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## NEO-BACKWARDNESS IN BOLSONARO'S BRAZIL

*You once said that the 1964 military coup in Brazil presented itself 'as a gigantic return of everything that had been banished by modernization'.<sup>1</sup> Would you describe Bolsonaro's victory in the same terms? And does the resurgence of the far right point to failings on the part of the PSDB and the Workers' Party, the PT, who've ruled the country for the last two decades?*

**T**HE VICTORY OF Bolsonaro in 2018 and the coup of 1964 have quite a bit in common. In both cases, a programme overtly favourable to capital could make itself viable by mobilizing the regressive depths of Brazilian society, discontented with the liberal course of civilization. In giving these anti-modern sentiments a leading political role, as a kind of compensation for a section of the electorate, capital's strategists made a cynical and risky calculation—in itself, nothing new. The classic example is the obscurantist *volte-face* in Germany in the 1930s. Accepting and nurturing Nazism, the German big bourgeoisie unleashed an uncontrollable process, at the end of which there was no way of knowing who would be devoured by whom. It's worth re-watching Visconti's *The Damned*; Bolsonaro may not reach that point, but it won't be for lack of trying.

In 1964 there was a military takeover; in 2018, an election. It's hard to admit that defending the dictatorship and attacking successful social reforms can win votes—but it can. Where did the PSDB and the PT go wrong, to the point that they opened up a path for the far right? There's no shortage of explanations, with each of the adversaries blaming the other. *Bolsonarismo* now sees them both as cut from the same cloth—

horrific examples of statism and cultural Marxism, which is to say, of communism. The accusation is paranoid, but even so, it may help us to understand certain things. The PSDB (then the Brazilian Democratic Movement, or MDB) and the PT emerged at the historic moment of redemocratization in the 1980s, and took as their programme the redress of the ‘social deficit’ generated by the dictatorship. The state’s role would be to include the excluded, to raise the pitiful minimum wage and provide basic social services, so as to create a decent and more solidaristic society. From an electoral point of view these proved unbeatable rallying cries, and it seemed to follow that the two parties would enjoy decades of hegemony. And yet . . .

Leaving aside the mistakes that both parties have undoubtedly made, there is another, more pessimistic hypothesis to explain the turn to the right. The sequence of advances that, for a time, gave the impression that Brazil was finally lifting off to join the First World, may now have reached its limit—at least if it’s to remain within the bounds set to protect the interests of the established order. With the exhaustion of the favourable international conjuncture, in particular the commodities boom, the funds needed for further advance disappeared, interrupting the process of national integration and its general climate of optimism. With the turn of the tide, popular approval was transformed into rejection by a sudden and astounding sleight of hand, aided by social-media propaganda techniques. In the absence of any political organizing to deepen democracy—or rather, to deepen the social reflex of collectivity itself—one can imagine how the newly dissatisfied, who had previously benefited from the existing policies, might have recalculated their position and moved their chips to the opposite side of the table. In a context of stalling growth, they seek to safeguard their gains and have shifted to an ‘every man for himself’ mentality with regard to the future. With luck, that decision will be reversible.

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The first part of this text is translated from an interview given to Claudio Leal, ‘Neoatraso bolsonarista repete clima de 1964, diz Roberto Schwarz’, *Folha de S. Paulo*, 15 November 2019. The second part is drawn from an interview with Bruna Della Torre and Mónica González García, ‘Cultura e política, ontem e hoje’, *Meridional: Revista Chilena de Estudios Latinoamericanos*, no. 11, October 2018–March 2019. Both are reprinted with kind permission. Some of the questions have been shortened and, in the second section, re-ordered. Translation and notes by Max Stein.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Culture and Politics in Brazil, 1964–1969’, collected in Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, London and New York 1992, trans. John Gledson.

