

THE CITY IN THE BRAZILIAN NOVEL
POSTHUMOUS MEMOIRS AND OTHER WRITINGS
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Representation of the totality of life

In his longest essay on literary criticism¹, Lukács discusses a comparison between the two great genres of literature: the historical novel and the historical drama. At the outset he establishes that the *purpose* of both, novel and drama, is the representation of the concrete reality of a given historically specific social formation. What they differ in, is the *method* through which both of them attempt to build such a representation to best encompass the totality of life. The historical drama would build a finely cut diamond-like crystal-clear structure of the society in which the story develops and the individuals 'move' about more according to their position or role in that society than according to their own purposes. The account is stripped of all detail that is not directly necessary to show the structure or to advance the unfolding of the action. On the centre stage stand the great figures of history in positions them ascribed by the clashes between antagonistic forces present in great historical social changes. By contrast, the novel attempts to show the manifold aspects of the totality of life through the multiplication of details. This implies to put into the centre people of everyday life and fictitious ones of greater standing, whereas historical figures must remain in the background since their actions and everyday life are not known in detail. Throughout the rich illustration of these theses with examples taken from world literature from the greek drama to the great novels of the XIXth century it also becomes apparent that the *subject matter* of the historical drama is the transformation from the demise of an old social formation and the emergence of the new that will supseed it, such as from matriarchal to patriarchal order, whereas the historical novel deals with the concrete realities of a new social formation, as with the advent of capitalism in the great novels of Dickens or Victor Hugo.

¹ "Historical novel and historical drama"

Drama shows the essence of the transformation whereas novel represents the 'reality' of a new order. In the first, the antagonisms (between the old and the new social formations) are explicitly and crystal-clearly exposed; in the second, reality is embedded in a welter of detail and individual actions, none of which does explicitly show, by themselves, the essence: the antagonisms at work behind the appearances (hidden by ideology in its form of liberalism) which are being represented –those antagonisms will be revealed only by sum total of the detail presented by the author. In a way, the novel is a form of representation less demanding as regards the deep understanding|consciousness of the author's society.

This leads to a peculiar situation: the novel is less prone to failure in representing totality of life, or in other words, it is less demanding on the consciousness|conscience of the author: the latter does *not have* to be aware of the antagonisms lying behind the details of social life he presents so faithfully to the reader -- this being just the case in the ways of Dickens but also of Hugo. In fact, such determination of the author of explicitly showing the underlying antagonisms at work in the society can even be counterproductive in that the prose can become academic and lose its grip on the narration of the reality for its excessive concern in showing what is under its surface. That would weaken its focus on the concrete details --*this* being the very own method of the novel-- , the account of which should lead the reader to full comprehension of society.²

Hugo was far from being a revolutionary but he presented capitalist society at the close of its first, extensive, stage of development³ as it is/was in width and depth with unsurpassed mastery and eloquence -- for which reason he was a favourite [writer|novelist](#) of Marx. And Dickens was an outright right-wing conservative --witness *A tale of two cities* in which he freely expresses his horror of revolution--, but none the less his *Oliver Twist* did the same job and not less convincingly for London as *Les misérables* did for Paris.

Ideology and the problem of representation

This possibility of a distance between the consciousness of the writer and the meaning of his work is allowed by the nature and techniques of ideology, the dominant form of discourse in capitalism, the purpose of which is to produce a false conscience and thereby to obtain the active consent of the members of a

² As Schwarz (1979) put it: "The prose disciplined by contemporary history is the [end|arrival](#) point of the path of the great writer|novelist, not its starting point" -- which inversion is [something](#) like what happened to the socially conscious works of socialist realism aimed at showing the antagonisms of capitalist societies *directly* and at hiding or minimizing|alleviating the antagonisms of socialist-thinking-themselves societies.

³ We use the concepts of *extensive* and *intensive* stages of development as in Aglietta (1976).

Nobody knows better than thou, wise Kublaï, that one should never confuse the city with the discourse that describes it. Nonetheless, there is a relation between both.

Italo Calvino *Le città invisibili*

society to the maintenance of its *status quo*. The means to achieve this goal, its technique so to speak, is⁴ the use of *lacunar discourse*. The lacunar discourse is made of [explicitly stated] propositions which are never false, to suggest [but not utter] other propositions which *are* false but precisely, are meant to be believed. Thus the essence of the ideological discourse is not what it says but what it *does not say*.⁵ An archetypal form of lacunar discourse is 'All are equal before the Law' -- true, in a bourgeois society, but it is meant to suggest that all members of society enjoy equal conditions and have equal opportunity which is false *because* of property in the means of production. Observe that the discourse must perforce correspond to the concrete conditions of society lest it loses its persuasive power regarding the untold content it means to convey.⁶

Both the true –explicit– part, and the false –untold– parts find their way into *common sense*, indeed the same are the constituent matter of *common sense* which in this way, unwittingly, carries also the hidden content of ideology and in this way induces false conscience.

