) and Work and Emancipation (Popular Expression). He received the Zeferino Vaz Award from Unicamp (2003), the Florestan Fernandes Chair from CLACSO (2002) and the Medal (Commendation) of the Superior Labor Court - TST (2013). He works with subjects such as work sociology, social theory, social being ontology, new work morphology, work and centrality, working-class, action and consciousness, trade unionism and workers' movement.

¹ Interview given by Professor Dr. Ricardo Antunes (UNICAMP - Campinas-sp), to the Interinstitutional Laboratory of Subjectivity and Work - LIST, on the theme Work, Politics and Action.

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⁴ We emphasize that there were parts of the interview that were taken off in order to give more fluidity to the text, thus they do not change the content or the essence of the interview. These changes were considered by staff interviewer and interviewee to meet the content to be made known and the editorial policy of the Psychology in Study journal.



LIST: In 2018, you released the book *O privilégio da servidão: o novo proletariado de serviço na era digital*, by Boitempo publisher. In this publication, references to the writer Albert Camus are found, among them the servitude privilege idea. How is it possible to understand this idea in contemporary work scenery?

RICARDO ANTUNES: A special chapter in the history of the creation of a book is the development of its title. In the case of my last book, as it is a particular book originally designed from articles that I reworked entirely, some of them published abroad, others unpublished, unprecedented, others I wrote for the book itself; I only had the subtitle *o novo proletariado de serviços da era digital* (Antunes, 2018). That was the motto; however, it had no title. Reading the first book by Albert, *O primeiro homem* (Camus, 1994), in it there is a passage that says, “[...] workers (and he is referring to the working poor of Algeria) only have a vacation when they are injured on the work and their company has health insurance”. Consequently, it is to deal with their health that these workers take vacations, what is a freak because to take a vacation when you are sick surely it is no vacation. Then he says, “[...] the work became martyrdom, work is no longer a virtue; it became the servitude privilege” (Camus, 1994). From these issues, I said to myself, “I found the title of my book!”

Why? What do I mean by it? Young people today - I am not talking only in Brazil, I mean in Argentina, Chile, the United States, Italy, France, England, Germany, the Netherlands, India, China, some of the countries I know, if they are lucky they will have the privilege of being servants. What is to be a servant? Working without rights. If he has work, he works and earns. If he has no work, he waits and does not receive from it. If he is not careful, he will only have a vacation at the moment he has an injury. However, the problem is that today many companies have no health insurance because if you are a legal entity (known in Brazil as Pessoa Jurídica – PJ), companies are not bound to bear this ‘cost’. Then comes what I call in my book, a mass of workers in global intermittent services that are flexible, outsourced, they are in the informality. Of course, I am not talking about middle age servitude, I am speaking in servitude towards the subject, that is, he has lost control of work, no longer has any right to ensure longevity on the job, so he is a potential candidate for at worst to be unemployment or to have underemployment in a median hypothesis. It is a tragedy, since in Brazil we now have 13 million unemployed, according to official figures, in addition, more 5 million of discouraged workers, by over 7 or 8 million unemployed with intermittent work, the so-called occasional odd jobs. This information gives nearly 30 million of unemployment or underemployment situations, in an economically active population of a little over 100 million. It is a tragedy!

Last year, in Italy, where I have been teaching for 10 or 12 years, at Kafosca University in Venice (Italy) as a visiting professor, I gave a master class called ‘History of critical sociology’. There, none of my students was sure about what kind of work they will have, or even they will have work. They know that if they work, they will have precarious work, either by caring for hotels or restaurants or fast food, or in Venice opening and closing the *vaporettos* doors (typical public bus from Venice). This is a worldwide tragedy. A societal tragedy and a Brazilian tragedy too.

LIST: Before the Brazilian panorama of labor reforms, outsourcing and the imminence on the approval of the Brazilian Social Welfare Reform, which perspective do you consider that will unveil for the society and the employee?