*In the same essay, you spoke of 'the combination, at moments of crisis, of the modern and the oldest of the old'. Are we seeing that now, in the coexistence of the militaristic project of Bolsonaro's group and the neoliberal reforms of his financial team, supported by business leaders and the financial markets?*

The situations echo each other, but they aren't the same. In the 1960s, in the context of dependency theory, there was much discussion of the 'recurrence of backwardness', designating a constant in Brazilian history. At moments of acute crisis in the modernization process—just when it seemed that the country, to render itself fit for the present age, would at last overcome the abyssal inequalities of its class relations—a retrogressive-modernizing solution would appear that allowed capitalism to advance, while society continued to indulge in the same old inequalities. Hence Brazil's incapacity—or lack of appetite—for self-reform, and fall-back on the resources of backwardness, or 'conserving modernization'; a torment well captured by *tropicalismo* at the time of the dictatorship.<sup>2</sup>

It seems clear that we are living a new chapter of that history, with the marriage of convenience between neoliberal economic reform and the archaicizing project of *bolsonarismo*. That said, the times are different. For better or worse, in 1964 left and right both promised to overcome underdevelopment, a horizon that nobody dreams of today. At the same time, the regression into backwardness is worse today. Fifty years ago, those who marched on the side of God, family and property were those whom modernization had bypassed—relics of the old Brazil who, despite being the winners, felt they had to fight against disappearance. It was as if the victory of the right, with its trunk of obsolete ideas, was an accident that could not ultimately divert the positive direction of history. Despite the defeat of the advanced forces, it was still possible—or so it seemed—to wager that time would do its work, to bet on the existence of progress and the future. Whereas the neo-backwardness of *bolsonarismo*, equally flagrant, is of a different type—and far from being exhausted. The de-secularization of politics, the theology of prosperity, firearms in civilian life, the attacks on speed cameras, the hatred of organized

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<sup>2</sup> *Tropicalismo*: a counter-cultural movement that emerged in Brazil under the 1964–85 dictatorship, above all in popular music, combining carnivalesque and bossa nova elements with borrowings from psychedelia and the Anglo-American pop industry; a collective album, *Tropicália, or Bread and Circuses*, featuring Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Gal Costa and others appeared in 1968.

workers—these aren't archaic customs from a bygone era. They are antisocial, but they germinate in the soil of contemporary society, in the vacuum left by the failure of the state. It's quite possible they will have a place in our future, in which case the relics will be us, the enlightened ones. Though globally too, of course, the beacons of modernity have lost much of their light.

*How would you evaluate the return of state censorship for plays, exhibitions, books and films on religious grounds or for motives of outright political repression?*

As far as I know, during the time of Fernando Henrique, Lula and Dilma there was no talk of censorship, for the first time in our history. From that point of view, we were part of the civilized world. A small fraction of cultural life was governed according to its own criteria, with state support, although the predominant part was ruled by the market. From the standpoint of culture, that balance was unsatisfactory—but even so, far preferable to the authoritarian-religious intervention now in motion.

Having registered that debasement, it is still worth noting that our cultural freedom has always borne the stamp of a class prerogative. Setting aside the great exceptional moments, the focus was mainly on catching up with the fashions of the dominant countries, rather than settling accounts with the class inequalities that surround us. To see a productive side in the current regression, let's say that the enforced confrontations with the new religiosity, the new authoritarianism, the new half-culture, may nonetheless be a historic opportunity to leave behind our sometimes shallow culture of modernity and to aim for a more substantive actualization of social realities. This could be the moment, for example, for our agnosticism to come out of the closet and claim its right to the city.

*According to the World Inequality Report, Brazil has a greater concentration of income in the top 1 per cent of its population than any other democratic country. Meanwhile, there has been an electoral entrenchment behind a conservative movement that aims to delete the fight against inequality from the public agenda. How should that paradox be explained?*

I'll answer indirectly, with a quotation from a passage by Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, which gives a historical and social dimension to the

problem.<sup>3</sup> ‘Slavery bequeathed to us a certain insensitivity, an indifference to the lot of the majority, which is at the root of the strategy of the better-off classes today, when they isolate themselves and create a world accessible only to them, in which security is privatized, education is privatized, health . . .’