The 'problem of representation' then, over and above the choice of the matter and the means and techniques of the Art, as has been discussed in literary criticism [such as Lukács above] includes the further question of 'what reality' - -the concrete conditions of society for its members and classes, or the other presented by [the] ideology[ical discourse] -- a distinction *critique* only can perform. The choice open to the artist, or writer, is to take critical or an apologetical stance towards the existing social order, a decision which may or may not be conscious[ly taken]. The stance can transit between such extremes as the *dramatic|caustique* images of Brueghel and Goya against oppression and the bland representation of the conqueror and the social order by David, sycophant of Napoléon.

To sum up, the problem of representation must include the question of peircing the shield of common sense which protect the appearances that hide the real features of society. Marx has ascribed to 'science' where science meant physics, the task of discovering the essence behind the appearances. But more to the point, it could be said the task for critique of society –a task both for social science and for art and especially literature– is to reveal the essence behind the screen of appearances interposed by ideology. And while for physical science the appearances are innocent, in society they are not, for they have been *built* with a purpose, namely, to hide what is behind.

⁴ As discovered by Althusser (Althusser, 1971)

⁵ The message is the falsehood contained in the lacunae --the untold part-- of the discourse. [repetition?](#)

⁶ This is why the stages of development of capitalism must have their own forms of ideology. Thus in the initial, extensive stage we have *liberalism*, in the intensive stage and the elevation of the workers conditions of life, social democracy and in the current crisis, neoliberalism.



The novelist, in doing their job of representing 'totality of life' in capitalist society do not thereby necessarily contradict ideology *explicitly*, for what they describe is the *state* of society without denying the *possibility* of change (for 'better') of the sort of the destitute and ultimately even of society itself – essentially, the idea of progress. We will see that in Brazil the situation is other on both counts: which meant that Brazilian writers – who at first tried to adopt, and adapt, ~~in the beginning~~ techniques of European literature – had to find their own ways to address the problem of representation of society.

Latin America

Thus in addressing the literature in Brazil and LA, the first thing to take into account is the so very different nature of their societies albeit capitalist. Indeed in their processes of independence in early XIXth century, they built a new institutional framework –the sovereign State apparatus– for continued support for their thitherto colonial society. These societies differ deeply from their counterparts in fully development capitalism – a point to which we return below–, which introduce utterly different conditions for their representation in literature. This was certainly sensed by Alejo Carpentier to express his concern thus:

I believe that certain american realities, for not having been literarily explored, for not having been *named*, demand a great, vast, patient process of observation. ... I am convinced that the great task of the american novelist|romancist is to inscribe the fisiognomy|semblance of their cities into universal literature.

Alejo Carpentier, 1969

One can take exception [\[as to the use of 'universal'](#) for 'capitalist' but there is no doubt regarding the well-founded of Carpentier's feelings about the additional difficulties awaiting the american writer facing the task of having to 'literarily explore' their own realities so different from those of the European societies. In fact this difficulty stems from the fact that Latin American societies have imported the ideas from Europe taking them as 'universal'. Accordingly, we have to address in what the specificities of Latin American societies differ from their European counterparts. Ideological presentation flies in the face of concrete reality which created the widespread current of *realismo fantástico*. Here however we will leave Latin America to turn in what follows to address especifically Brazil and Brazilian literature to keep to the task at hand.⁷

⁷ Let us note in passing that there is a lot in common to *all* LA countries but Brazil is unique among them in that slavery was widespread in most of the country, the very basis of the plantation economy that produced the main export staples of the colony.

Brazil

Born by a colony, Brazil became a sovereign state in 1822 in a process to be called *Independence* in which the weakening of Portugal forced colonial society to set up its own state apparatus, with no other change in the organization either of production or of society.⁸ The essence of colonial production is that the excess produce of it is appropriated by its metropole (here Portugal) as its tribute, except a portion of it which is reinvested in local production in view of increasing the appropriatable surplus. Thus it is a process of expanded reproduction, albeit its expansion is slower than what the full potential of the productive structure would allow, being drained by the extraction of the tribute. The main staples of the colonial economy were, in succession, brazil wood (*brasil*: from ember, *brasa* for its red dye), then gold and plantation produce (sugar, cocoa) both based on slave work. Thus at Independence the colonial society was dominated by the plantation economy and the great agricultural barons running it, and so it remained after the setting up of the sovereign country with its own state apparatus.

