

Hybrid Criticism and Historical Form

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La déconstruction n'a jamais eu de sens et d'intérêt, à mes yeux du moins, que comme une radicalisation, c'est-à-dire aussi *dans la tradition* d'un certain marxisme, dans un certain *esprit de marxisme*.

Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*

“The national literary system appears to be a repository of forces in the process of breaking down” (Schwarz 58). This is Roberto Schwarz’ paradigmatic diagnosis as set out in his most recent book assessing the current state of the crucial contribution by Antonio Candido to literary and cultural studies in Brazil, to the extent that this contribution may be perceived in the present. Describing the situation of a peripheral country in a runaway globalization process, Schwarz understands that the system, outlined by Candido as the outcome of a peculiar historical and cultural formation, is now beginning, or may shortly begin, to operate as the real, insofar as this is one of the spaces where it is possible to sense that which is in the process of crumbling. The brief description maintains something of the *Unheimlich* in its reference to the disintegrating and abject transformation of the system (not only an organization but also a hierarchy). In a nutshell, the critic tells us that the nation—this Brazil that the previous generation beheld in the process of forming and that today is sliding into abject abandon—is the real thing, that which cannot be symbolized, the opposite of desire or, as Lacan put it, “ce qui ne cesse pas de ne pas s’écrire” (*Séminaire* 20, *Scilicet* 17).

The real of the present situation (the impossibility of this very present, its unbearable presence but also its reprehensible presentation) introduces an

unequivocal deformation and an unyielding distance vis-à-vis its own image. It is a point at which the framework of the present takes shape in the recesses of the very material content of representation. It thus spills over into a radical dissymmetry between glance and vision, that which transforms all communication—just as the one that is presupposed in the initial pages of the *Formação da Literatura Brasileira* by Antonio Candido—into a fruitful error. Consequently, the argument by Haroldo de Campos that censures Candido's debt to the Jakobsonian linguistic functions is limited (it would be more trustworthy, perhaps, to evoke Bühler's communicative triangulation), because, in addition to the functionalistic mark unequivocally present in the model of formation, the very idea of communication and the existence of a community is presented as something that, in order to be introduced, requires something "real." In other words, for this community to come into being and for intersubjective communication to work satisfactorily, a response of the real finally becomes imperative. We are, however, obviously aware of the non-existence of symbolic communication; that is, there is no community in formation without a correlative *Unheimlich* dimension of its own experience. It is this that ultimately defines the real.

It is not the observer then who sees the nation but it is it, the Thing, that sees us, just as Brazilian literature itself, at its heights of modernity, was able to make clear.¹ This concept of the real cannot, however, introduce elements that energize the apparently quite stereotyped debate about the idea of formation and its yield in the critical tradition that goes back to Antonio Candido. We should then recall that there exists, at least for Freud, two ways of rejecting the real. The first is based on sublimation or, as Mário de Andrade preferred to translate the Freudian term *Verdrängung*, "sequestration." There is however another way, deriving or stemming from refusal. That which is sequestered can return in the pre-consciousness in a symbolized way, since that which is rejected can also return, nonetheless, in the shape of a new and delirious reality. Following this line of reasoning, we could then say that within Candido's idea of formation, the Baroque is, in fact, sequestered, as Haroldo de Campos desires, with the proviso, however, that it can come back and, in fact, does return, since Góngora is, in Roberto Schwarz' words, "an explicit presupposition of the *Formation*, where it forms a defining contrast with a neo-classical type of image" (Schwarz 51). This proves that we should correct the disjunctive presented by Schwarz—"the historical cycles either exist or they don't"—to the form of a historical trilemma: the historical cycles exist and do

not exist because it is typical of the event (and the Baroque unquestionably comprises this peculiarity) to exasperate the ur-history and the post-history when confronted with the present. Or, in other words, in Benjamin's terms, it actually falls to the present to define where and how the ur-historical aspects (the ghastly colonial administration, for example) and the post-historical ones (the contemporary acephalicness) mutually diverge and intensify each other in order to better evaluate the event and to circumscribe its core (Benjamin 494).

