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BEYOND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT? REDEFINING THE LITERARY IN POST-DICTATORSHIP BRAZIL AND POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

BEYOND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT? REDEFINING THE LITERARY IN POST-DICTATORSHIP BRAZIL AND POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

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The recent literary production of Brazil and South Africa, which spans the transformation of their political systems from authoritarian regimes into relatively liberal democracies, has often been read by resorting to one of two contrasting paradigms, loosely describable as theories of post-modernism or of post-colonialism. These two families of approaches have been divided, among other aspects, by their oppositional attitudes toward ideology: while the former has primarily looked at texts supposedly deprived of underlying "essences," the second has placed at the center of its investigations works that pursue radical stances and in turn posit a set of relatively stable political values; frequently, such works can be considered as engaged. My dissertation overcomes this critical dichotomy by arguing that today's Brazilian and South African literary production appears in fact to be often characterized by a peculiar entanglement of postmodernity *and* engagement, yet an entanglement that far from representing a chaotic confusion results instead in precise and productive attempts at fashioning new literary responses to the socio-political realities of these two remarkably similar countries.

The three authors that I explore—João Almino and Cristovão Tezza from Brazil, and the South African Barbara Adair—were educated during Brazil's military dictatorship and South Africa's apartheid period, respectively, yet they began their literary careers as the anti-authoritarian struggle was coming to an end. This study illuminates the rootedness of their fiction by showing how, when situated within their respective socio-cultural contexts, the apparently transnational modes of writing they employ reveal a localized significance which further

contributes to making their "post-modernity" a function of their "post-coloniality" and vice-versa. The category I introduce to explore such mode(s) of writing, namely "post-engagedness," provides a framework for focusing not just on what the writers I study have in common (not so unlike the two countries they live in), but more importantly for setting out the different choices they have made in responding to a similar problem: the loss of the structuring principle of (most) literary production during the previous anti-authoritarian struggle, namely engaged resistance—a loss, however, that was not completely irrecoverable.

Thus if Almino constructs his post-engagedness by attempting to revive the "lettered" roots of Brazilian humanistic culture, so as to evoke a new melancholic engagement with the literary, Tezza develops instead a peculiar "polyphonic binarism:" by activating a number of supposedly postmodern devices he carries out an ideological confrontation—between the two poles of radical engagement and neoliberal respectability—which would in time become the dominant concern of his fictional career. Finally, in her most recent novel Adair sets up an intertextual dialogue with Njabulo Ndebele, prominent critic of black fiction, through which she brings his proposals for an engaged literature of the "ordinary" to the limit, opening up a new non-ideological fictional space where a peculiar form of bodily politics becomes possible.

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INTRODUCTION

THE GROUND OF COMPARISON: ANTI-AUTHORITARIANISM, POST-MODERNITY, EXPERIMENTALISM

No critical study of contemporary Brazilian literature can start out without acknowledging the obvious: that current literary production is multifarious, impossible to describe univocally, and comprised of an enormous variety of types. The apparent obviousness of this realization has possibly dissuaded a number of critics from taking the risk of generating ampler paradigms of interpretation to make sense of the works written in the last couple of decades. A high degree of caution is certainly necessary in confronting the most recent Brazilian fiction, caution that does not need to be as acute, apparently, when slightly older literature is concerned: if one assumes a broader chronological perspective, looking in particular at the body of writing composed during the military regime and at its interpretations, one can in fact find a number of overarching critical views put forth by some of the most prominent specialists of contemporary Brazilian literature, among them Malcolm Silverman,[1] Renato Franco,[2] Regina Dalcastagnè,[3] and Silviano Santiago.[4] Not unexpectedly, many of these interpretations have employed some form of literary engagement as their guiding notion, with the result of making this critical concept one of the most productive so far for the study of late Twentieth century Brazilian literature. It is all the more striking then, although perhaps not completely unexpected, to see that this same concept of engagement has been considered near-irrelevant for the study of more recent works. In our post-ideological world, commitment has seemed even to Dalcastagnè, the most important critic of the Brazilian literary engagement, a rather useless (we could even

[1] See Malcolm Silvermann, *Protesto e o Novo Romance Brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2000).
[2] See Renato Franco, *Itinerário Político do Romance Pós-64: A Festa* (São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 1998).
[3] See Silviano Santiago, *Nas Malhas da Letra* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2002), 28-43.
[4] See Regina Dalcastagnè, *O Espaço da Dor: O Regime de 64 no Romance Brasileiro* (Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1996).

say "misplaced") concept: "criticar uma obra porque ela não trata de assuntos políticos e sociais está [no Brasil dos anos 1990] absolutamente fora de questão."[5] And yet, in other parts of the world, and not just in the postcolonial world strictly conceived, but even in countries where "engaged" opposition to neoliberal hegemony seems to have almost dwindled to naught (such as Italy or the United States), commitment has today become again the guiding criterion of analysis in a number of studies of contemporary literature.[6]

I propose here to start from the assumption that engagement need not be discarded wholesale even for the Brazilian case and as we shall see forthwith, for the South African one as well, but can still provide a useful conceptual reference for a discourse on contemporary literature, even if we will have to deal ultimately with its absence rather than its presence. Engagement, I will argue, is a lingering ambition for a number of contemporary Brazilian writers, yet one whose significance resides precisely in the fact that it cannot ever be fulfilled. It is in the interstice between a longing to commit politically and the realization of the impossibility of this desire that some of the major writers at work in Brazil today seem to situate their literary contributions. Cristovão Tezza and João Almino, the Brazilian writers I explore, intervene literarily precisely at the threshold between commitment as they knew it in their formative years during the military regime and what has been called post-modernism, of which I will present a specific definition that is particularly well-suited, I believe, to the Brazilian tradition. I will argue that these writers are able to solve the problem of coupling an engaged attitude to a post-metaphysical awareness by imbuing their social commentaries with a profound and relentless critique of their own role as writers and of the status of their own art. By undermining and, as it

[5] Regina Dalcastagnè, *O Espaço da Dor: O Regime de 64 no Romance Brasileiro* (Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1996), 27.
[6] See for instance, Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug, eds., *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture* (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

were, emptying out the act of artistic composition through a host of literary devices, many of them metanarratival, they have created a form of artistic practice that is able to convey a kind of social critique that remains essentially post-metaphysical, since it does not propound any teleological ideal. In other words, these writers have accomplished a "not quite" engaged art, distinctive in its tone and crucial to an understanding of "contemporary" Brazilian literature. This, however, does not imply that such a "post-engaged" mode of writing can describe the *totality* of authors at work today in Brazil. Nevertheless, I believe that this country's contemporary literary field cannot be read without acknowledging the prominent role of such a mode, even though it appears to define in particular writers who belong to a relatively learned tradition.

Even at a very general level, the commonalities linking Brazil and South Africa appear to offer a compelling ground of comparison for a critical endeavor that brings together their two literary traditions. Such common features invest a whole array of domains: not just the literary, but also the socio-political, economic, and historical. Like contemporary Brazil, South Africa is today a multicultural and multiracial democratic society characterized by rife inequality and high rates of crime and plagued by administrative inefficiency. The historical narratives of both Brazil and South Africa have been driven, principally if not exclusively, by a sustained quest for modernization that in each case has been pursued, until very recent years, by illiberal and authoritarian governments. As a result, both countries have experienced at similar times (during the sixties in South Africa and the seventies in Brazil) periods of great economic growth that in each of them were contemporary with phases of increasing authoritarianism. Today both are home to diversified economies, and benefit from an abundance of raw materials. Even their arrival to democratic rule nearly coincided (the eighties in Brazil, the nineties in South Africa),

and each was followed by a surge of disappointment, which stemmed from the realization that the miracle of democratic revival had not brought with it nor would, at least in the near future, the expected socio-political advances. Thus, to this day, and despite recent successes, the dream of modernization seems to remain hesitantly suspended and unfulfilled, both in Brazil and South Africa. Indeed, it never stood completely uncontested, as a number of competing cultural narratives had been in existence throughout the histories of both countries, making it impossible for either of them to commit exclusively to Western modernity. As a result, substantial sections of the literature of South Africa have been read as performing a transcultural negotiation descending precisely by what was termed by David Attwell a "fugitive" commitment to modernity, and this contention could be applied to the Brazilian case as well.[8]

As in Brazil, the achievement of democracy has deprived South African authors of what had been for decades their historical foil: the apartheid government and its ideology. As a result, political commitment could not continue to be performed in the forceful terms of the anti-apartheid years; as Graham Pechey specifies, "the polar contest of apartheid and its antagonists needed for its own purposes to compel an infinity of disparate temporalities and identities into a totality. Writing is under no necessity, and it is the business of a post-apartheid criticism to respect this discourse, whose agnosticism where centers of power are concerned is absolute."[9] Once Pechey's assertion is translated into the terms provided by Gianni Vattimo's theory of

[8] See David Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 22 and 23-24: "I suggested that the investment in modernity on the part of South Africa's black writers had a 'fugitive,' quality, ... it produced something like 'fugitive modernities.' By this I meant that such investment was never complete or unguarded. It always sought, in other words, to define itself outside of received, colonial versions of authority. Fugitiveness, in this sense, has less to do with flight—as in, for example, the fugitive slave culture of nineteenth-century African-American experience--than with the fugitiveness of being in-and-out simultaneously, a condition that is evoked by the musical implications of fugitiveness."