Instead of fantastic realism (realismo fantástico), in Brazil prevailed *sátira, cheia de ironia, humor e sarcasmo*

In view of the cessation of the colonial link new forms of expatriation had to be found and created, among which the main are the servicing of foreign debt (two years after Independence Brazil assumed the debt of Portugal to the Bank of England, formally as a condition of the recognition by England of its sovereignty), to which later when came industrialization, were added profit remittance by foreign-owned industries and chronically deficitary balance of the services (freight and insurance of foreign trade) account. Elsewhere I called this principle of economic organization hindered accumulation and the society to which it lends the economic basis, of *elite society*, to be distinguished from *bourgeois*.⁹

We will show the peculiar features of Brazilian society as we go through the examples of its representation in literature. We present three examples taken

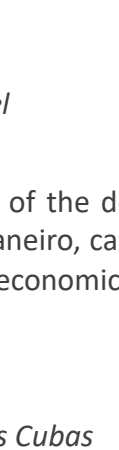
⁸ Differently, therefore, of the English colony of North America which rose in fight against its metropole to free itself from the asphyxiating grip of the latter on its economic organization. In fact this was the exception in all American colonies; for the Spanish colonies were very much in the same situation as Brazil, with the weakening albeit to a lesser extent of Spain under the continuous encroachment of Britain. The main difference between Brazil and the Spanish colonies is probably that here slavery prevailed to work the predominantly plantation economy, whereas in the former there was a sizeable stock of indigenous population but no slavery. Consequently, the resulting independent states were able to take the *form* of republics, whereas Brazil which preserved slavery for another half century became an absolutist state (a 'constitutional monarchy') with an emperor. Which it remained till 1989, one year after abolition of slavery to then become in its turn a republic.

⁹ In its earliest formulation: Deák (1988) "The crisis of hindered accumulation in Brazil" BISS Mexico, summarized in (2001) "The partido dos Trabalhadores in São Paulo" and then again in 'The metropolis of an elite society' :91ss in Segbers (2007) with an indication of its consequences on the production of urban space in Br and São Paulo.

from the three main stages of the development of the country. The first and the last come from Rio de Janeiro, capital city of Brazil until 1960, whereas the second from São Paulo, the economic centre of Brazil from the turn of the XXth century onwards.

Capitalism-cum-slavery: Bras Cubas

After Independence came a long period of consolidation of the new country having among other, to fend off a dozen or so separatist attempts at virtually all quarters of the territory. Then came the Second Empire under Dom Pedro II (1848-1889) and the passing of two measures which create the conditions for an albeit half-baked capitalist development, in which wage labour was introduced but slavery was not abolished. Were they the 1850 Land Act which introduced property in land in place of the thitherto prevailing system of direct concessions of use. This is equivalent to the same process driven by the enclosures in England and which is a condition of the introduction of wage labour as the predominant relation of production. The other was the *de facto* cessation of the slave trade so that albeit slavery was not abolished, its presence started to weaken *vis-à-vis* the slowly strengthening wage labour.



Very little of the strengthening under the surface of wage labour becomes apparent during the monarchy, and least of all in the capital Rio de Janeiro. Production of wage workers' consumption goods was beginning to concentrate in São Paulo, growing fast but still small. The main city was Rio de Janeiro, the capital. Here we don't see *work* – this is the capital of the Empire, an administrative city where there is no production and even the slaves perform in the main only menial|household tasks. The recently emancipated colonial society was still feeling it's way to adapting to it's new status. Poets, writers, novelist journalists and chroniclers were busily working on the elaboration of a 'Brazilian' literature and free themselves of the colonial heritage of exoticism and the predominance of *nature*, mainly through attempts at imitations --the more clearly stated objective was 'integrate Brazilian into 'universal' culture-- where 'universal' meant in practice, European.

Machado de Assis is the first great figure, a novelist, in Brazilian literature whose life spans the Empire -- he then saw the peculiar features that dominated this first stage of capitalist development in Brazil. [As just said](#) until then, the attempts at creating *the* Brazilian literature resulted mainly in imitations of European, mainly French models of naturalism nationalism, romanticism and a welter of smaller works of poetry, and a couple of satirical attempts, journalism. Both imitation and attempts at producing 'home grown' representations suffer from the difficulties stemming from the baffling|abyssal differences between the foreign 'models' and the peculiarities of Brazilian society and its life.