## 2

*You’ve argued that tropicalismo and Oswald de Andrade’s antropofagia were both, in equal measure, aesthetic programmes of the Third World.<sup>4</sup> What did you mean by that? And do you not find it somewhat unfair to Andrade to equate him with tropicalismo? Ultimately, his ‘cultural cannibalism’ was dressed in red, so to speak, and despite what came later, his play The Candle King was critical of the bourgeoisie and its alliance with foreign capital.*

Oswald de Andrade’s ‘anthropophagous’ poetry—which is humorous right from its title onwards—has a simple formula which is charming in its minimalism.<sup>5</sup> In the spirit of avant-garde montage, it centres on the glaring counter-position of representative images of modern and archaic Brazil, hand-picked for the vivacity of the contrast. The result—highly dissonant, containing an element of tomfoolery and silliness—is seen as a humorous allegory of the country itself, caught in its touching eagerness to overcome its backwardness. As the artistic procedure is highly advanced, permeated with the irreverence of European revolutionary literature, the work breathes optimism and light, and seems to promise a felicitous, not to say utopian collaboration between the three mismatched temporalities—pre-modern, modern, revolutionary—which coexist within the poem.

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<sup>3</sup> Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, *Revista Veja*, 15 May 1996.

<sup>4</sup> See Schwarz, ‘Political Iridescence: The Changing Hues of Caetano Veloso’, NLR 75, May–June 2012, p. 110; the essay is a consideration of Caetano Veloso’s autobiography, *Verdade Tropical* (1997); in English, *Tropical Truth* (2002). A slightly longer version was published under the title ‘Verdade Tropical: Um percurso de nosso tempo’ in Roberto Schwarz, *Martinha versus Lucretia: Ensaios e entrevistas*, São Paulo 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Oswald de Andrade (1890–1954): outstanding practitioner of the 1920s Brazilian avant-garde, whose *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928) exalts Brazil’s ‘cannibalization’ of other cultures, including that of its own colonizers. See also the discussion of the *antropofagos* in Schwarz, ‘Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination’, NLR 1/167, Jan–Feb 1988, pp. 83–4.

Forty years later, in 1967, *tropicalismo* too would couple the ultra-archaic with the ultra-modern, the distant past with the *dernier cri*—or, better, it would juxtapose images taken from old patriarchal Brazil with the latest techniques of international pop music. The family resemblance with Oswaldian anthropophagy is evident, with one difference. While in Andrade the clash of historical periods is the promise of a joyful national future, in which history and modernity are integrated under the sign of inventiveness and surprise, in *tropicalismo* it is the incarnation of national absurdity and disjuncture, of our irremediable incapacity for social integration—in short, the historic failure which would be our essence. As Caetano Veloso himself has said, the most radical moment for the popular song in Brazil also proved to be its moment of greatest pessimism. In historical perspective, this represented—to my mind—a powerful and sardonic formalization of the social-political experience of 1964, when the counter-revolution coupled capitalist modernization with the deliberate reiteration of the same social iniquities as always, which it reconfirmed. The image-type of *tropicalismo* encapsulated the very disconcerting, very Latin American experience of a ‘progress’ which only replays backwardness, rather than overcoming it. Poetry as pills, like Andrade’s, but whose substance was a kind of perpetual relapse into error, contemplated with repulsion and fascination—the famous Brazilian Absurd.

So, both *antropofagia* and *tropicalismo* are aesthetic programmes of the Third World, responding to the questions of delayed modernization—Andrade with a certain euphoria, at the start of the developmentalist process, and Caetano with strident disenchantment, as the perspectives of national-developmentalism seem to shut down. In both cases, the vigorous capture of historical energy—‘dressed in red’ or not—makes them indispensable moments in our cultural debate. As Hans Magnus Enzensberger observed, it is easier to transform underdevelopment into art than to overcome it. It’s an interesting observation; though as Vinícius Dantas has noted, the crisis of the First World might also be easier to turn into art.

*Brazilian cinema also produced some powerful work during the dictatorship—perhaps most iconically, Glauber Rocha’s Terra em Transe, which appeared in 1967. The film could be seen as prophetic of the hardening of military rule with Institutional Act Number 5 (AI-5), but also of the assassination of Che Guevara that year and the military coups in the Southern Cone countries,*

metaphorically 'sistered' through Washington's Operation Condor. Glauber arguably took *Che* as the inspiration for the character of Paulo Martins—he was thinking of making another film, with Cuban cooperation, about the Argentine guerrilla's last years.