[9] Graham Pechey, "The Post-Apartheid Sublime: Rediscovering the Extraordinary," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, ed. by Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 63. See also p. 58: "Post-apartheid writing turns from the fight against apartheid, with its fixation upon suffering and the seizure of power, into just such stories as these: stories which then open out to transform the victory over apartheid into a gain for postmodern knowledge, a new symbiosis of the sacred and the profane, the quotidian and the numinous."

postmodernity, on which I will mostly rely in this work, it could be said that today South African authors are writing in a time of metaphysical "weakness," as they are unable to commit to a positive political teleology. This shift to Vattimian post-modernity has been even more dramatic here than in Brazil, since the literary tradition of South Africa had been consistently characterized by a most vigorous propensity to engage, one that makes the literature of (anti-) apartheid an almost paradigmatically *engagée* one. "With very few exceptions," Lewis Nkosi wrote in the late seventies, "the literature of Southern Africa is wholly concerned with the theme of struggle and conflict [...]. Whether written by white or by blacks the literature of Southern Africa is committed to the notion that certain 'tasks' are the legitimate function of socially responsible writers."[10] Even during the "interregnum," namely the chaotic period of transition to democratic rule,[11] when less overtly committed works began to appear, South African writers could not ignore the expectation of being committed, and any less-than-fully-committed intervention, such as J. M. Coetzee's, had to negotiate its position in relation to this underlying imperative. Indeed, this strong propensity to commit has often been considered a weakness of the South African tradition, since it foreclosed the possibility of writing in an array of literary modes and on a number of other topics which were not considered sufficiently "urgent."[12]

[10] Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks* (Harlow: Longman House, 1981), 76. See also on this issue Louise Bethlehem in a recent contribution: "South Africa constitutes a particularly overdetermined instance of analysis for our purposes, precisely because the consequences of literary engagement were heightened, sometimes lethally so, by the extremely repressive politics of the state." Louise Bethlehem, "The Pleasures of the Political: Apartheid and Postapartheid South African Fiction," in *Teaching the African Novel*, ed. Gaurav Desai (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009): 225.

[11] Thus Nadine Gordimer famously called the period of transition to democracy in South Africa: it took place roughly from 1987 to 1994 (from the stalemate of state repression to the first democratic elections), while in Brazil the transition lasted approximately from 1975 to 1985 (from Geisel's to Sarney's presidency, although the upper limit could be extended up to 1989, when the first democratic presidential elections took place).

[12] See on this issue André Brink, "Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faced by South African Literature," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, eds. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 15-16: "The very urgencies of a struggle against apartheid encouraged the imposition of other silences (betrayals and excesses within the ranks of the liberation movements; appalling conditions, torture, and murder in the training camps and detention centres of the exiled ANC in Angola, etc.) and produced a sense of priorities which made it very difficult for writers—even for writers who refused to be

Yet if with the onset of democratic rule engagement appears as a problematic attitude, I believe that even in South Africa it remains an operative literary drive, although its persistence appears crucially "weakened" today. I will argue in my dissertation that the art of the South African human rights lawyer and lecturer Barbara Adair, the third author that I will be reading, is located at the threshold between engagement and post-modernism, not dissimilarly to the Brazilian writers included in this project. More specifically, her work is in conversation with one of the first South African critics of African descent who openly challenged the aesthetics of engagement during the apartheid years, Njabulo Ndebele. His critical positions are twisted by Adair's fictional practice in such a way as to lift them from a "modern" ideological attitude into a thoroughly post-ideological one. The result is that Adair's own post-modernism appears as a highly situated one, indeed imbued with the long reflection on committed writing that took place in the preceding decades. Her works do in fact prove to be ideally positioned to illuminate the issue of the situatedness of many postmodern fictional practices—a concept first explored in South Africa by David Attwell[14]—since her stylistic and literary choices, while highly akin to those performed by the Brazilian writers I have selected, can only be truly appreciated by an interpretation of her works that is grounded in her local critical environment. In this way, Adair will join Tezza and Almino in helping us illuminate the situatedness of some of today's most significant postmodern literary works, whose features can only be understood once the persistence of the past (in this case a very particular past: the engaged heritage) is detected within them.

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explicitly harnessed to any 'cause'—to write about certain very ordinary human situations (like a love relationship without direct political connotations) without inviting accusations of fiddling while Rome burns, of suppressing more 'urgent' issues, of avoiding 'reality', or of self-indulgence." See also Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006).

[14] See David Attwell, *J. M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* (Berkeley and Cape Town: The University of California Press and David Philip, 1993), *passim*.

Beyond Authoritarianism: A Critical Challenge

The period that follows the end of authoritarian rule both in Brazil and in South Africa has been the object of sustained attention by scholars of both countries. Within the field of Brazilian studies, pride of place is taken by Idelber Avelar's interpretation, which by looking at the Benjaminian categories of "mourning" and "allegory" (derived from Benjamin's work on the baroque *Trauerspiel*) can be employed in reading contemporary Latin American literature, presents a fascinatingly shattering argument. The military dictatorships, in Avelar's opinion, by implementing sweeping economic reforms that imposed a forceful transition into a fully capitalist order on Brazil and other countries of the subcontinent, have substantially reduced the possibility of producing literary art, and all the more so since some of their policies had an afterlife in those of the democratic governments themselves. What is left to the writer is only the task of mourning which, inasmuch as it represents "active forgetting," defies "growing commodification." The latter, in contrast, "negates memory because new commodities must always replace previous commodities, send them to the dustbin of history."[15] Thinking about the past thus becomes a way of not only recovering the significance of anti-authoritarian resistance, "an experience [...] seemingly condemned to silence and oblivion,"[16] but also of actively fighting the commodification and technicization processes that are engulfing cultural production with the spread of the market. In this sense literature appears today to Avelar as an "untimely" enterprise, yet it is precisely such untimeliness that represents, according to Avelar, literature's one reason for persisting. As the Benjaminian "angel of history," today (good) literature "looks back at the

[15] Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 2.
[16] Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 10.

pile of debris, ruins, and defeats of the past in an effort to redeem them, being at the same time pushed forward by the forces of 'progress' and 'modernization.'"[17]

While in Avelar's view of the literary present there is hardly anything liberating, a vastly different attitude can be found in some of the major South African interventions in post-apartheid. In particular, Njabulo Ndebele, André Brink, and Graham Pechey are figures who, despite their remarkably different perspectives, nevertheless share a sense of relief and enthusiasm in their reading of the period that precedes or is immediately subsequent to the end of authoritarian rule. Such accounts of creative liberation can be traced to the first of the critics mentioned, Ndebele, who I'll explore extensively in the third chapter of the thesis. Ndebele famously set out to investigate the shortcomings of anti-authoritarian fiction, which he considered plagued by posturing and "sloganeering."[18] In Ndebele's opinion, the confrontational stance vis-à-vis the apartheid regime seemed to compromise the "autonomy" and "coherence" of works of fiction as well as to hinder characterization, all aspects that were neglected for the sake of anti-authoritarian politics. Following Ndebele's lead, Brink tried to further articulate the processes of artistic silencing that had taken place in engaged fiction, illuminating new or less frequently trodden avenues, such as "the link between woman and history" or "magic realism."[19] Pechey, on the other hand, investigated the "extraordinariness" at the heart of the transition to

[17] Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 11.
[18] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 42.
[19] André Brink, "Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faces by South African Literature," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, eds. Derek Attridge and R. Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 23 and 25.

post-apartheid as a moment when "opportunities for re-imagining community without setting up the false god of an overarching politics open up."[20]

My position does not align with either of these two currents, as I do not believe that post-authoritarian writings can be considered solely liberatory, nor do I intend to exclusively focus on the "mourning" of a universe of discourse previously existent—be it before the "turning of State into Market"[21] or the establishment of democratic rule. Instead, I will argue that if the transition to a post-engaged mode of writing (a transition whose historicization needs to be strongly problematized) is rooted in a previous period, such a backward gaze becomes the means by which experimental texts that are thoroughly conscious of their literary novelty are formulated. In illuminating these "post-engaged" works, I employ a perspective that descends from two different sets of critical approaches that have usually been considered separately, and within which the authors just mentioned can be more or less loosely situated: the post-modern and the post-colonial. These two families of interpretations have been divided, among other aspects, by their oppositional attitudes toward ideology: while the former has primarily looked at texts supposedly deprived of underlying "essences" (as Graham Pechey has been doing), the second has placed at the core of its investigations works that pursue radical stances. The question of "resistance" to colonial or neocolonial domination not only informs the major works that started the postcolonial trend (in particular those penned by New Left-connected critics) but can be considered the main focus of postcolonial studies as a whole. This critical mode posits, in turn, a set of relatively stable political values (that is, an ideology) that are present most of the time both in the critics' perspective and in that of the works they consider, and which are often rooted in

[20] Graham Pechey, "The Post-Apartheid Sublime: Rediscovering the Extraordinary," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, eds. Derek Attridge and R. Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 60.
[21] Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 11.