RICARDO ANTUNES: About three years ago, I met India, where I was invited to give some lectures at the New Delhi University (a public university). What I saw in India I had not seen

in Brazil and any other country in the world. Crowds! Countless miserable crowds. They are not poor or very poor; they are miserable! People in the indigence line, the most brutal. For example, I was staying in a hotel near the train station in New Delhi, a vast city; the population comes from the interior, without work and sit on the streets. These people need food, and the principal place to look for it is in the street gutters. If you need to go to the bathroom, we usually go to the bathroom at home. Nevertheless, how do people, who live on the street, go to the bathroom? I saw scenes that marked me a lot, in which the person takes off his pants and does his basic needs on the street, in plain sight, because for him it is normal, there is no other place to do them.

When I came back to Brazil in 2015, following the movement for labor reform, the outsourcing, the welfare PEC, the tragedy that has been announced in Brazil [...] which country can annually reduce health, education and welfare spending in a population that does not have decent public health, who does not have a decent public school, who does not have decent social welfare? Recalling what I saw and marked me in India, I wrote an article in the *Folha de São Paulo* (a famous Brazilian newspaper), stating, 'O Brasil caminha num célere processo de indianização'. Indianização in the sense of what I saw in India and not in the sense of the indigenous himself. Because in India, there is a large number of people who are treated like animals, who do not belong to the large and complex system of races and castes. We walked to it. If you are now in the center of São Paulo, there is a large mass of indigent, the other day I read that has a population that lives in the sewers. In the sewers! In Porto Alegre, in the central avenue of the city, there is a totally covered sidewalk, which is practically a hotel for the poor. Remembering a phrase by Albert (1994) to those who "[...] have nothing to lose because they have lost everything". In Salvador, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, the situation is similar. That is the tragedy. This is the scenario in which we will be, an unemployed working-class, perhaps, underemployed. Bolsonaro (Brazilian President) proposal on creating a 'green-yellow card', from which the worker individually negotiate their rights with the employer. It is evident; we are in the process of 'Indianização'.

LIST: Would it be possible to conduct a critical analysis of the relationship among the entrepreneurship cult, the *pejotização* (the creation act of legal entities) and the informality within the national scenery?

RICARDO ANTUNES: For sure! If you have around 20 million unemployed, recent data from the IBGE (2018)⁵. In this regard, I thought that this rate is not only higher because Uber now employs in Brazil, or rather; it connects today in Brazil, a number close to 700,000 workers. By the way, I have used this service and several drivers told me that rent the car to work because they do not have own car. Then the driver leases the car, works around 13 hours a day, pays R\$ 100.00 (a hundred reais) for the automobile leasing, as well as all costs because drivers bear all costs: fuel, car cleaning, car insurance, et so on. What do they achieve for, after working 13 hours day? What is left for him? What does that mean? As there is a mass of unemployed, you have to create fetishes and myths: entrepreneurship is the meaningless elixir of the world. Then, of course, the speech is for you to be an entrepreneur. Nevertheless, the problem is this [...] Let us assume a hypothetical situation: you lost a job in the public bank, received compensation of R\$ 50/60 thousand, and then invested in a snack bar. If this place fails, it will be your problem, my friend. If you received R\$ 20/30 thousand related to retirement and bought a hot dog car and if this commercial

⁵ Data obtained via the official website.

enterprise breaks, it is strictly up to you. Therefore, it is a myth because the entrepreneur dreams that he is the businessperson himself. Nevertheless, he is also the owner of himself.

Indeed, this idea is a free adaptation of a Marx idea, speaking of pay for piecework. May we think that Uber owns the production means? No! The Uber driver owns the working tool, which is quite different from owning the production means. Production means is wealth. Banks, industry, agro-industry, big agriculture and big services control the production means. Now it would be interesting to a study, despite the difficulties of accomplishing something in this regard, how many entrepreneurs 'rise' and how many 'blow up'.