Let us then once again look at the prospects outlined by Roberto Schwarz in exhaustively identifying the idea of formation in the face of the emergence of the real.

One perspective is that it (the formation) is also an ideal that has lost its meaning, disqualified by the course of history. The nation is not going to be formed, it is going to fall apart, the 'advanced' sectors of the Brazilian society have already become part of the most modern dynamics of the international order and will let the rest go to pot. Finally, given that the nation will not join in, the very process of formation will have been a mirage, which for the sake of being realistic, might as well be abandoned. There is an enormous gap between what was promised and what was fulfilled.

Another possible perspective: let us suppose that the economy ceased to push towards national integration and the formation of a relatively self-regulated and self-sufficient whole (actually, it is pushing in the opposite direction). If this were the nature of the pressure, then the only entity that continues to state that it is a whole, and that it needs to have a future, is the cultural unit that for better or for worse was formed historically, and which was completed in literature. Along these lines, the formed culture, which attained a certain degree of organicity, works as an antidote to the economy's tendency towards dissociation. Nevertheless, one will not fail to note the idealism behind this defensive position. Every person with some materialistic fiber in their being knows that the economy is in the driver's seat and that the cultural sphere only follows along. However, it must be acknowledged that our more or less accomplished cultural atmosphere is indeed an element of anti-barbarism, insofar as it is said that here it formed a whole, and that this whole exists and is part and parcel of all of us that are concerned with this issue, and also many others who are not concerned with it.

Another hypothesis: divorced from a national economic project, which ceased to exist in the strong sense of the term, the very desire towards formation is emptied and loses any inner dynamic. However, it is not only because of this that it ceases to exist, as it is an element that can be used in the market of cultural differences,

and even in tourism. The national formation may have ceased to be a perspective of substantive accomplishment, based on a certain political and economic autonomy, but may not have ceased to exist as a historical feature and to be perhaps a commercial triumph all along, in the context of the international commercialization of culture. Finally, by being disconnected from the process of social and economic self-realization of the country, which included important tasks for the sake of humankind, such as historically surmounting colonial inequalities, formation does not cease to be merchandise. And it can, in the present moment, have a great future on that level. (57-58)

Having enumerated these hypothetical scenerios, Schwarz, as we can see, relegates to the background the aesthetic argument according to which the formative framework no longer makes any sense since literary models come from all times and places. Schwarz, however, argues that “if instead of the literary influences, which in fact are as if hand-picked, we think of the language we use, infused—on the verge of becoming pasteurized—with the social fabric of experience, we will see that the globalized mobility of the writer can be illusory. The new world order produces its own scissions and even qualifies the aspirations of intellectuals” (58). Now, it is Antonio Candido’s own critical sensitivity, no less divided and qualified than our own, that problematizes this observation, which is accurate in general, but not in all aspects.

In his analysis of *O Cortiço*, which aims at isolating the point of view of the free Brazilian in the slavocratic order, i.e., in the national and autonomous focus that structures the work, Candido analyzes the subject of enunciation of a popular saying, seemingly secondary or subaltern: “para português, negro e burro, três pês: pão para comer, pano para vestir, pau para trabalhar” (“for the Portuguese, the black man and the ass, three f’s: food to eat, fabric to dress, ferrule/stick to work”). The critic notices in this saying something real, i.e., its vacuous gratuity. It is built in the style of the peremptory judgments of the poetry of Gregório de Matos—such as “Neste mundo é mais rico o que mais rapa” (“In this world he who steals gets to be the richest”) or “De dois *ff* se compõe / esta cidade a meu ver/ un furtar, outro foder” (“Of two *f*’s is made up / this city in my view / one filching, the other fucking”)—which can still be heard on the lips of a mulatto known as Macunaíma. He, in his turn, in an open parody of Gregório’s fifth epigram, avers the evils of the colonial land, the ethical axiom predicated upon the line “pão-pano-pau” (“food-fabric-ferrule”), which exposes not only aspects of