Marxist thinking. Idelber Avelar's Adornian and Benjaminian ascendency is a case in point. This dissertation overcomes such overarching contrast by arguing that neither of these two paradigms would bear much fruit in the exploration of today's Brazilian and South African literary production. In fact, such production appears to be characterized by a peculiar entanglement of postmodernity and radicalism, yet an entanglement which, far from representing a chaotic confusion, results instead in precise and productive attempts at fashioning new literary responses to the socio-political realities of these two "post-colonial" countries.

Brazil and South Africa: Comparing Analogous Literary Systems

While the overarching similarities between Brazil and South Africa have offered the comparison's initial spur, it is in a number of more specific domains of *analogy* that the critical operation that brings together their recent literature will be most productive. Obviously, the ways in which committed authors responded to authoritarian power in Brazil and South Africa cannot be identical; nevertheless, both similarities and differences can be mapped onto a grid of conceptual analogies, which can in turn enable us to make the two traditions critically illuminate one another, leading ultimately to a better understanding of post-engaged fiction. In this section I will focus on two domains of analogy: the aptitude of the two literatures to envision a post-authoritarian future, and the participation of marginalized groups in anti- and post-authoritarian writing.

The question of post-authoritarian writing elicits that of political ideology, and, more specifically, requires the study of the relationship between the elaboration of political utopia and the practice of engaged writing. Remarkably, any consideration of this issue in Brazil should start before the rise of the military dictatorship, though not necessarily by many years. As has

been forcefully argued by Marcelo Ridenti, the foremost living historian of Brazilian engagement, anti-authoritarian commitment in this country can be considered a continuation of the "florecimento revolucionário" that characterized the Brazilian political discourse starting in the early sixties.[22] In turn, this trend of revolutionary engagement should be understood in its relationship to the global expansion of the Left, which in those years closely linked Brazilian political discourse to political developments in Europe and elsewhere in the world. As Renato Ortiz wrote, Brazilian leftist culture gave voice in the sixties to "valores similares aos da contracultura nos países centrais, só que agora ajustados a uma sociedade periférica"[23] (although on a smaller scale, the role of Western thought in shaping anti- and post-authoritarian writings in South Africa was not negligible either; "Ndebele's work," for instance, "has connections with a theoretical impulse originating in black Britain [...] with Stuart Hall, Hazel Carby, and Paul Gilroy, and widely influential in U.S. cultural studies, feminism, and African American studies"[24]). These leftist values were at the time (roughly 1960-65) strongly imbued with a utopian bent, as Renato Franco's and Marcelo Ridenti's critical interventions have suggested.[25] It was in the midst of such revolutionary/utopian discourse that the 1964 coup took place, and from then on the military started to effectively hijack such discourse, exploiting it to serve their

[22] Marcelo Ridenti, *Em Busca do Povo Brasileiro: Artistas da Revolução, do CPC à Era da Tv* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2000), 33.
[23] Renato Ortiz, *A Moderna Tradição Brasileira* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 156-157. See also Marcelo Ridenti: "Na década de 1960, a utopia que ganhava corações e mentes, era a revolução (não a democracia ou a cidadania, como seria anos depois), tanto que o próprio movimento de 1963 designou-se como *revolução*. As propostas de revolução política, e também econômica, cultural, pessoal, enfim, em todos os sentidos e como os significados mais variados, marcaram profundamente o debate político e estético especialmente entre 1964 e 1968. Enquanto alguns inspiravam-se na revolução cubana ou na chinesa, outros mantinham-se fiéis ao modelo soviético, enquanto terceiros faziam a *antropofagia* do maio francês, do movimento *hippie*, da contracultura, propondo uma transformação que passaria pela revolução nos costumes." *Em Busca do Povo Brasileiro: Artistas da Revolução, do CPC à Era da Tv* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2000), 44.
[24] Anthony O'Brien, *Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 77.
[25] See especially Marcelo Ridenti, *Em Busca do Povo Brasileiro: Artistas da Revolução, do CPC à Era da Tv* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2000), 23-57; see also Renato Franco, *Itinerário Político do Romance Pós-64: A Festa* (São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 1998), 42-50.

authoritarian ends: "O governo e a mídia, especialmente a televisão, iam desfigurando as utopias libertárias, transformando-as em ideologias de consolidação da nova ordem nacional."[26] Eventually, once the regime had strengthened the new order by achieving an impressive economic expansion, leftist utopias found themselves obliterated by the triumphant developmentalism of authoritarian modernization, which rapidly stifled them into insignificance. The result was that in the years following the coup, especially after 1968, positive ideologies gradually receded even among leftist writers, whose engagement became progressively characterized by a profound sense of defeat.[27] Instead of presenting alternative realities (that is, *post*-authoritarian projects), engaged Brazilian writing of the early seventies limited itself to an anti-authoritarian attitude, to such an extent that those years came to be characterized as the time of a "cultura da derrota."[28] In this period, engaged novels focused on criticizing the present while at the same time preserving its memory for generations to come, who would otherwise remain misinformed by the regime-controlled press and media. These works "têm a pretensão de ser documentos de uma época, o espólio artístico de uma geração que enfrentou um dos piores momentos políticos da história do país. Se não fosse assim, não teriam sido escritos."[29] In other words, the testimonial register (itself showing a peculiarly "weakened" link to the idea of futurity) seems more operative in Brazilian engaged writing than the positively utopian one; such

[26] Marcelo Ridenti, *Em Busca do Povo Brasileiro: Artistas da Revolução, do CPC à Era da Tv* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2000), 323.
[27] Here is the description, in the words of Roberto Schwarz, of the turning point that 1968 was for the left in Brazil (Schwarz is writing this lines between 1969-1970): "o regime respondeu, em dezembro de 68, com o endurecimento. Se em 64 fora possível a direita "preserva" a produção cultural, pois bastara liquidar o seu contato com a massa operária e camponesa, em 68, quando o estudante e o público dos melhores filmes, do melhor teatro, da melhor música e dos melhores livros já constitui massa politicamente perigosa, será necessário trocar ou censurar os professores, os encenadores, os escritores, os músicos, os livros, os editores—noutras palavras, será necessário liquidar a própria cultura viva do momento. O governo já deu vários passos neste sentido, e não se sabe quantos mais dará. Em matéria de destroar universidades, o seu acervo já é considerável: Brasília, S. Paulo e Rio, as três maiores do país." Roberto Schwarz, *O Pai de Família e Outros Estudos* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1978), 63.
[28] See Renato Franco, *Itinerário Político do Romance Pós-64: A Festa* (São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 1998), 72-97.
[29] Regina Dalcastagnè, *O Espaço da Dor: O Regime de 64 no Romance Brasileiro* (Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1996), 46.

writing, while starting out as the bearer of post-authoritarian reflections, gradually focused its resistance against the dictatorial present, thus acquiring at once a more pronounced *anti*-authoritarian character and, even more significantly, becoming incipiently "weakened," inasmuch as engaged works were no longer the conveyors of positive utopias.

On the other hand, in South Africa committed anti-authoritarianism seems to have been consistently concerned not just with confronting the racist regime, but also with mapping the conditions of possibility for a future radical democracy that was expected to come into place in the aftermath of apartheid. This is most clear, to take a particularly significant instance, in the political implications of Ndebele's call for a literature of the ordinary. In Ashraf Jamal's interpretation of Ndebele's stance, the ordinary is in fact "patently resistant [...] to being harnessed to a head-on and prescriptive system of resistance;"[30] it is both a resistance to resistance[31] and a way to envision a post-authoritarian society with a new degree of "normality"[32]: "the valorisation of the ordinary supposes a post-imperial and post-national logic, a logic which, against these competing and collusive powers, calls for a civil society."[33] In other words, Ndebele's conception of the ordinary is a clear example of a post-authoritarian move, which tries to overcome the limits of mere anti-authoritarianism to chart a new conception of national culture (living the ordinary) instead, which would ideally become the basis for a post-authoritarian democratic society.[34] In this positively utopian enterprise, Ndebele was not alone. As Anthony O'Brien has pointed out, Ndebele's own agenda of "critical resumption and

[30] Ashraf Jamal, *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press; Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 84.
[31] See Ashraf Jamal, *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press; Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 84.
[32] See Ashraf Jamal, *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press; Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 85.
[33] See Ashraf Jamal, *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press; Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 86.
[34] For a discussion of critical takes on Ndebele's famous series of essays, see Anthony O'Brien, *Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 37-38.

reworking of Black Consciousness 'givens' for the moment of transition beyond apartheid can be seen to have introduced a new cycle of freedom, a new political aesthetic, for South African emergent culture. It runs parallel [...] to the black feminism sketched out by Desiree Lewis, Lauretta Ngcobo, Nise Malange, Zoë Wicomb, and others."[35] Yet it is crucial to remark, as both Graham Pechey and Ashraf Jamal have done, that in trying to look beyond the apartheid regime, such post-authoritarian reflections were also coming to terms with its inherent modernity, and so were trying to shape an incipient post-modern politics—that is, a "weakened" form of political thinking.[36] To return to our comparative project, we can then suggest that if Brazilian *anti*-authoritarian writers saw their engagement "weakened" by their lack of a positive utopian dimension, in South Africa the utopian envisioning of a post-authoritarian society also revealed, albeit for very different reasons, a similar post-modern "weakening." It is precisely such "weakening," as I will try to show in the following sections, that will be deepened by post-*engaged* literature.