Pejotização is a falsification. It is a masked way of saying that a person is not self-employed though he is self-employed. The Temer government was outsourced, victorious in a coup to start the devastation of the relations of social rights, social welfare and labor. Then, the result is that informality makes companies treat workers as a syringe: to be used, to be discarded. The problem is that we are creating an inhumane, brutal, antisocial, destructive and violent society. Why do we see the flowering of a wave in which "[...] we must end the criminality now"? How to end it? To fight against criminality in Brazil, you have to end the drug trafficking, the petty, medium and large theft. You do not end this without education, without health, without dignified life in the suburbs and hills and out of work. If you live in the hills and do not work, drug trafficking employs. It is not worth putting the army to smash everything because innocent people die, who has not to deal with drug trafficking, the ordinary population. When the shooting starts rolling, the bullet did not choose either which house the drug dealer is or in which he is not. We walked to a society of the devastation and that can be observed in Temer labor reform –or better, in counter-reform – that even the labor justice was reduced because the capital does not want labor justice. The way to solve this is by direct negotiation between the company and the worker. Thus, what for labor justice? Therefore, PJ, entrepreneurship, informality are patches of anon-repairing society. Like Swiss cheese, the holes will grow.

LIST: The technological revolution has created new services proletariat of the digital age. What would characterize what you call the info proletariat and the so-called precariat?

RICARDO ANTUNES: In Europe, in the advanced countries and here it is only talked on industry 4.0. Anyone, who wants to, can read with a little calmer about it in the book. Fundamentally, it is industry 4.0 because is the fourth cycle of monumental technological advancement of the industry. They say that the first was the Industrial Revolution; the second was the Taylorism and the automotive industry of the 20th century; from 1973, the third cycle happened with the informational Digital Revolution and the fourth is from now on with this new leap. It is the creation of the 'internet of things'. For example, I am with my mobile here by my side, I turned it off because otherwise, I would not have peace to give you this interview, but what will I do as soon as we finish it? To turn on this stuff to see what I have to do and what I have not to do. The companies will have the algorithms; they will have artificial intelligence; they will have automation and robotics taken to the limit; to the scanning of all. What is evident is that employment will increase for an ultra-qualified small layer. However, consequently, we will have massive layoffs of a series of activities that exist today, but that will disappear. The result will be a scanned precariat, so info proletariat or cyber proletariat. The perspective is that there is hardly any work that does not use the cell phone to mediate this relationship. One may ask, "But are you against technology?" No, evident. The problem is that technology today is guided by a corporatist logic, completely devoid of human societal sense because there is a war among corporations. Apple knows that if neglecting itself, Samsung breaks it. Moreover, Samsung knows that Nokia does the

same. Therefore, it is a war. It is the law of the jungle, so much so that in my boyhood, you like either the Brahma or Antarctica. Decades later, Brahma and Antarctica have joined and today they already are something else, AMBEV, which is Brahma, Antarctica, more Belgian and other beers in a single corporation. So, the logic is this. To avoid breaking, it has to compete with other breweries, and this applies to the phone system, for cars, and so on.

Therefore, the picture we have is the expansion of an intermittent info proletariat without rights, precarious, giving the soul, which I call 'digital slavery'. Because when you go to your house, the phone is ringing, someone always calls at midnight and says, "Look, I hope you are awake because I have a problem and need you to solve it tomorrow at six in the morning". So the time has blurred, blurred the differences between lifetime at work and lifetime out of work. This is a result of this info proletariat.

The precariat is another matter, which I develop in my book, and deserves a particular discussion. Especially in Europe, you had a working class that has expanded during the Welfare State, post-second war, in which the employee worked, but could buy a car, get a good public school, good health care, he could have his house and to retire. However, what was once called Welfare State is also turning to dust, and you notice a mass of young workers who are already under the sign of this delegislation, under this no-legislation that does not protect work anymore. Besides, these young workers are only working for wages paid by voucher (as in Italy), no labor laws, with the zero hour contract (as in England). If a driver gets sick and does not have health insurance, who will work for him while sick? No one. Who will pay the salary he earns only when actually performing the act of working? No one. Therefore, he is an info proletariat. It has the appearance of the digital world, but there is also corrosion of his social rights. It is a myth to imagine a society without work. I am here with my cell phone in hand, this phone is a powerful machine, but what is the first activity without which this phone does not exist? The ore extraction made in Asia, Africa, Latin America, or even the digital equipment requires the most brutal handwork.