Brazilian ideology always imported from Europe the (there) prevailing ideological form and added to it a home-born component. The new country therefore imported liberalism and added an all-encompassing view of understatement of anything home grown, while exalting it *in abstracto* at ridiculous levels|heights. Thus while liberalism does not *explicitly belie* concrete reality in the bourgeois societies of full unfettered development, it certainly does so when transplanted into the slave society of Brazil.

Then still young Machado de Assis wrote in his 1873 "Instinct of Nationality", a sort of *Ars poetica*, thus:

"There is little doubt but that what must be expected from a writer (of a especially of a nascent literature) is above all, a certain [inner|intimate] feeling, that would turn him man of his time and his country, even when dealing with matters far away in time and in space." This is the "other Independence" which "has no Seventh September nor Call of Ipiranga"; which "will not be made in one day, but slowly and gradually, to become more lasting; it will not be the work of a generation, not even of two; many will work on it till wholly achieving it."¹⁰

Machado himself kept writing for a couple of years good but still 'preparatory', one could say, novels. Then came his 'turning point', an about turn whereby he addressed directly, frontally and explicitly the society of his time.

The first in the succession of his 'mature' works is *Memórias postumas de Brás Cubas* written in 1880 and in it Machado achieved a representation of the Brazilian society, along with its glaring incoherences, contradictions, antagonisms and iniquities. He manages to tackle the *explicite* difference between ideology and reality through a rich range of techniques which literary critique Roberto Schwarz explored in detail and whose main lines of interpretation we attempt at summarizing below. In short, we deal with a prose which is, as incongruent, contradictory, volatile, provocative on a scale encompassing everything from small joke to profanation of the most jealously respected ideas, as the society itself and its dominant elite of Machado's time.

This begins with the title --*Posthumus memoirs of Bras Cubas*--, since dead do not write. Then it continues such:

F I R S T C H A P T E R

decease of the author

I hesitated for some time whether to open these memories by the beginning or by the end, that is, whether I put in first place my birth or my death. Given the vulgar practice to begin with the birth, two considerations led me to adopt a method different: the first is that I am not, properly speaking an author defunct, but a defunct author, for whom the grave was [an]other cradle; the second is

¹⁰ Quoted in Cândido (1975):368-9



Birthplace of Machado

that the writ[ten] would in this way be more gallant and new. Moses, who also told the story of his death, did not put it in the introito, but in the tail: a radical difference between this book and the *Pentateuch*.

That said, I expired at two o'clock in the afternoon on a Friday of the month of August 1869, in my beautiful farmstead of Catumbi. Was about sixty four years of age, was worth about three hundred contos¹¹ and was accompanied by eleven friends. Eleven friends! True, there were no letters or notifications. Besides it was raining (...)¹²

The disparities of the defunct author with infamous humor methodically stuffs the reader with "saloon absurds tiring at first sight but highly efficient", in Schwarz's saying.

So here we have, as Schwarz continues: "in other words, a narrator **voluntarily annoying** and lacking credibility". And further, on the reference to the Bible: "Far from being presumptuous, the parallel with the Scriptures is the result of other sentiment much more unconfessable: being the malign satisfaction of debasing and vexing, of announcing that the narrator will not stop at anything, that there will not remain stone over stone..." This means to declare that the critique uttered or untold, but *contained* in his story will be inclement and complete.

There are many aspects of society and its ruling elite that will be ridiculed, shown loathsome, exposed to limitless scorn. Of these we may bring the example of volubility, arbitrariness and inconsistency.

Contrary to two earlier prestigious critiques, who saw weakness in Machado's composition due to its acrobacies and apparent lack of consistency or incapacity for a large scale narrative of reality, Schwarz argues that

...there is method in the narrative whims of the romancist. These are part of a rigorous composition, which gives form and [exposes in its tail|thus exposes] decisive dynamics of Brazilian society. [1987:115]

The conspicuous absence in *Bras Cubas* is work or any sort of production, which is of course, delegated to slaves. Again from Schwarz:

[H]is life goes through stages in nothing uncommon, for a son of the Brazilian dominant classes: studies in Coimbra, love, poetry, politics, philosophy, philanthropy and death. What is conspicuous is the absence of work and more generally of any sustained effort whatsoever or of ideological commitment.

Brought into the field of volubility, the basilar purposes of bourgeois life are reduced to recourse to immediate imaginary satisfaction, a satisfaction mixed

¹¹ About £ 120.- at the same epoch and about 8 times the average franchise required in England for voting right after the 1832 Reform Act.