While the crucial reflections on radical democracy that I mentioned took place in South Africa during the eighties, the onset of a democratic order after 1994 has borne witness in this country to a striking renunciation of ideological reflections on democracy itself.[37] In other words, post-authoritarian writing seems to have entered a state of crisis, as the "culture of settlement" for liberal democracy—more and more prominent in the national political discourse—has begun to render difficult if not impossible precisely the kind of utopian envisionings that had been

[35] Anthony O'Brien, *Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 77.
[36] See Graham Pechey, "Post-Apartheid Narratives," in *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, ed. by Francis Barker et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 155 and Ashraf Jamal, *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press; Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), especially chapter 5, where in detailing the failings of Ndebele to envision a fully post-metaphysical politics, Jamal is also acknowledging the attempts of Ndebele to see beyond the modern politics of apartheid.
[37] See Graham Pechey, "Post-Apartheid Narratives," in *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, ed. by Francis Barker et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 151-171.

elaborated in previous decades. Thus, while South African literature around the interregnum seems to "come together around the question" of "how to construct an expressive culture that springs from, responds to, and shapes visions of economic and political democracy deeper than ballot box democracy,"[38] this concern is not to be found in more recent works, such as Phaswane Mpe's, Ivan Vladislavić's or even some by Zakes Mda, which appear indeed to represent a new, post-engaged form of writing. Even some apparently "forward-looking" works, such as Mda's *Way of Dying* (1996), which seemingly provide "a springboard for speculations about the new urban subjectivities and semantic topographies that may emerge with apartheid's demise,"[39] have been considered by other critics as lacking "an expansive sense of politics."[40] It is precisely this turn from post-authoritarianism to post-engagement, to which Barbara Adair also belongs, that my dissertation proposes to clarify, and which I think can benefit from being compared to what happened in the Brazilian setting, were post-authoritarian fiction *preceded* anti-authoritarian writing. Yet, as will become clearer in the ensuing sections, these diachronic discrepancies can only highlight the powerful philosophical communality which underlies the dynamics of the two traditions, namely the vacillation of utopian commitment.

The second domain of analogy that I would like to introduce concerns the role of marginal or subaltern voices within the tradition of anti-authoritarian writing in Brazil and South Africa, and can add a useful layer of interpretation to the study of all three of the authors on whom I will be writing. I will start from South Africa, where anti-authoritarian writing, while intervening in a society whose racial and economic polarization was not completely unlike that of Brazil, was

[38] Anthony O'Brien, *Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 3.
[39] Rita Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 150.
[40] Grant Farrel, "Mourning the Postapartheid State Already? The Poetics of Loss in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*," in *Modern Fiction Studies* 46 (Spring 2000): 195. Cit. by Rita Barnard, in *Apartheid and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 155.

nevertheless distinguished from its Brazilian counterpart by a most acute racial awareness that would be impossible to detect on the other side of the ocean. This was obviously the result of the racist ideology openly assumed by the South African authoritarian regime, and which compelled engaged writing so inescapably to address the issue of race. Instead, in Brazil the myth of racial inclusion has persistently characterized the self-representation of the national community, despite the fact that the economic, educational, and political marginalization of people of color has not been much less stark in Brazil than it was and still is in South Africa. Indeed, it was precisely the modernization imposed on Brazil by the authoritarian regime that was instrumental in further disenfranchising the colored population, and yet even during the years of the dictatorship race was not among the major issues debated by the engaged Brazilian writers who confronted the authoritarian regime, and who were lead by their mostly white and bourgeois backgrounds to focus more on the institutional and ideological aspects of oppression than on the racial ones. Thus, while in South Africa there has been a long tradition of "marginal" literature (to use the Portuguese expression, starkly "misplaced" in South Africa) both produced by and concerned with people of color, which jointly addressed the problems of authoritarianism and racial subalternity (as, for instance, in Can Themba and William Modisane's memoirs, Miriam Tlali's novel and Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography, and in the black poetry of the seventies), such writing is instead in Brazil a relatively recent event, finally making its appearance in a literary arena where the practice of literature had been for a century the domain of a mostly white and bourgeois cultured élite, the inheritor of the Hispanic *letrados*. It was only during the very last decades that the dispossessed people of color found a literary voice in this country,[41] in writings

[41] While the first Afro-Brazilian literary journal, *Cadernos Negros* was founded in 1978, the first professional Black writers started to operate in Brazil only in the late 1990s. See Emanuelle K. F. Oliveira, *Writin Identity: The Politics of Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Literature* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 3. Today Ferréz and Paulo Lins are two very different instances of such Afro-Brazilian writing.

that are characterized to this day by the striking persistence of engagement. Indeed, just as post-modernity does not, as we will see, imply the end of modernity, so post-engagement still carries on engagement in some form. I believe that the history of racial strife in South Africa, and the way in which it informs its anti-authoritarian tradition, can be employed to illuminate the gray racial areas of both Brazilian engagement and post-engagement, for example, by helping us recognize the relatively privileged positionality of the Brazilian writers that I am proposing to study, and the fact that their post-engaged attitude is —most significantly—taking place today, precisely when the dispossessed other has finally found a voice.

The Idea of Post-Modernity: A (Persistently) Productive Concept

To understand the peculiar relationship both of abandonment and permanence that the selected writers establish with engagement, we need to go on to examining in more detail the post-modernity that pervades their works. To this end, I want to recall the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo's interpretation of post-modernity, as it provides, in my opinion, the spark for a reconsideration of this divisive category that would prove illuminating when applied to our setting. While Vattimo detects the roots of philosophical post-modernity in Nietzsche's later writings, it is Heidegger who he identifies as the first thinker who was able to conceptualize "un nuovo modo di relazionarsi alla metafisica che non sia né l'accettazione passiva dei suoi errori, né la critica oltrepassante che in realtà la prosegue."[62] Post-modernity represents, in Vattimo's opinion, the peculiar form of thought that has left metaphysics "behind," through a surpassing that has none of the developmental significance that informs the paradigm of modernity. What

[62] Davide Monaco, *Gianni Vattimo: Ontologia Ermeneutica, Cristianesimo e Postmodernità* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2006), 98.

leads to post-modernity is rather a *Verwindung* (a term first introduced by Heidegger), namely an un-developmental "getting over":

> This is the meaning of the post-modern, to the degree in which it cannot be reduced to a mere fact of cultural fashion. From architecture to the novel to poetry to the figurative arts, the post-modern displays, as its most common and most imposing trait, an effort to free itself from the logic of overcoming, development, and innovation. From this point of view, the post-modern corresponds to Heidegger's attempt to prepare a post-metaphysical kind of thought which would not be an *Überwindung* but rather a *Verwindung* of metaphysics. […] The post-modern experience of art appears as the way in which art occurs in the era of the end of metaphysics.[63]

In other words, in Vattimo's thought the "post" of post-modernity should be considered neither chronologically (as something coming after modernity in time) nor developmentally (as something coming after modernity in a teleological sequence of ideas). Instead, post-modernity is "post" precisely because it is able to overcome the paradigm of modernity by renouncing the teleological conception of knowledge which has characterized the modern. There is no "better" idea in post-modernity: no utopia, no positively held political project, no "grand narrative." It is in this sense, then, that post-modern thought can be considered a *weak* form of thought (or "pensiero debole"), although its very weakness is in many ways its most empowering feature.

The loss of the possibility of political engagement brought about by the end of authoritarianism, itself intimated by the incipiently "weakened" forms of engagement that we detailed *supra*, enabled some contemporary Brazilian and South African writers, many of whom with a middle-class background, precisely to "get over" a dimension that was still modern, inasmuch as characterized by teleological politics, and to embrace a post-modern way of conceiving politics and art; that is, an approach characterized by precisely the post-metaphysical "weakness" that Vattimo described as the hallmark of post-modernity. Between 1964 and the 1980s in Brazil, and for much longer in South Africa, authoritarianism presented writers with an

[63] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Synder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 105-106.

undisputable enemy against which they defined their committed messages of democratic revival. Such messages, inasmuch as they upheld a teleological aim for the development of the respective society, can be considered to be the bearers of a form of modernity, albeit one that was already to some degree "weakened." Democratic rule dramatically changed this situation, annihilating the possibility of upholding a revolutionary ideology while also enfolding Brazilians and South Africans writersin a feeling of profound disenchantment resulting from the poor performance of its governments. The space for teleological projects, and therefore for *modern* commitment, was dramatically reduced.

And yet, even in writing composed according to this other philosophical mode, a longing for engagement was still active. To understand how this is possible, we must resort again to Vattimo's theory of post-modernity. In fact, the peculiar "getting over" he conceptualized through the Heideggerian idea of *Verwindung* is one that does not leave modernity behind completely. The *Verwindung* of the metaphysical tradition "is at once a recovery from *and* a resignation to metaphysics [...]. Contemporary philosophy can, Vattimo contends, go beyond the latter only through a slow 'weakening' of it that brings it along with us—and repeats it (with a difference)—as we convalesce from its era and its errors."[64] In the same way, while the authors that I propose to study have had to leave "behind" a modern conception of commitment, they are still able to retain at least some degree of engagement, in a form that is nevertheless transfigured precisely by their post-modern attitude.