LIST: According to your analysis, what are the challenges and trends for emancipation and resistance processes today? How to think, for example, collective organizations and trade unionism.

RICARDO ANTUNES: The assumption that shapes my analysis is that this wealth enhancement system of global financial corporations has the inevitable consequence of the increasing impoverishment of the workers' mass. Just think about immigrants now running the world desperately behind any work, from the north to the south, from the south to the north, from the east to the west, from the west to the east, from the south to the south, from the north to the north. I mean, this desperate wander. Here in Paraná, in the region of poultry and beef cutting and et so on, there is a mass of Haitian workers, for example, which was incorporated due to the necessity of working, in working conditions that it is possible to imagine. Why, even, is it more difficult for the Haitian to join the trade union? It is especially harder because of the language issue; the Haitian does not speak Spanish and also Portuguese; he has his own dialect. So how is he going to join a trade union, a political party?

See, in this context, the biggest challenge is that we have a no-repairing society. We have to rebuild a way of life in which the question of work is law and dignity guarantor. The work today has no less dignity to the capital; work is mere cost. "Is it expensive? Just cut it and goodbye". Therefore, we have to think of a new society where the way of life up the work as a value and not as a commodity that creates benefit. Four or five Brazilians today,

Oxfam Brasil (2018)⁶ and other researches quoted it, earn what 100 million people produce in Brazil. Remembering Caetano (Caetano Veloso, a famous Brazilian singer) singing, “[...] something is out of order”.

Moments of crisis are tragic, but these are the moments that responses are also generated. We have to find the answers. Anyone who studies history will see that we are in an age of darkness. Moreover, who is dominating in Brazil today? For this purpose, all that is needed is a sharp eye.

Anyone who knows history realizes that capitalism has neither three centuries. The Mercantilism had five centuries. Capitalism, between its prehistory - its proform - and its current frame counts three centuries of validity. Socialism tried and was defeated with the Russian Revolution, with the Chinese Revolution and with several other revolutions of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, capitalism was also defeated in the revolution in Venice in the sixteenth century and in Avis Revolution in Portugal in 1783. I mean, there were early bourgeois experiments that were defeated. This shows that capitalism is a totalizing and totalitarian system and defeat it is not an easy undertaking. These facts reinforce the importance of trade unions, political parties, and social movements. These are the world of work tools.

Now, all of these tools have to be completely redesigned. The trade union, for example, is experiencing a deep crisis. Despite the reform as Temer imposed on trade unions, they need to recover the sense of class unionism. We are not experiencing one vertical Taylor-Ford industry; today, it is horizontal. For example, Walmart (a global force US hypermarket) has thousands of suppliers and many other thousands of subcontractors whose production is made in the south of China. You have a huge supply chain; today, supply chains compose the world. In Apple, the capital is American, but Foxconn is the company that produces the equipment in China. The latter is a company that has come to have more than one and a half million of workers in 2010 and had 17 suicide attempts, from which 13 tragically have become effective. Many companies have the brand today. They are the brand owner but outsource everything, the entire production chain.

Knowing China and India were vital to me. When I attended conferences in China two years ago, I took a plane full of small, medium and large Brazilian entrepreneurs. At one point, I asked for some of these entrepreneurs what they would do in Shanghai. They said they were going to a fair. In addition, I continued, “[...] but after all, what is there in this fair of Shanghai?” The person said, “Everything! All you need to produce; they sell there, and cheap!” Then one of them told me that he produced socks here - these designer socks - and he sells them for R\$ 80.00 a pair; however, if he bought these socks in China, he spent R\$ 2.00 for each pair. He said, “Why will I produce in Brazil and spend R\$ 10/15.00? I buy all my socking stock, and periodically they deliver it to me in Brazil”. All production is Chinese. That is why China, besides having an internal market spectacularly large (about 1.5 billion people), it is producing for all parts of the world and even has become the owner of many companies in the international scenery. Trade unions are being forced to rethink in this production chain.