social life, but also pre-formed figurative representations of identity or of dominant values. It further exposes the very structure of the literary series, its energy released with the intention of formation, and, in the final analysis, confronts us with the relevance that, in its Baroque poetic style and in its modernist repetition, the paronomasia maintains. The attentiveness of Antonio Candido—according to which the paronomastic series goes beyond the form, and that its truth lies in the density of an ideological form—cannot be justified within a formalist theory alien to the critic's own sensitivity. It is in fact he himself who points to the substitution of the metaphor by the paronomasia as one of the defining lines of modern literature. He explains:

We had a literature predominated by image, by analogy—'you are as beautiful as a rose'—and now we have a literature dominated more and more by paronomasia, that is to say, by that figure of speech that brings together words sounding similar but of a different meaning. (Candido 184)

Against the approach based on analogy and reference presupposed by metaphor the critic observes the allegorical dominance of the simulacrum and the ready-made, in which "the discourse takes the world as an arsenal of comparisons... creating a parallel world, an autonomous world, which is a type of duplication of the natural world." (Candido 187)

Thanks to this device as well as to his critical acuity, Candido proposes a reciprocal determination or a specific overdetermination between the social and the aesthetic in which none of the levels obscures or diminishes the other. Rather, on the contrary, they mutually determine and reciprocally energize each other. Furthermore, we could derive from the notion of paronomasia, in the wake of Michel Serres' well-known *Le Parasite*, a deconstructive theory of self-sufficiency in the parasite's economy.

Parodistic, parasitic, paronomastic, there's nothing irrelevant in these symptoms. After all, for instance, Paul Valéry would use this paronomastic movement as the definition of the poetic, ever oscillating between *son* and *sens*. It may further be observed that to formulate it the poet was forced to give up precisely the very resource he wanted to define, making this tautological theory the fictional meeting place of the subject of what was uttered with that of the utterance itself.

Nevertheless, not even Valéry's definition authorizes overlooking this autonomous way of forming statements. On the contrary, the oscillation

between *sens* and *son* resonates beyond the metaphor/metonym tension in other critical binomials that are equally enlightening: representation/stereoscopy; identity/becoming; formation/dissemination; *beginnings* (Edward Said) / *becomings* (Andrew Benjamin). In the final analysis, we may say that while metaphor rallies behind the limits, the teleological marks that guide the entire formation—paronomasia—signals the threshold that, being always the penultimate, does not cease to re-open the signifying chain. And in so doing, it persuades us that every completion comes from the order of the imaginary.

The center of this debate revolves, as you can see, around the concept of *formation*. In order to better assess this, Roberto Schwarz attempts to formulate an archaeology of the concept, recalling that, upon being published, Candido's book joined with other works that also used the concept of formation.

In the progressive field, the most important related works known are those by Caio Prado Jr., Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Celso Furtado. A comparative study of these works is still in its infancy, awaiting works of synthesis. I'd like to suggest very briefly some differences between them. For Caio Prado Jr., the Brazilian formation would be completed at the moment in which our heritage of social inorganicity was overcome—the opposite of interconnecting with internal goals brought from the Colony. This high moment would be, or was, in the future. If we look at Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, we find something similar. The country will be modern and will be formed when it overcomes its Portuguese, rural and authoritarian heritage, and we would then have a democratic country. Here again the point of arrival is farther forward, dependent upon the decisions of the present. Celso Furtado, for that matter, will say that the nation is not complete while the tools of command, mainly the economic ones, are not in the country. That is to say, while the basic decisions that concern us are made abroad, the nation continues to be incomplete. Just as with the other two, the conclusion of the process lies in the future, which seemed close to the author's generation, and now seems remote, as suggested by the title of one of his latest books: *Brasil: A Construção Interrompida* (1992). (Schwarz 54-55)

Candido's concept of formation, far from adhering to a linear and prospective sense or to an unequivocal inscription like the other works mentioned by Schwarz, is equipped with the benefit of hindsight, in relation to an apex located in the past, around 1870, prior to the abolition of slavery.