Approaching post-engagement in Brazil and South Africa through Vattimo's thought compels us, moreover, to tackle the issue of the possibility of writing "history." As post-metaphysical *Verwindung* represents a "getting over" that cannot be described by a progressive

[64] Jon R. Snyder, "Translator's Introduction," in Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Synder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), xxvi-xxvii.

conception of historical time (precisely because *Verwindung* performs a leap outside of history), the act of interpreting "historically" the works that reveal such post-modern "surpassing" might appear somewhat inconsistent with their own post-modernity. Yet, I believe that an interpretation that takes into account diachronic time remains possible, provided that any notion of teleological development is shed, and that such interpretation remains always aware of its own ultimate fictionality. Vattimo himself, in his landmark contribution on *The End of Modernity*, retraces the authors and works that have ushered into history, intended here as a merely temporal succession of events, post-history itself, that is a non progressive conception of time, with the aim of showing the identity of the precursors of post-modernity. A similarly cautious investigation can, I believe, be conducted for the most recent literature, while keeping in mind a crucial caveat: the post-modernity of the authors I am studying has never in fact developmentally overcome a previous modernity, but remains with it in a relationship of *Verwindung*. Tezza, Almino, and Adair show a persistent entanglement with modernity, and they do that through their longing for commitment, even while their works can be considered post-metaphysical. In this sense, their fiction cannot be employed to establish a historicistic "stage" of Brazilian literature, since modernity has never been historicistically surpassed in their works, but rather "distorted," "twisted," or "resigned to"[65] through a process of *Verwindung*. Their "contemporaneity," in other words, should not be considered as something that completely supersedes some previous stage, but rather as a mode of writing that performs a twisting of the very conception of time that is lodged at the heart of any historicizing interpretation. Thus, while in my dissertation I will refer to the interplay of events that rendered possible particular modes of writing and to the differences that obtain between artistic modes in different times, my interpretation will

[65] See Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Synder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 171.

emphasize not only its own provisionality and the non-exclusivity of the narrative it conveys, but also the unavoidable entanglement of post-modern temporality with any "previous" modernity.

If it was precisely the end of engagement that made it possible for some of the leading writers of Brazil and South Africa to fully accept their own *weakened* character, then how is it possible today to write post-modern literature while remaining socially mindful? Is this still an artistic possibility? Once we recognize that we lack a clear political message, that we cannot hold onto any metaphysical certainty, and that modernity has never defined Brazil as its exclusive feature, how can we write critically about the social? How would our writing deal with the tension between a willingness to develop a social critique and the awareness of the end of all political teleologies? These are the questions that I will be answering in this dissertation. However, in order for us to tackle these problems, we must first deal with two preliminary issues: firstly, the metaliterary nature of engaged writing—and even more so of post-engaged fiction; and secondly, the crisis of the Brazilian writer after the creation of a modern culture industry in Brazil.

Committed literature has frequently been considered the opposite of a self-reflective mode of writing. Rather than literariness itself, its main concern appears to be the effective conveyance of a political message through the employment of the rhetorical devices most suited to the particular audience it intends to address. These are some of the characteristics of engaged art that Adorno, for instance, made the aim of his famous critique. And yet there are distinct ways in which even engaged literature can appear to be already performing a reflection on the literary. The peculiar reflexivity of *engagé* writing is precisely what Benoît Denis, the foremost French scholar of classic engagement, has emphasized. In his opinion, engagement is

> fondamentalement [...] une interrogation sur la place et la fonction de la littérature dans nos sociétés. [...] Ce n'est pas un hasard en effet si la réflexion sur l'engagement littéraire s'est souvent développée sur le mode du 'qu'est-ce que [...] ?' (*Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* chez

> Sartre, 'Qu'est-ce que l'écriture' chez Barthes, etc.): l'engagement aboutit toujours plus ou moins à un questionnement sur l'*être* de la littérature, à une tentative de fixer ses pouvoirs et ses limites.[66]

If such reflexivity is not absent from engaged writing, it tends nevertheless to remain built into its narratives, rarely overflowing onto actual metanarrative devices which would perhaps impair its rhetorical effectiveness. Engaged literature, by its sheer existence, is proof that its underlying questioning of the literary has been at least provisionally solved by prioritizing the effective expression of a particular ideology.

This preoccupation with the literary prefigures the metanarrativity that will come to the fore precisely once engagement has become an impossibility. While metanarrative reflexivity appears to be reined in by the act of writing engagedly, this propensity of literature to reflect upon itself emerges again once the possibility of engaging is lost. In fact, if any engagé form of writing, as Benoît Denis pointed out, requires and presupposes thinking about the literary, then the end of engagement makes it even more urgent to tackle that very issue. If literature previously had a purpose, however problematic, with the end of engagement it enters into a profound uncertainty about its status. This is why post-engaged writing can only be a writing characterized by an unrelenting aesthetic reflexivity, which almost unavoidably triggers the elaboration of a host of sophisticated metanarrative devices.

And yet, as with post-modernity—a "surpassing" of modernity that is at the same time a deepening and a persisting of the modern—in post-engaged works engagement is still in some form (the form of a *Verwindung*) carried on. The longing to be relevant socially and politically persists in these writers, but without ever being able to transform itself into ideological commitment. The way in which they are able to perform such peculiar post-engagement is by putting to use the very metanarrative virtuosity triggered by the end of engagement itself. The

[66] Benoît Denis, *Littérature et Engagement: de Pascal à Sartre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 296-297.

writers that I propose to study do in fact couple their every socially critical move with its own ironic twisting, continuously halting an always renewed commitment at the very threshold of ideological thinking, thus giving voice to a quintessentially post-modern instantiation of (post)engagement.

Brazilian Engagement: The Incipient Weakness of a Modern Intervention

Having laid down these initial references, we can proceed to a more conceptualized interpretation of engaged Brazilian writing during the dictatorship, some of whose peculiarities have already been introduced. As I have already mentioned, with the coup of 1964 and for the duration of the military dictatorship, many Brazilian writers committed themselves to opposing the regime. Such opposition, when viewed from the standpoint of classic engagement theory, shows many of the features considered essential to commitment, as it carried a definite message: by advocating for the restoration of democratic rule, it was propounding a clear political teleology. Despite the strength of the regime, there seemed to be little doubt for many fiction writers in the sixties and seventies that democracy offered Brazil a clear developmental objective: "A partir de 64, gradativamente, as diversas facções esquerdistas foram se aglutinando para formar uma frente ampla que acabou por rejeitar qualquer forma de ditadura, até mesmo a do proletariado."[67] Such political teleology had all the hallmarks of metaphysical thought. In other words, it remained an expression of modernity.[68]

[67] Silviano Santiago, *Nas Malhas da Letra* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2002), 15.

[68] Marcelo Ridenti has also stressed, in different terms, the modernity of Brazilian leftist thought. See for example, Marcelo Ridenti, *Em Busca do Povo Brasileiro: Artistas da Revolução, do CPC à Era da Tv* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2000), 25: "O romantismo das esquerdas não era uma simples volta ao passado, mas também modernizador. Ele buscava no passado elementos para a construção da utopia do futuro. Não era, pois, um romantismo no sentido da perspectiva anticapitalista prisioneira do passado, geradora de uma utopia irrealizável na prática. Tratava-se de um romantismo, sim, mas *revolucionário*. ... A volta ao passado ... seria a inspiração para construir o *homem novo*. Buscavam-se no passado elementos que permitiriam uma alternativa de modernização da sociedade que não implicasse a desumanização, o consumismo, o império do fetichismo da mercadoria e do dinheiro."

However, traces of a "weakening" of this modern position were already noticeable. Advocating for democratic rule during the years of the dictatorship, and especially between 1968 and 1975, was a position that defined itself mostly *negatively* in Brazil, that is, *against* the dictatorship, so that while teleological in nature, it cannot be considered as much *post*-authoritarian as it was *anti*-authoritarian. While the writers still put forth a clear socio-political teleology, such a teleology constructed itself mostly in relation to its own negation, the reality of the dictatorship, and not as a self-founded reflection on a future political reality. Many pro-democratic stands, in other words, seem less the result of independently held political theories than of the urgency of confronting the dictatorial regime. These negatively held utopias can be considered as a sort of ideological groundwork that prepared writers for the abandonment of utopia *tout court*. Moreover, many engaged interventions were profoundly marked by a sentiment of defeat ("falta à literatura pós-64," Silvano Santiago wrote, "o otimismo social"[69]) that narrowed the distance of these literary interventions even further from fully blown post-utopian works such as those that I am proposing to study; this is especially visible in *Lavoura Arcaica*, perhaps the paradigmatic work of the defeatist trend. Furthermore, by attacking the military dictatorship, engaged Brazilian writers were fighting a regime that held Western-style development, with the notable exception of political liberalization, as one of its firmest policies.[70] In other words, between 1964 and the early eighties, in Brazil a not-yet-post-modern form of engaged modernity found itself combating another modernity:

