

Thursday, May 8, 2008 19:00

Paolo Lugari: Back to the Pre-Socratic Thought

by Mario Calderon Rivera

Paolo Lugari is, above all, the generational symbol of mindsets against the Cartesian paradigm. For this reason, he began as an exotic human being in a Manichean and dogmatic culture, based on the immutable principle that the total can never exceed the arithmetic sum of the parts.

With this unavoidable approach, members of our generation seemed destined to a cumulative process of sterile learning of uncoordinated knowledge -. But we were also, inevitably doomed to turn into the same vicious circle of previous generations. Because, there could be something good in this fragmented knowledge and conformist world, we were always taught, as Fritjof Capra would say, that accumulating more of the same was not only the best but the only option for maintaining the appearance of growth. And all this despite the fact that the only result we have got was the widening of the gap between rich and poor. In this closed paradigm could never be a minimum distribution of development benefits.

Sometime in the sixties, with his diagnosis that "a country is poor because it is poor" - the Professor Albert Hirschman was perhaps who could give to us the key for breaking the vicious circle that our conformist culture has condemned us. From a corner lost in the Colombian Orinoco, Paolo Lugari gave the first answer: "the only deserts are deserts of imagination. Gaviotas is becoming an oasis of imagination." This message seemed to come from the roots of those who like him just need to get back to nature to break the myth that the total cannot exceed the arithmetic sum of factors. He knows very well that in the interaction with nature - and especially the tropical nature- the emergent things always contribute to a whole that exceeds that preset linear dogma. Something that made Professor Richard Evans Schultes write, the great master of our mega-biodiversity in the twentieth century: "Gaviotas is one of the few places where you think in a tropical way."

2500 years ago, Paolo Lugari would have taken place of honor in the gallery of the sophists and the pre-Socratic philosophers who laid the foundation for advanced science in our time. And, of course, he would have caused the same scandal, but also the same fascination as, Protagoras, or Thales, or Pythagoras, or Anaximenes, and Heraclitus, or Empedocles, and Democritus of Abdera, that believed they have discovered the beginning of everything in the Cosmic Nature. The rediscovering of these footprints 25 centuries ago, helped derail many of the paradigms that for 400 years had a monopoly on anthropocentric thinking of scientific understanding. Those were some eccentric characters that believed Nature to exist before man and there are principles that bind all things and they condition all in the entire universe. In this ongoing search, they returned to the depths of nature to identify the basic raw material in the water, air, and fire. They identify that totality that flows and is transformed by itself as "Panta rei" as Heraclitus of Ephesus said, Heraclitus who was called "the dark". Edgar Morin, one of the most lucid minds of our time, would express it in a much more clear way: "the whole earth is a physical-biological-anthropological totality, where life emerged from the history of Earth and man emerged from the life on Earth"

From Centro Las Gaviotas, Paolo Lugari sailed the same biocentric water. And in the essence of the Socratic saga he planted its first milestone in renewable energy sources. With the same inspiration, he called all of us, this generation around the masterly statement of systemic philosophy of the Great Democritus of Abdera: "All is in all". This will have another beautiful version of "organicity of all" in the ever-present Theillard de Chardin, and beautifully complemented by the theologian Thomas Berry: "everything is in everything and nothing is complete without everything else." From that same exploratory universe where hazard and uncertainty are surrounding everything, Paolo Lugari could make in Gaviotas in their own words "a sum of occurrences arising in nonlinear emerging chaos. A place, where the hazard can incubate and where the synergistic interaction replaces competition. "

Alan Weisman, a brilliant science journalist in New York Times and Los Angeles Times, made up this title to sum up this big experience for writing his revealing book - "Gaviotas, A Village to Reinvent the World" - which became one of Amazon's best sellers of the year. That title reproduced the first exclamation of laureate García Márquez's when he found Gaviotas: "Paolo, inventor of the World". He served also as an inspiration to Robin Lane to build a musical drama called "Enthusiasm," it made a great impact on large audiences of American society.

Not by chance was President Belisario Betancur who during his term made it an obsessive purpose that vision "to change the world." With political will, the techno-bureaucratic apparatus of the state temporarily retreated to allow the construction of thousands of housing solutions with built-in thermal solar energy and countless double effect windmills and brought water to the most isolated homes in well drained Orinoquia.

It was also during this time that, at the invitation of President Betancur, the Board of the Club of Rome, led by the unforgettable Aurelio Peccei came to Centro Las Gaviotas, for a memorable day. Taking leave of Colombia, he died very soon after, this apostle of ecumenism in the twentieth century, wrote his own image of Gaviotas, "a paradigm of sustainability for the world." Ten years later, Gunter Pauli, who carried on as Paolo Lugari, the everlasting gospel of the Club of Rome, will launch from the United Nations University in Tokyo, the ZERI initiative, one of the responses with much more global but also local significance, which have been given to the challenges posed by the Rio Summit.

Nor was casual that the country lived a stellar moment in the years before the founding of the Centro Las Gaviotas. From the ideological pages of *El Siglo*, inspired by the unforgettable Bernardo Ramirez, Belisario Betancur and Alvaro Gomez-Hurtado, the country approached new forms of holistic thinking. The first publication in Spanish language of the gigantic work of Teilhard de Chardin, starting with "The Phenomenon of Man" were in those pages, while Paolo Lugari conceived Gaviotas as an expression of the beautiful figure created by Teilhard with its "spirit of the Earth", or "the thinking Earth" or the equivalent of the "noosphere" as an intelligent substance surrounding our planet Gaia. Since then Gaviotas became a kind of meteorite coming from an also thinking universe that industrial civilization would completely ignore.

Paolo Lugari has taught us to live in contexts, rather than in single texts, to stay in processes and not on fragmented facts. Its essential virtues are perceptive genius, authenticity, and Socratic humility. As Democritus from Abdera, his spiritual contemporary, he gives us the permanent lesson that "the truly wise is he who does not grieve for what he does not have and is happy with what he has." From his creative universe with unlimited potential to multiply what you have, Paolo Lugari gives us the key to break all vicious circles. Including – in the first place, that of our poverty, but also the continuous recurrence of our own intellectual myopia.

Let us pray to the Goddess Gaia to give a stamp of permanence to the tracks he has set.

Santillana Foundation, Bogota, August 15, 2007

Translated from <http://www.revistaaleph.com.co/component/k2/item/178-paolo-lugari-regreso-a-los-presocraticos>