As far as I can see, the focus of *Terra em Transe* is the crisis of 1964, when the vast process of Brazilian democratization was defeated by the civilian-military right, with American supporters. The film lives on today thanks to the courage and the operatic exaltation with which it confronts the impasses of the left. The self-examination takes place through the figure of Paulo Martins, a poet-journalist thirsting for the absolute, brought up amid the opulence of the oligarchy and converted to the cause of the people and the strategy of the Communist Party. The character—deliberately and pitilessly presented as problematic—struggles between the conflicting calls of eroticism, revolution, privilege, party discipline and death, which he confronts in the final scene, machine-gun in hand. Between hopes, struggles, violent political disagreements, contradictions, betrayals and setbacks, the *mise-en-scène* stages an intellectual journey towards armed struggle. That path is certainly representative of the historical moment, but the achievement that makes the film so profound and enigmatic springs from another dimension. From the start, there is a *basso-continuo* from the people that disturbs the action, composed of drumming, songs and ritual dances by the oppressed, immiserated *mestizo* masses, alienated from the political discussion among the whites, living in another time. This is the tropicalist aspect of *Terra em Transe*, in which the avant-garde techniques of the film, as well as its modern plot, are juxtaposed with ostentatious incongruity to the substratum of colonial relations that continues to exist in the country. This is a disparity of incalculable historical-political reach, codifying Brazilian realities—and those of Latin America as a whole—in the aesthetic of *tropicalismo*; and, in a different way, in the fiction of Machado de Assis.<sup>6</sup> As for the resemblance between Paulo Martins and Guevara, I may be wrong, but I'm not convinced.

*On Machado: much of your work has centred on this great nineteenth-century novelist. You've argued that he succeeded in characterizing and synthesizing*

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<sup>6</sup> Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839–1908): author of some two hundred short stories and nine novels, including *The Posthumous Memories of Brás Cubas* (1880), sometimes translated as *Epitaph of a Small Winner*, *Dom Casmurro* (1900) and *Esau and Jacob* (1904).

*the history of a country still lacking a consistent cultural history of its own, and thus subsisting off foreign models, imported from Europe. That was the situation not only for Brazil but also for the Latin American republics which, having gained their freedom from Spain, continued to look to Europe for models of art, culture and thought. In this sense, can we read the literature of Machado not just as an 'allegory of Brazil', but also of the aspirations of Latin American cultural elites more broadly?*

The work of Machado de Assis was always a problem for our critics. For a long time it was seen as an alien body within Brazilian literature. Breaking with the vogue for patriotic and picturesque Romanticism that followed Independence, it appeared less than national to many readers, not to say foreign-seeming and lacking blood in its veins. Machado's taste for analysis, at the expense of adventure, also pointed in this direction. To his naturalist contemporaries, fixated on the fatalities of race and climate, it seemed alien to the new scientific spirit. For them, a Brazilian novel could not be modern without the seasoning of miscegenation and tropical colour. Nevertheless, for reasons that are difficult to explain, Machado was recognized as the country's greatest writer and the only one of universal stature. A synthesis of that paradox can be found in an unfair yet acute essay by Mário de Andrade, which didn't include any of Machado's novels among the ten best in Brazilian fiction, but prided itself on the genius of his fellow-countryman, whom the world would recognize as one of its greatest writers.<sup>7</sup> Today, there is a certain consensus on the extraordinary social and national perspicacity of Machado's stories and novels, not to mention his critical range and aesthetic modernity.

The turnaround happened slowly, step by step. In 1935, Augusto Meyer published a set of short articles which changed the frame.<sup>8</sup> In place of the master of language and decorum, bow-tied and bland, meriting the applause of the establishment, there now emerged a perverse Machado, a high-modernist 'cerebral monster', close to Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and Proust. The façade of the ultra-exacting prose stylist, fond of the classics, never short of a quotation from Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Erasmus, Pascal or Schopenhauer, in fact concealed an avant-garde author of

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<sup>7</sup> Mário de Andrade, 'Machado de Assis' [1939], *Aspectos da Literatura Brasileira*, São Paulo 1943.