Such a development results in a structural ambiguity in the system, or rather, in an ambivalent evaluation of the very process of Brazilian modernization that simultaneously exists and does not. It has a defined profile and a ghostly consistency. It so happens that if we accept Candido's lacunal premise—that all evaluation, besides being fragmentary, is radically ambivalent—we are compelled to suspend until further notice our unflinching trust in the existence of a “progressive field.” It becomes necessary, therefore, to re-equip the genealogy of the concept with a much more wide-ranging and broader vision. After all, it is not the glance that constitutes the object; rather, on the contrary, it is the vision that overdetermines the subject.

I thus find in Silviano Santiago the matrix of the counter-modernist genealogy that can snatch us from the illusions of completion. In “Atração do Mundo (Políticas de Identidade e de Globalização na Moderna Cultura Brasileira),” Santiago undertakes a re-reading of the concept of formation. But surprisingly enough, it is not based on the essays of national interpretation, which attempt to return structural homogeneity and systematic balance to national formations hit by the crisis of capitalism. On the contrary, it is a fragment of *Minha Formação*, a hybrid, memorialistic and speculative text by Joaquim Nabuco that traces the indispensable scene for the constellation he proposes. This constellation is the critic's attitude as the observer of a performance (the theatrical metaphor soon becomes necessary) and the globalizing mediation of technology, when applied to actions restricted to the local level (the telegraph for Nabuco, computer networks for us).

This analysis of the constellations of the concept of formation and its very cultural spectrality give rise then to an enlightening reading, which may not be materialistic, and yet is not dualistic.

The models of analysis, inspired respectively by the 1920s and 1930s, have a clear universalistic posture in common, [concludes Santiago], but they do distance themselves from one another just as they lay the foundations for one another as disciplines (culture *versus* economy, and vice versa) and in the way they conceive of the historical process (pluralism *versus* one-way, and vice versa). It is through these differences that there is a distinction both in the weight given to the national thing [and perhaps it would be timely to say to the national Thing], and in terms of how to assess it as part of the quest for *moral* progress for Brazilians; the differences are still distinguished in the concept of the socio-political development of humankind.² (Santiago, “Atração” 50)

Silviano Santiago's reading explicitly refers to the unilaterality and narrowness of rationalistic and universalistic positions that, according to their urban and cosmopolitan character, repress that which goes back to the amorphous condition of human drives. Implicitly, however, in his recourse to Nabuco's formation (an author admittedly admired by Fernando Henrique Cardoso), Santiago reveals that the hypermoral character of this dominant liberalism paradoxically nurtures the simplistic, acritical and regressive irrationalism of an irreversible globalization. Santiago, however, seems to recycle his own concept of the "in-between-place" (*"o entre-lugar"*), and position himself *between* the sterility of criticism and the return of nationalism, *between* theory and fiction, in other words, *between* Enlightenment and narrative.

This between should not be seen as ethical abstraction or abstinence, but rather as a specific genre of theoretical fiction: that which is common to the two.³ To affirm and to deny, to appreciate and to depreciate thus create a surpassing of the formative model of structural tensions; they move in the direction of an active becoming, that of transgression and of reactive forces, and in the direction of a reactive becoming, that of the will to nothing and of the active forces.