[69] Silviano Santiago, *Nas Malhas da Letra* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2002), 24.
[70] See Riordan Roett, *Brazil: Politics in a Patrimonial Society* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Praeger, 1992), 164: "The economic reforms, led by Planning Minister Roberto Campos and Finance Minister Octávio Bulhões, worked. While the years 1964-1967 had low rates of GDP growth (an average of 3.9 percent per annum) and of industrial expansion (3.6 percent per annum), inflation began to drop—from 87 percent in 1964 to 27 percent in 1967. With the direction of economic affairs in the hand of Antonio Delfim Netto after 1967, and using the Campos-Bulhões stabilization program as a foundation, manufacturing grew impressively from 1967 to 1973, at an average rate of 12.9 percent per annum. The share of industry in GDP, which had remained constant at 26 percent between 1960

> Para descrever o poder reacionário como algo de concreto, dotado de corpo e também de espírito, teve o artista brasileiro (e o intelectual contestador de maneira geral) de se distanciar dele. Por isso, a postura política na literatura pós-64 é a do total descompromisso para com todo e qualquer esforço desenvolvimentalista para o país, para com todo programa de integração ou de planificação de ordem nacional.[71]

This confrontation with a quintessentially modern ideology[72] turned Brazilian engaged writers into *modern* opposers of *modernity*, thus partially exacerbating their propensity to "surpass" it. Finally, the censorship laws passed by the regime encouraged in some writers a process of coding that originated some of the most inventive works of this period. This process of concealment was, however, more often an aesthetic choice than an imposition, since censorship against fictional writing in Brazil always remained rather mild, given the small audience this form of art has always had in the country. A number of writers elaborated a host of sophisticated literary devices which, while concealing their political message also endowed their works with a surprising level of metanarrativity. This was a literary feature that was to come into the center of the literary landscape no more than a few years later with the end of the dictatorship: in post-1964 literature "surgem outras nuances menos explícitas na sua resistência e mais preocupadas com soluções estéticas e experimentais,"[73] such as Raduan Nassar's two novels, Carlos Sussekind's *Armadilha para Lamartine*, and Silviano Santiago's *Em Liberdade*. It can be argued,

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and 1967, jumped to 30 percent in 1972. Overall, GDO grew at an average annual rate of about 11.5 percent while the industrial sector and the manufacturing industries expanded at rates of 13.2 and 13.9 percent, respectively."

[71] Silviano Santiago, *Nas Malhas da Letra* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2002), 21.

[72] In Vattimo's opinion the spread of technology (resulting from the developmentalist policies of the military regime in Brazil) represents the most sophisticated expression of modern thinking, since its global project is to link "all entities into predictable and controllable causal relationships."(Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Synder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 40). As Vattimo's commentator Jon R. Snyder reminds us, "this is for Heidegger and Vattimo simply the logical outcome of the same process to which rational metaphysics itself belongs." (R. Snyder, "Translator's Introduction," in Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Synder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), xxiv).

[73] Tânia Pellegrini, *Despropósitos: Estudos de Ficção Brasileira Contemporânea* (São Paulo: Annablume, 2004), 42. See also Silviano Santiago, *Nas Malhas da Letra* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2002), 37: "Houve uma primeira e comuflada resposta da literatura às imposições da censura e repressão feitas pelo regime militar: a prosa de intriga fantástica e estilo onírico em que o intrincado jogo de metáforas e símbolos transmitia uma crítica radical das estruturas de poder no Brasil, tanto a estrutura ditatorial centrada em Brasília como as microestruturas que reproduziam no cotidiano o autoritarismo do modelo central."

then, that Brazilian protest writing already contained, even in the peculiar kind of literariness that it enacted, the traces of that different mode of writing that the authors I examine represent, and which was rendered possible precisely by the end of the dictatorship.

We can then provisionally conclude that engaged writing remained anchored in Brazil to the paradigm of modernity, as by holding onto the prospect of a democratic renovation it proposed nothing less than a political teleology. And yet, signs of an impending *weakening* can be found in many of its aspects. The peculiar dynamics triggered by the dictatorship itself were probably responsible for this double motion of attachment and detachment to and from modernity. On the one hand, the military regime was pushing writers to experiment with a high degree of codedness and metanarrativity, branding them at the same time with a deep sense of defeat, while on the other hand, by offering a convenient *cible* of political engagement and a negative foil for the construction of revolutionary teleology, the dictatorship was also achieving the opposite, namely preventing engaged Brazilian writers from shifting to a post-metaphysical and therefore post-modern form of art. The onset of democratic rule changed all of this: it dramatically redimensioned, especially for the middle-classes that were and are at its center, the possibility of a revolutionary project and of an alternative teleology, while also enfolding them in a feeling of deep disillusionment as a result of the poor performance of successive governments:

> Successive public opinion surveys have shown that Brazilians have been unusually disappointed by and disaffected from democratic policies over this same period of relative political and economic stability. In fact, Brazilian support for democracy is near the very bottom among Latin American nations, along with Guatemala, which has only recently emerged from a brutal civil war characterized by savage abuses of human rights. Thus, the Brazilian case offers a particularly striking contrast for students of Latin America and democratization: an intriguing mixture of positive and negative aspects, of progression and regression, of stagnation and stasis.[74]

[74] Peter R. Kingstoneand Timothy J. Power, eds., *Democratic Brazil Revisited* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), 2-3. See also p. 4: "The clear message of post-2002 Brazil was that continuity trumped change: the PT, by all accounts, has made only the smallest of dents in Brazil's elitist political culture, and "politics as usual" prevails;" and p. 6: "Brazilian democracy in 2008 features globally recognized and admired social policies, sound macroeconomic management, and increasingly stable patterns of party competition alongside ugly and large-scale corruption, lawlessness, and injustice, and deep-seated alienation of much of the voting public."

It was the "liberating" approach of democracy, then, that offered the conditions of possibility for a fully post-modern art in Brazil. However, the affinity between works belonging to these two different modes of writing, the modern and the post-modern, is proof of the entanglement that characterizes the narrative I am proposing, and that which makes it impossible to clearly define literary "stages" of "development." At the same time, it points to the continuing relevance of the Vattimian category of *Verwindung*, or ironic "getting over," for a reflection on the most recent Brazilian literature.

Yet it would be wrong to contend that modernity is waning in Brazilian culture just because many of its writers seem to be writing in a different register. Modernity today is still operative in the media and government-related outlets, where the old metaphysical/teleological way of thinking about time and history has never ceased to appear compelling. Moreover, even the writers that I examine show a complex process of "deepening" and "twisting" in relation to modernity itself, to which they maintain an ironic relation. Because of this persistence of the modern, we cannot speak of a new post-modern "stage" in Brazilian literature. Rather, post-modernity in Brazil continues to include modernity, thus eluding attempts to enclose it in a fully historicistic interpretation.

However, if mature post-modernity in contemporary Brazilian writing coexists with a public culture that appears to continue to convey, in many of its forums, a modern conception of history (instances of this would be the developmental ideology of the Lula presidencies[75] and the

[75] Lula's policies over the last eight years have been consistently aligned with neo-liberal macroeconomic theory despite mild attempts at wealth redistribution. Neo-liberalism, with its emphasis on growth, is one of the most powerful contemporary forms of modernity. See for instance Peter R. Kingstoneand Timothy J. Power, eds., *Democratic Brazil Revisited* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), 82. See also Vivian Schelling, "Introduction," in Vivian Schelling, ed., *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America* (London, New York: Verso, 2000), 13: "In the 1990s, with the growing integration of Latin America into global markets and the adoption of neo-liberal economic thinking as the dominant paradigm, this technocratic conception of modernity has become increasingly hegemonic."

technocratic bias of mediatic discourse), such a discrepancy should not be deemed a feature special to our time. On the contrary, in Brazil modernity has always been a non-exclusive ideology, its presence constantly counterpoised by competing narratives. As Ruben G. Olivien contends,

> it is possible that the peculiarity of Brazilian society lies precisely in its capacity to take on those aspects of modernity that are of interest to it and to transform them into something suited to its own needs, in which the modern interacts with the traditional, the rational with the emotional and the formal with the personal.[76]

Modernity, as much as it was crucial in defining Brazilian politics and art, was never a totalitarian narrative of the Brazilian nation, as Renato Ortiz recalls:

> Modernity, modernism, modernisation are terms which are associated with the national question. The obsession with Brazilian identity was also an obsession with modernity; its absence connected the modern to the construction of a national identity. However, it will always be ironic that it was tradition which ended up furnishing the main identifying symbols of the Brazilian nation. It was not the railways ..., technology, the iron and steel of which the futurists dreamed, or the Parisian boulevards ... which legitimised the founding traits of Brazilianness; it was samba, carnival and football.[77]

In other words, modernity in Brazil was always a fragmented reality or a notion real only in its fragments, a "kaleidoscopical" notion, as it has been described by Vivian Schelling.[78] I want to argue that Almino and Tezza can be interpreted as authors emblematic of the Brazilian relationship to modernity. In their works, by "getting over" a metaphysical approach to art, they are able to interiorize an attitude that has often been a characteristic of Brazilian culture, namely a non-exclusive relationship with the modern.

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[76] Ruben George Olivien, "Brazil: The Modern in the Tropics," in Vivian Schelling, ed., *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America* (London, New York: Verso, 2000), 70.

[77] Renato Ortiz, "Popular Culture, Modernity and Nation," in *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, ed. by Vivian Schelling (London, New York: Verso, 2000), 142.