<sup>8</sup> Augusto Meyer, 'Machado de Assis' [1935], *Machado de Assis 1935-1958*, Rio de Janeiro 1958.



the most irreverent kind. Meyer removed Machado from the ranks of conventional literary officialdom and set him next to the great minds of the time, which helped his genius to become apparent, but made it harder than ever to understand his relationship to the backwardness of Brazilian culture.

The problem would be solved by Antonio Candido, in a synthesizing overview of Brazilian Romantic fiction.<sup>9</sup> The thesis of a universalist Machado, influenced by the great figures of Western literature but indifferent to local literature and realities, was put in check. Contrary to contemporary opinion, Candido observed that Machado had undertaken a detailed study and appropriation of the work of his Brazilian predecessors—secondary figures, far less significant than him, but whose contribution was nevertheless substantive. This point is crucial.

Under the sign of local colour and enchantment, Romantic fiction had carried out a literary-incorporation programme of the regions, customs and social realities of the country, newly independent. It was a patriotic, quasi-sociographical project, which soon produced a small tradition of novels, of variable calibre, which satisfied the tastes of a public that was undemanding but thirsty for national identity. With remarkable critical acuity, Machado was able to see in these provincial works a substratum of another order, with different possibilities—of great literature—which he would go on to explore. Like a photographic negative of modernity, to which they alluded by contrast—and, to speak carefully, by their naivety, what they left to be desired, they pointed to an unsuspected obverse. As unexpected as it may have been, the amiable triviality of Romantic localism came with a powerful backdrop: the distinctively Brazilian complex of liberal-slaveholding clientelism, with its own labyrinth, with nothing pleasant about it. This made him see—since it was through Machadian spectacles—a differentiated insertion in the present-day world. In sum, the non-bourgeois social relations of the ex-colony—slavery, direct personal dependence, pseudo-bourgeois order—as well as their elaboration in Romantic prose, furnished Machado with a dense historical mortar, with unforeseen contemporary implications, that enabled the adventure of his ultra-modernism. Difficult and profoundly dialectical, that connection is one of the secrets of Machado's literature.

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<sup>9</sup> Antonio Candido, 'Temas e expressão', *Formação da Literatura Brasileira: Momentos Decisivos, 1750–1880*, Rio de Janeiro 2017, pp. 436–7.

The erudite prose stylist who had monopolized the attention of the critics up until that point, full of classical references and cosmopolitan elegance, did not disappear, but became overdetermined, with a supreme irony, by the set of local social relations in which he bathed, which were anything but exquisite. In this surprising dissonance, provincial narrowness acquired a remarkable relief and depth, which had a new quality, of high humour, besides being socially accurate. Encased in his cultivated and Europeanized repertoire, evolving in a backward, markedly second-class situation, which did not lack an element of barbarism, the Machadoian narrator was transformed into an emblematic and problematic figure—in fact, a great *realist* achievement. Reconfigured by the context, it then enacted an original ideological comedy, characteristic of life on the periphery of bourgeois order—or better, of societies in the process of decolonization.

So, to return to your question: Machado didn't start from zero. When he wrote *The Posthumous Memories of Brás Cubas*, his first great work, in 1880, he was continuing forty years of previous fictional attempts—though of course, we shall have to see what type of continuity it was. With greater or lesser talent, his predecessors had picked out and established a variety of landscapes, characteristic situations, interesting social types, class conflicts, tonalities of prose and humour, narrative points of view, foreign models, and so forth. Taken in themselves, these options ranged from the disastrous to the amusing, from the banal to the curious, from the conformist to the irreverent, setting in perspective and formalizing, for better or worse, some aspect of local reality. Overall, the outcomes were modest, representing the effort of self-knowledge and self-figuration of an incipient national society, which sought to find itself through the Romantic imagination. Perhaps it is not unfair to say that the attention these works deserve today from the demanding reader is due to their—naturally, involuntary—role in the preparation of Machado's works.