¹² Machado de Assis (1880):111, cit.in Sch79:19

with derision and to which the pretense of greatness and objectiveness brings an added taste. In the dimensions of caprice, they take a cheaper form: in stead of science, the universal healer ointment; of politics, the parliamentary discourse of Brás Cubas arguing for the shortening of the formal hat of the National Guard by two inches; of Philosophy, social thoughts inspired by the spectacle of a dog fight.

Schwarz 1981 in 1987 *Que horas?* :122

Volubility dialectique: the author pours praise under the guise of critique and scorn under the thin disguise of praise (79:44-5); the effect of concomitant superiority and inferiority. We come back to this point below: in Brazil, inferiority of everything Brazilian makes part the local component of ideology. The idea of inferiority is instrumental, to convey the idea that *here* progress on the European pattern –unfettered accumulation– would be unconceivable.

Thus volubility is a general feature from which nothing escapes, (...) the literary behaviour of Brás Cubas – his volubility– consists in belying and breaking at every instant the rules that he had just fixed himself. (79:44;209)

There can be no better 'model' to represent the behaviour of the Brazilian elite. This is the logic behind political processes that frequently appear not making any sense at all. The elite constantly negates any notion of public interest, equality before the law, and many other principles basic to liberalism. The elite make (boundless numbers of recklessly ambitious and ridiculously elaborate) laws just to break them, thus reasserting their authority in both movements: they can make the law and they can break it the next moment; and this movement is socially accepted as *normal*. [for being everyday practice]

The elite society develops its peculiar political forms as well. Thus, if democracy is the political form proper to bourgeois society, built on the idea of commonwealth and the concrete equality of citizens before the law, in elite societies it becomes a farce because overprivilegemenent of the elite completely belies any notion of commonwealth, and equality before the law simply does not obtain. With Schwarz, again:

(Thus) life in Brazil imposed upon the bourgeois conscience a series of acrobatics which scandalise and irritate common sense ... Under such circumstances, as well as an offence, an offence is also the norm, and as well as a norm, the norm is also an offence... In this way, the Europeanized sectors of Brazilian society did take part in bourgeois civilization, although in a peculiar, semi-detached way, whereby they invoked it and defied it, alternately and indefinitely.

1979:

But let us now take Machado's last and final critique which refers directly to the society as a whole and strikes it with a sort of *coup de grâce*. We return to the character fragmented of the prose, built with a narrative technique centred

on the discontinuity –a 'staccato', lacunar narrative, as it were–, with an inversion of the temporal poles of its fragments.

See the scornful pleasure with which the narrator [destroys|dissolves|obliterates] in the hatcher the expectations it creates: tells death before life, society before love, the failure before the try|attempt and so on. This sort of contraventions are many and deliberately sterilize the plot|story. *In abstracto* could be means of disturb and offend the recognized order. In context however they say more, and to a certain extent, the contrary. They are as they were narrative precautions to ensure the *improductivity of time*, which goes by in vain and leaves everything as it was. (Schwarz 79:69)

Here is the ultimate achievement of Machado. As we have seen, he had already shown *not showing* the [unacceptable] reality of Brazilian society and the total falseness of its ideological representation to us (which is already more than what the bourgeois novel had to do), but also that there is no perspective of this reality *to change in the future*. The European novelist may or may not indulge in presenting such a perspective in addition to the revealing representation of present reality; for the change is not incompatible –on the contrary– with progress, for it is as a direct derivation of accumulation and growth not only acceptable but presented as necessary. [Now] Such a choice is not open to the Brazilian writer. Progress would demolish the fetters of accumulation and thereby destroy elite society. Accordingly, progress is permanently and above all *invoked* by ideology just as it is *prevented* by all practical means. This is what the Machadian prose achieves: it looks as if it produces a narrative of the life of its|his presonages|protagonists while it destroys every bit of it [step by step] the very while the narrative progresses, and thus represents –without saying so– the essential workings and perspectives of an elite society. Thus was shown the unconfessable: this society *does not want development|progress* for it would be destroyed by it. There will be no progress, no social change whatsoever. The existing order will last forever.

However, as Lampedusa said, it is necessary to change to everything remain the same. Wage labour, slowly expanding in the background, was becoming the main form of work and finally slavery was abolished in 1888 when slaves made up already a bare 8% of the work force. One year later the Emperor was deposed and republic proclaimed, to allow for institutional adjustments.

Hindered development in the extensive stage: Macunaíma

With the abolition of slavery, capitalism could therefrom develop unfettered by it, but *hindered* development can not allow this. Accordingly new forms had to be created to ensure continued surplus expatriation, with adjustments also in ideology discourse.