[78] It is not incidental then that contemporary Brazil has been also read as a mosaic of competing temporalities; in Brazil, as Octávio Ianni has noted, modern teleological time has never reigned sole: "O Brazil Moderno, ao mesmo tempo que se desenvolve e diversifica, preserva e recria traços e marcas do passado recente e remoto, nesta e naquela região. O país parece um mapa simultaneamente geográfico e histórico, contemporâneo e escravista, republicano, monárquico e colonial, moderno e arqueológico. Toda a sua história está contida no seu presente, como se fosse um país que não abandona nem esquece o pretérito; memorioso" (Octávio Ianni, *A Idéia de Brasil Moderno* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1992), 63). Even the time-structure of Brazilian modernity (characterized by plurality and coexistence) is already prefiguring the time of the post-modern—and, as I shall demonstrate in my dissertation, it helps illuminate the temporal structure of some of the works I am setting out to study.

Post-dictatorial literature in Brazil is then in many ways a literature that thrives on its *weakness*, as its writers cannot assume anything as a firm metaphysical principle. It is a *weakness* that responds at once to two realities that are special to Brazil: the end of a modern approach to politics brought about by the onset of democratic rule and the peculiarity of a national culture where modernity was never an exclusive narrative. In a certain way, we could even say, then, that it is precisely in Brazil that art can be fully post-modern in the sense propounded by Vattimo: it is only in the "land of the future," where modernity has always been an obsessively reiterated and yet forever misplaced ideology, that it can be more fully overcome without being teleologically surpassed. It is in Brazil that ultra-modernity and ultra-postmodernity seem able to coexist: on the one hand, modernity here has always been something yet to come (a "project," a "dream," a "fantasy"[79]) in a sort of fundamentalist developmentalism that represents the modern spirit squared (in Brazil more than in France or England, every today is superseded by its imaginary "future"); and on the other hand, Brazil can also be considered as emblematically post-modern, thanks to the presence of competing cultural narratives—both aspects descend indeed from modernity's original "misplacedness." And yet, and this is crucial, it was only with the onset of democracy and the end of the politically engaged fight against the military regime that this fully post-modern dimension rushed to the fore of the literary scene. It did so in ways that remain highly peculiar and that are responsible for its continued entanglement with previous modes of writing.

[79] See Renato Ortiz, *A Moderna Tradição Brasileira* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 24: "Com respeito a esse Modernismo do subdesenvolvimento Marshall Berman dirá que ele 'é forçado de se construir sobre fantasias e sonhos de modernidade.' Quero reter da citação a idéia de 'sonho' e de 'fantasia,' e propor que ela não quer necessáriamente dizer fachada, o que nos remeteria de volta à discussão sobre a cultura ornamental, mas que pode ser lida como aspiração, desejo de modernização." See also p. 35: "Ao Brasil real, contemporâneo, os modernistas contrapõem uma aspiração, uma 'fantasia' que aponta para a modernização da sociedade como um todo. ... O Modernismo é uma idéia fora do lugar que se expressa como projeto." And p. 209: "Eu diria que o Modernismo como projeto encerrava um elemento de utopia uma vez que ele era incongruente com a sociedade brasileira que ainda buscava seus caminhos.

Furthermore, the metanarrativity of the works that I am proposing to study should be understood not just in relation to the "surpassing" of engaged literature, but also with respect to a particular and specific event that seems to have laid down the conditions of possibility for an even deeper enhancement of such metanarrative inclination. The crisis of writing brought forth by the end of engagement was in fact coupled in Brazil with another deep crisis, that of the role of the writer, and this both in social and economic terms. This was itself the result of the creation, during the years of the military dictatorship, of a full-blown culture industry which was inexistent in Brazil until at least the 1960s. The military regime was not only responsible for imposing censorship on Brazilian public media, but for promoting the creation of a capitalistic culture industry, so as to be able to effectively convey its propagandistic discourse to the whole body of the nation. Such policies had dramatic repercussions in the modes of production of literature:

> A chamada 'modernização conservadora,' empreendida pelo regime militar, alterou profundamente as condições materias de existência da literatura, na medida em que, pela primeira vez na sua história mais recente, ela se confrontou com formas *efetivamente* industriais de produção e consumo, que já existian antes, é verdade, mas de forma incipiente, nem de longe com o mesmo poder e alcance.[80]

Given the restructuring of the cultural field by the cultural policies of the dictatorship, the authors writing on the cusp of democratic change in Brazil found themselves not only in urgent need of rethinking their writing in the wake of a disappearing engagement, but also in need of interrogating their own re-configured role within a field of discourse that seems strongly characterized by processes of standardization and commodification, as "the large communications groups developed during the military period, which controlled wide networks of different media, were able—due to their capacity to standardise tastes and set consumer habits—

[80] Tânia Pellegrini, *Despropósitos: Estudos de Ficção Brasileira Contemporânea* (São Paulo: Annablume, 2004), 20.

to impose theirs standards of production and commercialisation."[81] Today many middle-class Brazilian writers not only lack an enemy against which to pitch a committed message—as João Gilberto Noll memorably reminded us in *Hotel Atlântico*—but they have also to intervene into a field of discourse within which fictional writing has lost a considerable portion of the cultural capital it traditionally enjoyed in Brazil. This additional crisis in their writing offers another crucial reference point in the study of the profound metanarratival bent of the texts I explore in what will follow. The metaliterariness of these works is in fact not only a way of achieving a post-engaged mode of writing, but also a reflection on the role of the writer in contemporary Brazil (two issues that are indeed more closely entwined than they might appear at first). The specific ways in which this occurs will be the subject of the coming pages.

The Authors

I selected the three authors I have studied—João Almino, Cristovão Tezza, and Barbara Adair—among writers that while already established as practicing fictionists (that is, with a sizeable history of publications behind them) have nevertheless become only very recently the object of critical inquiry. This gap between the relatively substantial nature of their literary contributions, extremely large in the case of Tezza, less so in the case of Adair, and the scantiness of critical interpretation makes them a potentially fruitful terrain for reconsiderations of their craft, as well as of its significance within the larger respective literary fields. A degree of contingency, however, is certainly present in the choice, given that due to the requirements of the dissertation form a larger selection had to be postponed until a larger study can be undertaken.

[81] Nicolau Sevcenko, "Peregrinations, Visions and the City: From Canudos to Brasília, the Backlands become the City and the City becomes the Backlands," in Vivian Schelling, ed., *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America* (London, New York: Verso, 2000), 103-104. See also Renato Ortiz, "Populare Culture, Modernity and Nation," in Vivian Schelling, ed. *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*. (London, New York: Verso, 2000), 134-136.

Thus, while these three authors cannot be made to represent the diversified environment of the two countries to which they belong, they certainly point toward the substantial presence of a post-engaged attitude within each of the two national literary fields, and particularly among university-trained middle-class authors as they are, not constrained by their immediate circumstances into the practice of more overt kinds of protest writing.

In the first chapter of my dissertation, I will explore João Almino's recent fiction, with particular emphasis on his 2008 novel *O Livro das Emoções*, the fourth book of a larger series that so far comprises five novels, all of them set in the city of Brasilia. Almino's persistent focus on Brasilia, the ultimate embodiment of Brazil's hankering for modernity, is of course highly significant; no less so the fact that in this particular book, this city of the future is indeed seen *in* the future (the fictional year 2022), a time characterized by the failure of the dream Brasilia's very existence was supposed to bring to fruition.[82] The complex narrative constructed by Almino in *O Livro das Emoções* can be illuminated precisely by bringing it into contact with the concepts I have explored in the previous pages. I believe that Almino's fourth novel is a book about the longing to intervene as artists in society, a desire that is nevertheless steeped in the awareness of the impossibility of its fulfillment; indeed, the dystopian Brazil imagined by Almino in Brasilia's future is not only characterized by the persistence of the failings of Brazilian modernity but is also a place where art has become utterly irrelevant.

[82] There is ample literature in Brazil, on the issue of the failing(s) of modernity, intended either as the impossibility of reaching a fully blown Western style modernity or as the attainment of modernity's own failings, without reaping its benefits. See for example Cristovam Buarque, *A Revolução na Esquerda e a Invenção do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992), 24: "Talvez nenhum outro país ... mergulhou tão profundamente e fracassou tão rotundamente na sua experiência de modernidade. Dos poucos que fracassaram tanto, nenhum outro dispõe de tantos recursos; além de uma infra-estrutura econômica, científica e tecnológica já implantada, ainda que em processo de sucateamento." See also p. 26: "O que está em jogo ... é ... como redefinir o sentido da modernidade ... no sentido de crescente aproximação com o futuro que o país deseja, e não como repetição, a qualquer custo, de um futuro já envelhecido nos países-com-maioria-rica e impossível nos países-com-maioria-pobre, especialmente aqueles com população grande, como o Brasil."