In fact, Machado not only took these middling novels into account, but dissected them with the 'knife of reason'—his expression—to test their substance, social as much as artistic, and draw the conclusions, as a writer who refused to be deceived. With extraordinary lucidity, still jaw-dropping today, he set about testing the reality and internal consistency of the literary output of his confrères, which was to be rectified. Patriotic enthusiasm, sanctity of families, social order, psychic normality, formal

and linguistic solutions, imported literary modes, contemporary ideas, certainties of progress—everything was critically examined, establishing a level of awareness that was unprecedented in Brazil (where it went unrecognized) and rare in any country. Let us say, then, that reflexive continuity with a second-rank tradition allowed him to take an extraordinary step, a critical overcoming in grand style, paradoxically modern, which is perhaps his greatest lesson as a post-colonial artist.

Relating this again to your question, the qualitative leap we're speaking of has several counter-intuitive lessons. First, the negating and sublating force of great literature may owe an important debt to the limitations of the artistic universe to which it is opposed. Second, in peripheral countries, formal invention doesn't arise from the refusal of metropolitan models, but from their critical testing against local experience, which it transcends and universalizes through this encounter. Third, perhaps it is true that artistic production in peripheral countries tends to acquire a supplementary dimension of national allegory, since the experience of incompleteness and relative inferiority is a ubiquitous fact in the life of these countries, an inescapable experience that weighs on efforts to overcome it, and in that sense, allegorizes them. However, in novels of a more or less realist type, the substance of artistic work lies in the incorporation and transfiguration of real relations, which gives them a representative weight that only secondarily participates in the conventions of allegorical abstraction. Fourth, in fact, the Machadian narrator who promenades his cosmopolitan refinement through the picturesque environment of the former colony, whose backward relations provide a flattering reflection of his own complexity and breadth of understanding, can be seen as an emblem of the Latin American elites who to some extent share that situation.

But why 'allegory'? This narrator is not a stand-in figure for an abstract entity—let's suppose, Justice, Industry, Finance, or Brazil—but the synthesis of a real historical condition, apprehended in a stroke of genius. That said, this apprehension is only one half the feat. The other half, mischievous in the extreme, is the transformation of this narrator—a decidedly *criticizable* character—into a formal principle, a generator of literary invention and the organizer of fiction.

*For the cultural critic as 'meta-thinker', the Latin American region today presents a different set of problems to those examined by Antonio Candido in a*

text like *'Literature and Underdevelopment'*, or by yourself in *'Culture and Politics, 1964–1969'*—yet today's problems are inherited from that historical moment. Would you like to comment?

'Literature and Underdevelopment' does for literature what the other classics of underdevelopment theory did for economics and sociology.<sup>10</sup> It's an essay to read and re-read. It's one of those rare reflections that organizes the cultural experience of a nation and of a continent. In essence, it's a study of overcoming the old and comfortable 'mild consciousness of backwardness' which came from Independence and Romanticism, for which progress was something that would arrive naturally, a mere question of time. At the opposite pole to that provincial, almost childlike optimism of the ex-colony, there would arise a 'combative consciousness' of that same backwardness, now seen as a catastrophe that required urgent struggle. In other words, the self-complacency of the 'new country', full of promise but fundamentally conservative, would give way to the realistic awareness of the 'underdeveloped country' with both internal and external adversaries, and for which the future is a problem. The inflection begins around 1930 and deepens in the 1950s. In Brazil, its first manifestation came in the novels of the Northeast, which introduced the poverty and backwardness of the region to the national debate. During the 1950s, the problem gained a conceptual dimension in the theory of underdevelopment, which was deployed to all planes of life; the country suddenly found itself underdeveloped from A to Z.