Este último capítulo é todo de negativas. Não alcancei a celebridade do emplasto, não fui ministro, não fui califa, não conheci o casamento. Verdade é que, ao lado dessas faltas, coube-me a boa fortuna de não comprar o pão com o suor do meu rosto. Mais; não padeci a morte de D. Plácida, nem a semidemência do Quincas Borba. Somadas umas coisas e outras, qualquer pessoa imaginará que não houve mingua nem sobra, e conseqüentemente que saí quite com a vida. E imaginará mal; porque ao chegar a este outro lado do mistério, achei-me com um pequeno saldo, que é a derradeira negativa deste capítulo de negativas: — Não tive filhos, não transmiti a nenhuma criatura o legado da nossa miséria.

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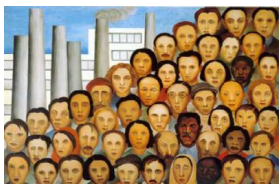
By this time, liberalism was in decline in Europe and with their transition to intensive stage and the corresponding improvement in workers' living conditions social democracy became the new form of ideology. There being no more room for extension of wage labour and the commodity form, continued increase in the productivity of labour became the only source of accumulation and thus progress became central concept of the dominant discourse, along with collective interest and State as its guardian.



Order and progress

As liberalism before, now the discourse of social democracy was duly imported to Brazil with its extensive stage just entering full swing and no hint even of Welfare state. To this, the same as before, the home born component of inferiority was added now focussed on industrial production, keeping it at the minimum necessary. Brazilian ideology reinforces its refuge in naturalism, the 'agricultural vocation' and the destruction of progress through its substitution by an abstraction: the Republic inscribes the contradiction (not an antagonism) in the national flag: *Order and progress* – where it will be unharmed. For good measure, it is there subordinated to the equally abstract 'order'.¹³

One year after slavery, monarchy was abolished as well –1889– and republic proclaimed. Brazil was becoming really capitalist in that wage labour has become not only predominant, but institutionally recognized as such. Coffee was still important but since long it could not pay for all imports and home production at least of the wage workers' means of subsistence ('mass consumption' goods) became necessary. Accordingly, industrial development along with urbanization was fast and started imprinting a new face to the country, and the centre of this process was São Paulo, which was becoming the main economic and also cultural centre of Brazil.



Tarsila Amaral
Operários

Indeed, for over half a century after Independence coffee had remained Brazil's main export staple and during the same period rapid industrialisation and urbanisation made São Paulo the major industrial city in the country. When the world crisis of 1929 put an end to the 'coffee cycle', the leading position of São Paulo in the Brazilian economy had already been firmly established. Indeed, in spite of permanent curtailing of genuine development of home production, the ensuing balance of trade constraints made it necessary to broaden industrial production and to supply the rapidly increasing home market at least with the bulk of consumption goods. Under the effect of a peculiar and rather baffling stop-and-go policy, a home industry of sizeable proportions and some complexity developed gradually, with the *proviso* that machinery and key

¹³ Into the flag: ordem e progresso – order and progress. As so many times before, Brazilian ideology will unite two contradictory principles, as here: order is the order of elite society while progress is the principle of [capitalist] accumulation brought from Europe but which here will not go *unhindered*. In a similar vein, Antonio Cândido had already observed: "in Brazil, never have the members of society been in presence of the norms [of liberalism:] of order and liberty; never had they the obsession of order except as abstract principle, nor of liberty except as caprice. (93):50-1

industries were systematically kept out of the structure of home production or else left in the hands of foreign capital.

Cultural dynamism: *Semana de '22*



Tarsila Amaral
São Paulo

As a counterpart of economic dynamism, by the early 20th century São Paulo was becoming the country's cultural centre as well. An explicit bid for that position was made in 1922 (the centenary of Independence as well) when a *paulista* group of artists –painters, poets, writers and musicians,¹⁴ produced a many-pronged event on arts under the name of *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Week of Modern Art) or *Semana de '22*, for short, and soon after launched a manifesto entitled *Manifesto antropofágico* “against all the importers of canned conscience”. Laying the foundations of the *movimento modernista*, in a declaration against academicism and for a valorization of Brazilian culture and its expression in ‘modern’ forms, they effectively determined the main directions artistic production was to follow for over a generation. One of its most prestigious literary productions is *Macunaíma*, by Mário de Andrade, the *hero with no character at all*.