In a chapter of my book, I say we have three tools: trade unions, political parties and social movements. Then I make a provocation: what is the most important? It depends. The political parties were very important in the twentieth century. Do the political parties have in the XXI century the same importance? Analyzing today, certainly not. What did the 2013 rebellions show? The rebellions of the world, the actions of the contemporary world are very

⁶ Data obtained via the official website.

anti-institutional. The population disbelieves in today's existing institutional system. So, we are forced to rethink the world. How are we going to do this? From the social struggles and not from the intellectual heads.

LIST: Front of the scenario outlined in your book *O privilégio da servidão: o novo proletariado de serviços na era digital* (2018), it is possible to see that the restructuring of capitalism, which is experienced, has caused dramatic changes to work. Consequently, the worker has his physical and mental health directly affected. Although a Work Sociologist, you accumulate a unique experience in your career that is why it was taken the liberty of asking: how do you understand the role of psychology in this context?

RICARDO ANTUNES: Surely, for me, it is a question that is not in my immediate universe, but you see [...] when I studied at FGV, we had the traditional view of Organizational Psychology. The psychologist worked for a better adaptation of the individuals working in the organizational structure, something like. Clearly, this is a traditional and uncritical Psychology. The work world today is the world of mental illness, of moral, physical and sexual harassment. For example, Japan has death rates - *the karoshi* - and suicides at work - *the karojisatsu* - among the highest in the world. Suicide exploded in countries like France, which does not have a tradition of suicide at work as in Japan. I read yesterday, or the day before, in the *Folha de São Paulo*, on the increase in the number of Brazilian workers who use psychiatric treatment. This is because the system does not give sure, if it has work tomorrow. The worker exhausted himself to meet hellish goals, if he achieves the goals today, tomorrow his goal will be higher, and the following day higher than the previous day and so on, "[...] otherwise, there is no fun" (irony). Who runs away from this rule is tying the capital and it does not like to tie. He likes to win the game by 7x1. It likes to rip open.

So, Psychology, Sociology, such as Social Assistance, each in its specificity, is being forced to rethink the world in which we operate and how we survive in this world deeply destructive. Therefore, I can only imagine in this context a critical Social Work Psychology, able to say that in this current frame, the equations can not be solved simply. A psychiatrist would prescribe those pills for you to sleep and relax, but still, they can be indispensable at a certain time of crisis, you can not only be restricted to this recipe, but you also have to have a social equation. Freud (1930), whom I read decades ago, has a fine essay called *O mal-estar na civilização*. We have a malaise that is much higher than that approached by Freud in his time, a malaise that is not from an isolated psyche. Today, Psychologists require a critical look, rather than a neutral look. It is reasonable when managing people to think that the first goal of these people is to work like crazy one in a targeting system, which makes them go crazy either at work or outside it? It is reasonable to think, as a manager of people, that if these people do not fit the maximum productivity, are they cards out of the deck? It is reasonable to believe, as they did in France, at France Telecom, when were the workers dismissed, as they did not fit to work. Then, they won in the labor courts the right to return to work, where they were regarded as species of animals because they did not fit the company's ideals? It is not possible.

Social Work Psychology has to analyze it critically, look at the world, not with a neutral outlook. There is no neutral perspective. This is vital for the Social Sciences and for all the humanities branches. The so-called 'neutrality' of the physical or mathematical does not make sense in this context. We have to have a conception of Human Sciences where humanity is the lifeblood, and this is decisive for psychology.

LIST: We thank Professor Ph.D. Ricardo Antunes, for the interview. Here we would like to register all availability and attention given to us by him.

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