As Celso Furtado was beginning to demonstrate, underdevelopment is not a transitional step that precedes full development, but rather a stage and a mode of life that tends to reproduce itself or worsen if nothing is done.<sup>11</sup> In the sphere of culture, for example, the drowsy and regressive dream of absolute national originality, which at the limit demanded the 'suppression of contacts and influences', had to be replaced by a sober but polemical diagnosis of dependency—and, in the best of cases, of generalized interdependency, which leads to an aesthetic-political questioning across the board. It's clear that the abandonment of initial illusions of autarchy represented some critical progress, pointing to a

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<sup>10</sup> Antonio Candido, 'Literature and Underdevelopment' [1970] in Howard Becker, ed., *Antonio Candido: On Literature and Society*, Princeton 1995. See also Schwarz, 'Antonio Candido, 1918–2017', NLR 107, Sept–Oct 2017.

<sup>11</sup> See Celso Furtado, *A Pre-Revolução Brasileira*, Rio de Janeiro 1962.

less deluded or more relational perspective, in which the desired originality results from the free and reciprocal influences between nations. On the other hand, it's also clear that this horizon is also illusory, given that the realities of imperialism and our own unacceptable social structures, highlighted by underdevelopment theory, make universal reciprocity a pious wish. In the next step, the continuing confrontation with structural inequality and imperialism could produce the revolutionary intellectual, whose figure signals a new level.

For its part, 'Culture and Politics, 1964–1969' recapitulates the intellectual and artistic developments of the first period of the dictatorship, following the right-wing coup. Amid a great variety of developments, the advanced fraction within the arts—architecture, cinema, theatre, song, visual arts—as well as the student movement and political debate itself had reacted courageously to the truncation of the democratic process that had been pointing towards socialism. In all these spheres, the anti-democratic interruption was taken as an incitement, imposing a return to petty and outdated ways of life that it would be grotesque to accept. The resultant indignation would be the basis for the artistic positions of the period, and for the passage of one section of the students into armed struggle, not to mention others who were prepared to risk some degree of illegality. From this perspective, reflecting on the reasons for the 1964 defeat, one part of the left blamed the disaster on the Communist Party's politics of class conciliation, which had collapsed without a fight, despite the breadth of the movement. Very convincing at first sight, this left critique spurred a further radicalization in all fields, both aesthetic and political, terminating in the as-yet untested alternative of armed opposition. That strategy seemed a consequential victory over the politics of accommodation and promised to open new historical horizons—which swiftly proved illusory in turn, with the brutal but relatively easy victory of the dictatorship, which scored a second triumph over the left. The defeat of conciliation was followed by the defeat of radicalization, dealing socialism a knock-out blow and announcing what would be the contemporary horizon—that of capitalism with no alternative in sight.

Both 'Literature and Underdevelopment' and 'Culture and Politics' held open the possibility of revolution as one of their coordinates. The two essays were published in 1970, initially abroad, not long after the decree of AI-5 that inaugurated the darkest period of the dictatorship. In the political sphere, the armed struggle was fought in the name of a vast

popular camp, rural and urban, immiserated and in good part illiterate (50 per cent at the time), which did not have much awareness of what was going on. This thin, not to say minimal, implantation, which made social support for the struggle unlikely, was carried over into the intellectual quality of the left's writings and pamphlets, which today give a terrible impression of unreality.

This was not at all the case in the sphere of culture—where, despite the political defeat, the results were excellent and long-lasting. Here, the same revolutionary desire for a vanguardist rupture and popular inclusion found a deep echo, a greater density. The revolution aimed to force open the narrowness of bourgeois culture, reinventing cultural and artistic forms with a view to the mass of the excluded and semi-excluded; that is, depending on circumstances, poor students, urban workers, even the rural population. This aspiration converged with the international spirit of 1968, with deep tendencies in Brazilian modernism—which in its own way had aimed at something similar in the 1920s—while also responding to the social realities of the country, which it rendered visible, with good artistic results. Notwithstanding the political defeat, the cultural movement of the period, with its formal and thematic audacity, underscored the value of radicalism, aesthetic and extra-aesthetic. The victory of the right did not prevent the left's positions of that period from enriching the best of Brazilian culture, right up to the present, fifty years later. That said, it's clear that the current deepening of commercialization—and the consumerist-miserabilist realignment of the formerly excluded—constitute near-invincible adversaries, requiring new answers.