Macunaíma is a caustic satire of its author's society, but here we invoke it in for its references to São Paulo in particular. Its hero is dropped into life in an indian tribe of the Amazonian jungle and starts it with a long yawn, saying: –Aw, what a laze... He spends his youth there having an eye mainly for women, including his relatives. Then he sets off on a long odyssey through the Amazonian forest, the description of which being a delicious anthology of folklore, and eventually arrives in the ‘city’ – and the ‘city’ is São Paulo. He writes his impressions back to his people:

Is São Paulo built on seven hills, in the traditional manner of Roma, the city caesarean, “capita” of Latinity which we descend from; and kisses its feet the gracious and unruly lymph of the *Tietê*. (...)

The city is most beautiful, and rewarding is its life. All cut by streets smartly narrow, taken by statues and lamp posts of most gracious and exquisite sculpture; all concurring to lessen the space in ways such that in these arteries scarce room there is left for people. Thus is obtained the effect of a gathering of numerous gents, the estimative of which may be augmented at leisure, which is propitious to the Elections, this invention of these most astute *mineiros*;¹⁵ at the same time that the councillors are provided with ample subject with which earn they days of honour, with peaks of eloquence wrought in the purest style and sublime labour.

The aforesaid arteries all are recovered by fluttering paper stripes and bits and quick-sailing fruit peels; and foremost of the most finest dust, indefatigable

¹⁴ Di Cavalcanti, Anita Malfatti, Tarsila do Amaral, Victor Brecheret; Oswald de Andrade, Manuel Bandeira, Carlos Drummond de Andrade; Mário de Andrade; and Heitor Villa-Lobos among the most renowned artists.

¹⁵ *Mineiros*: people from the neighbouring Minas Gerais State, the second strongest in the country both in population and economy, an occasional rival of São Paulo.

dancer, spreading around fierce microbes innumerable, which decimate the population...

Mário de Andrade: *Macunaíma*¹⁶

Except for its style, this description of São Paulo is not unreminiscent of William Morris' description, half a century earlier, where he sums up "London and the great commercial cities of Britain as 'mere masses of sordidness, filth and squalor, embroidered with patches of pompous and vulgar hideousness' " (Ashworth, 1954, p.171).

Brief as the description is, in it Mário de Andrade eloquently shows some of the features of city-building in the urban agglomerations of Brazilian capitalism. We may add that the spatial organization of these agglomerations reflects precisely the features of social reproduction. This should be expected of course, for urban space is a support to the reproduction of the social formation that builds it, and the physical infrastructure reflects the principles of organization of society itself. Thus the hindrances to full development translate in to precarious infrastructure, fragmented space where extreme differentiation, rather than attempt at homogeneization prevails and where infrastructure elements are frequently superfluous with waste of resources or even counterproductive, working as barriers rather than transpositions of barriers.

The extensive stage petered out in Brazil by mid-1970s and with it came an unprecedented and unsurmountable crisis. Indeed, with the end of the high rates of growth which allowed a relatively easy albeit antagonistic growth with expatriation of part of the surplus, the division of the surplus became problematic and whether society choses development at the expense of expatriation or continued expatriation at the expense of development, hindered accumulation will have *not* been reproduced. This resulted in a stalemate of social forces which felt they were facing a cul-de-sac, an *impasse* as it has been called – a dead end.

Contemporary crisis and neoliberalism: Cidade de Deus

By the time extensive stage became saturated in Brazil, intensive stage was exhausted in Europe which provoked the *neoliberal* reaction to the crisis.

Our exmple takes us back to Rio de Janeiro but it could be describing a portion of any big city in contemporary Brazil. It was again duly imported from Europe and the US, but now for the first time Brasilian society got an ideology which fitted it, for disqualifying of the State as representant of collective interest is easy if the state never had that rôle –there never was a Welfare State, for that

¹⁶ Andrade, Mário (1926). *Translation C.D.*

matter— or weakening it when it has always been kept precarious, thus it opens wide up the way to neoliberal practices such as privatization, PPP (public-private-participation) for planning and so on.

Cidade de Deus was written after two decades into the stalemate, in 1997. It is a breakthrough in Brazilian literature in that it is a *direct* attack on the shield of appearances of the ideology defending *status quo*. Its author himself has grown in *Cidade de Deus*, the biggest favela in Rio de Janeiro. The prose combines drama, emotion and objectivity showing an aspect of life in Brazilian society hitherto and always looked upon as 'marginal' (to society, that is) *from inside*, without modesty or embellishment or objectifying detachment. It is not the society as a whole, but it is a part of that society that never before became the central protagonist of the Brazilian novel.

Encompassing 30 years, the story follows the historical path on which this almost-hidden portion of the elite society transited from quase-bucolic features in the 1960s to the extremes of runaway violence¹⁷ under the aegis of neoliberalism and free vent to heavy drug dealing.