We can thus return to Roberto Schwarz' initial diagnosis, where he lamented the diminishment of the civilizing effort of Antonio Candido's formation, reduced, in the present, to "a repository of forces in the process of breaking down." Now, in my view, it is in that in-between-place of contradictory forces, of integration and resistance, that the dynamic and fictional ambivalence of the work of the hybrid lies. This being the case, in his criticism of the Romanesque model of formation, it is not at all surprising that Santiago should return to the disseminating proliferation of his *Em Liberdade* (a counter-formative fiction of the modern). Santiago's in-between-place is therefore defined according to a twofold assessment, in history and without, in name (*onomastic*) and beyond it (*paronomastic*), affirmative in its becoming-active and, at the same time, nihilistic in its becoming-reactive. This in-between-place symptomatically is similar to the position taken recently by Derrida: that of being a Marrano, like Spinoza and like Marx as well, "a sort of clandestine immigrant, the Hispano-Portuguese disguised as a German Jew who, we will assume, pretended to have converted to Protestantism." As a supreme paradox of this paronomastic fantasy (Marx-Marrano-Evil), the Marrano's condition of being out of place does not simply

end there, but would be applied to his descendants as well, Marx's children, those who "had forgotten the fact that they were Marranos, repressed it, denied it, disavowed it. It is well known that this sometimes happens to 'real' Marranos as well, to those who, despite really, presently, currently, effectively, *ontologically* being Marranos, no longer even know it themselves" (Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* 261-2).

Notes

¹ I am thinking of the aphorisms of *O Discípulo de Emaús* (1945) by Murilo Mendes, which problematized the active character of reading and the original dimension of the parasite, as well as Clarice Lispector's fictions, notably, *Água Viva* (1973).

² The world concept (still impregnated with post-utopian connotations when not with Resnais' and Borges' acephalic bio-politics) appears in another essay in which Silviano Santiago asks himself questions about the consistency of the narrative experience and opposes the narrator of Machado de Assis, a contemporary of Nabuco, with the post-modern narrator. See "Toda a Memória do Mundo."

³ In *L'Autre Cap*, Jacques Derrida insists on this preliminary position of a law that incessantly unfolds itself. Refuting the perennial universalistic ambition of French culture, he feels compelled

(...) de rappeler ce qui s'est promis sous le nom de l'Europe, de réidentifier l'Europe, c'est un devoir qui dicte aussi d'ouvrir l'Europe, depuis le cap qui se divise parce qu'il est aussi un rivage: l'ouvrir sur ce qui n'est pas, n'a jamais été et ne sera jamais l'Europe. Le *même devoir* dicte non seulement d'accueillir l'étranger pour l'intégrer, mais aussi pour reconnaître et accepter son altérité. Le *même devoir* dicte de critiquer un dogmatisme totalitaire qui, sous prétexte de mettre fin au capital, a détruit la démocratie et l'héritage européen, mais, aussi de critiquer une religion du capital qui installe son dogmatisme sous de nouveaux visages que nous devons apprendre à identifier. Le *même devoir* dicte d'assumer l'héritage européen d'une idée de la démocratie, mais aussi de reconnaître que celle-ci n'est jamais donnée; ce n'est même pas une idée régulatrice au sens kantien, plutôt quelque chose qui reste à penser et à venir: non pas qui arrivera demain, mais qui a la structure de la promesse et donc porte l'avenir ici maintenant. Le *même devoir* dicte de respecter la différence, l'idiome, la minorité, la singularité, mais aussi l'universalité du droit formel, le désir de traduction, l'accord et l'univocité, la loi de la majorité, l'opposition au racisme, au nationalisme, à la xénophobie. Le *même devoir* commande de tolérer et de respecter tout ce qui ne se place pas sous l'autorité de la raison.

Il peut s'agir de la foi, des différentes formes de foi. Il peut s'agir aussi de questions ou d'affirmations qui, pour penser l'histoire de la raison, excèdent son ordre, sans devenir pour autant irrationnelles, encore moins irrationalistes; elles peuvent même rester assez fidèles à l'idéal des Lumières, l'*Aufklärung* ou de l'*Illuminismo*, tout en reconnaissant ses limites, pour travailler aux Lumières d'aujourd'hui. Ce *même devoir* appelle certes la responsabilité de penser, de parler et d'agir conformément à un impératif qui paraît contradictoire.

For Derrida, in short, to take a concept seriously is to take it in inverted commas, in its paronomastic dissemination, which occurs recurrently as le *même devoir*. See *L'Autre Cap*.

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