Of old, life was other|different here in this place where the river, with the heart willingly tumbling against the pebbles, giving sand, innocent water-snake, some soap foam and going to the sea divided the field where tread the children of Portuguese and of slavery.

Subdued realism, extreme economy of words only enhance the strength of the prose.

At the top, *Burro na Sombra* (Donkey in Shade) and *Gaivota*¹⁸ were caught unawares with forty bags of grass|pot by two plainclothes.

—Fuck! You h'v got only grass! What shitty *bandidos* you are! Com' to the post, com'on...

At the police station, sargent Geraldo welcomed the traficantes with punches and kicks, then he odered a soldier to tie them with nylon strings, put them in a *viatura* and ordered the caporal to head towards the Road of the Bandeirantes. They took Via Cinco, stopped.

—[Get] Down – said the caporal as he opened the trunk. And continued: —Run, get out running whithout looking back, for now you|ye will sell pot|grass to the Devil.

The dealers ran not more than five meters and they took shots in the back.

¹⁷ Note that there is an important feature regarding which the book is *not* like a successful film adaptation, in which there is an optimistical upshot of sorts through which Busca-Pé 'manages' to escape from *Cidade de Deus* and start a life in the 'formal' society. In the book this event although present, is kept low key whithin an epilogue-like ending along with an idication of the future of quite a number of other figures far less 'happy'.

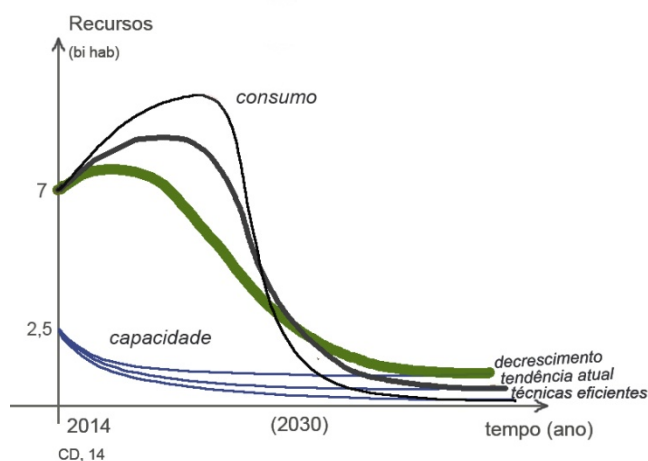
¹⁸ 'Burro na Sombra': *Donkey in shade*; 'Gaivota': *Seagull*

There is no story, really; the narrative is rather a succession of episodes of death, violence, occasional friendship, alliance and treason in which the evolution is conveyed more by the intensifying ubiquitous violence than through succession of interconnected events. At the end, the all-encompassing violence; as epilogue, five-line accounts of what happened later to the main figures. One or two of them found a way out and met a better sort –Busca Pé *would* become photagrapher–; the fate of the others was direct continuation of what came before.

The need for Utopia

The complete lack of perspective to appear as a way out of the present situation may deserve a couple of more words. Given the nature of the Brazilian crisis, the better way out of it would be to do away with the traditional hindrances on development and attempt to enter an intensive stage of accumulation; which, however, would lead into the crisis of capitalism as such, or world capitalism. Now suppose that world capitalism can find a way out of its crisis (which it can't), then we on Earth would run into the limits of growth imposed by the limits of the planet's resources. The neoliberal fallacy of 'sustainable growth' is a contradiction in terms, as easy to realize as the squaring of the circle; in fact we had already gone *beyond* the Earth's capacity quite some time back. What the limits to earth capacity are is open to discussion and wildly varying estimates have been put forth but it ranges somewhere between 2,5bn to 150 mn (Lovelock), that is, somewhere between one third to one fiftyeth of current world population.

To face this all-encompassing crisis, from literature maybe Utopia might be called to the rescue to produce a perspective for continued human presence on Earth, a formidable planning task for a planetary government. We say planetary by conviction, being the only conceivable course, but supported also by all great utopias from such different cultural and economic contexts as Fourier (France 1857), Madách (Hungary 1858) or Huxley (Britain, 1938).



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Trecho de Carta de Mário de Andrade a Raimundo Moraes:

“Quer saber mesmo? Não só copiei os etnógrafos e os textos ameríndios, mais ainda, na “Carta pras Icamiabas”, pus frases inteiras de Rui Barbosa, de Mário Barreto, dos cronistas portugueses coloniais, e devastei a tão preciosa quão solene língua dos colaboradores da Revista de Língua Portuguesa.”