Pedro Meira Monteiro wrote that Almino's novelistic oeuvre consistently reflects on various aspects of instantaneity and on the fugitiveness of time.[83] Such peculiar focus on the momentary, which is certainly a striking feature of Almino's works, finds a defining counterpoint in the author's concurrent interest in the *longue durée*. Such apparently contradictory emphasis gives voice, in my opinion, to the Vattimian post-modernity of Almino's works. In *O Livro das Emoções*, while Almino enacts a number of figures of the instant, particularly by basing his story upon the description of instantaneous snapshots, these figures find themselves included in a dense web of intertextual references which link the novel cross-chronologically to some of the foundational texts of Brazilian literature and to many Western European classics, thus hinting at a longer temporal dimension that always remains crucial to the construction of this narration. These two apparently contrasting attitudes toward time introduce a central aspect of our discussion, since they can be read as two complementary ways of rejecting one of the key tenets of the temporality of modernity, namely the value of the new. As Vattimo wrote:

> For the arts, the value of the new, once it has been radically unveiled, loses all possibility of foundation or value. The crisis of the future which permeates all late-modern culture and social life finds in the experience of art a privileged locus of expression. Such a crisis, obviously, implies a radical change in our way of experiencing history and time, as is somewhat obscurely anticipated by Nietzsche in his 'doctrine' of the eternal return of the Same.[84]

In other words, in *O Livro das Emoções,* Almino is constructing a literary configuration that presents itself from the very beginning, both in the choice of setting and in its peculiar temporality, as engaging both Brazilian modernity and the question of its "overcoming."

While pointing toward the post-metaphysical dimension of the novel, this concern with post-modern time is intertwined in the book with a preoccupation for the status of the literary and

[83] See Pedro Meira Monteiro, "Todo Instante: A Ficção de João Almino," in *Luso-Brazilian Review* 47, No. 1, (2010): 61-70.
[84] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Synder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 106-107.

both these aspects, as we saw, are closely bound to the issue of literary engagement. Indeed, all of Almino's novels, and this one arguably to an even greater degree, reflect on the writing of literature by combining very emphatically *literary* ways of writing with alternate forms of expression such as diary-writing, blog-writing, photography, and computer programming. They thus achieve a hybridization of the literary: every one of Almino's fictions exists only as the result of a process of compounding discourse. Yet such hybridization does not intend to undermine the status of literature. While Almino appears to register the increasing prominence of non-literary forms of writing in wider society, he also aims to reclaim a prime space for literature. He does so in a move that remains nevertheless aware of its own ultimate ineffectiveness—it is indeed a move imbued with longing. In *O Livro das Emoções,* such earnest yet consciously hopeless movement is achieved as Cadu's descriptions of his pictures become the vehicles of a veritable obsession with cultured style at precisely the same time as they ostensibly include the alterity of the photographic medium in the fiction. Cadu's photographs become visible both to himself and to the reader only through highly literary renderings so that, almost paradoxically, by structuring the work upon a "photographic diary" (a medium fully outside of the literary), Almino achieves the opposite end of fashioning a story whose every chapter could actually be read as nothing less than a *poème en prose* in poetical relationship with all the other sections. The result is that the whole novel, as a narrative composed of highly autonomous and stylistically compact chapters, approximates in prose nothing less than the *canzoniere* form. In fact, I don't think it casual that Almino chose the name "Laura" for one of the work's main female characters, precisely the one who, by helping Cadu sort through photographs he can't see, enables him to write.

This preoccupation with the literary is so central in the narrative of the *Livro* that it informs it in another crucial way: while photography is at times employed as the foil against which literary discourse can define itself, at other times and specifically when Cadu's openly reflects upon it, photography seems to become nothing short of a *metaphor* for the literary. I believe that Cadu's theoretical reflections on the art of photography, mostly conveyed in the diary about his past life, should not be read as merely meant in regard to this art, as they appear to be endowed with two ulterior dimensions: they seem to refer *metonymically* to art in general and *metaphorically* to literature in particular. This latter aspect is, I think, functionally foremost among the three, and recognizing it is instrumental in making sense of a crucial dimension of the book, namely its *un-faith* in literature, its willingness to believe in something (the literary) which has evidently lost all social relevance and therefore all power to engage with the social in a meaningful (political) way. It is also evidence of the complexity of a work that makes use of a kind of non-literary discourse (photography) both *against* and *in the place of* the literary itself.

The formulation of a post-modern temporality comes together with the emphasis on the literary so as to shape Cadu's peculiar brand of post-engagement. Despite his apparently loose morals, Cadu tries repeatedly to make his art the conveyor of political messages. While the effectiveness of these messages is already undermined by the social irrelevance of their medium, they are also characterized by a very peculiar attitude to politics, one which can be considered entirely post-metaphysical (and therefore post-modern). When Cadu has to face situations involving ethical questions, he chooses his line of action without ever resorting to ethico-political truths (or ideologies); he appears instead to practice nothing less than a "stylistics of politics"—which represents the book's particular take on post-engagement. Cadu's is a sort of non-principled protest: "Não consigo ver a política como o partido azul contra o vermelho—respondi,

reproduzindo uma opinião de Guga.—O que me interessa é certa maneira de viver."[85] It is a revolt that is disillusioned yet stubborn, unprincipled yet engaged: "Ao contrário de Aída, eu não tinha o otimismo da revolta. Além disso, não precisava provar uma bondade que me era alheia."[86] In *O Livro das Emoções,* Cadu's own political positions, and not just his art, appear to belong to the domain of the aesthetic which, despite its inherent weakness, seems able to subsume other domains within itself, including the political. It does so in a way analogous to the one in which the literary is related in this novel to other forms of discourse.

Cristovão Tezza, the novelist whose works I interpret in the second chapter, owes his fame to his recent novel *O Filho Eterno* (2007). This book won almost every major literary prize in Brazil and was the first among those Tezza penned that was subsequently translated. Thanks to *O Filho Eterno,* his writing has become widely known as a successful instance of that "retorno do autor" or, more precisely, of his/her biographical self, which recent critical work has identified as a wider trend in Brazilian contemporary literature.[87] Tezza had nonetheless written for decades as a talented fictionist whose novels were consistently characterized by attempting to construct multiple subjectivities (often both male and female), deliberately portrayed as un-subsumable into his own, even when clearly inspired by his life. Thus, while autobiographism or, somewhat more precisely, "autofiction," was a reason for the commercial success of *O Filho Eterno*, I don't believe this feature *per se* should give it pride of place within Tezza's rich oeuvre; in fact, it might be ground to argue for its marginality within it, since no other of Tezza's novels approximates the heights of autobiographic writing obtained in that book. It is only, I believe, once we trace how the legacy of anti-dictatorial engagement pervades it that we will

[85] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 139.
[86] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 128.
[87] For a brief discussion of Tezza's success, see Karl Erik Schøllhammer, *Ficção Brasileira Contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2009), 106.

discover not only how this book can be linked to the previous production of the author, but also the reasons behind the choice of finally writing an "autobiographical" novel. In this chapter I will then first focus on two of Tezza's earlier fictions, *Trapo* (written in 1982) and *A Suavidade do Vento* (1991), which are, despite their remarkable sophistication, little known either in Brazil or outside it to this day and at the end of the chapter, I will proceed to read them in conjunction with the more recent *O Filho Eterno*, which will then be appreciated as a reflection on the author's multi-decade aspiration to political resistance.

If *Trapo* was written during the last years of the military dictatorship, it was only published well after the first democratic elections. This is not coincidental, since this novel stages a reflection on the viability of anti-dictatorial writing in Brazil (the story is set in the seventies). The book takes its title from one of its two main characters, Trapo, a nickname meaning "rag" in Portuguese, a young man whose personal and professional undertakings are characterized by an unsustainable dichotomy. On the one hand, he works as an advertiser, a profession integral to the economy of modernizing Brazil and therefore to one of the main political projects of the military dictatorship—the country's accelerated development. Yet after work hours he acts as an extremely different person, a committed writer whose works are deeply imbued by a virulent political belief in anarchism, as well as by his opposition to the dictatorship and to any other form of patriarchy and order. As we previously saw, this is an instance of "weakened" engagement, whose political teleology is defined in an exclusively negative way. While embodying this other role, Trapo avowedly identifies art and life: the committed anarchism characterizing his writings motivates all of his extra-professional actions. Such tension between an extreme form of literary engagement on the one hand and professional conservatism on the other will prove, of course, ultimately unsustainable. It first leads Trapo to

erratically break the law and eventually to commit suicide. Once his writings are salvaged by the owner of the *pension* at which he was staying, they come into the hands of Professor Manuel, the second main character of the story, whom the *pension* owner believes can help her in publishing Trapo's works to her own financial advantage.

While the novel is ostensibly constructed upon the opposition between the two characters of Trapo and Manuel, an opposition emphasized by the author himself in an interview,[88] I will argue that the relationship that links the two is only superficially oppositional. At first, Professor Manuel seems Trapo's obvious polar opposite: as a retired grammar lecturer, he appears an utterly conservative figure. Yet not unlike Trapo, Manuel has also been entertaining the ambition of becoming a writer (although without ever actually trying). Despite the conservativism of his professional role, he leads a life which, due to its virtually complete seclusion and immobility, can be considered a challenge to the teleological time of modernity and therefore rebellious in its own right. Once again, then, a dichotomy is at play within this second figure: while Manuel has played a role within developing Brazil, since through his profession he has belonged to the academic bureaucracy, and therefore to the state, he also challenges that same order by his utterly unproductive lifestyle. In addition, the result of Manuel's placid-conservatism-cum-placid-resistance is not so dissimilar to Trapo's own death: it is a death-in-life or a life-as-death, making Manuel feel irrelevant, meaningless, and disposable.

The core of the book resides, in my opinion, in Manuel's ability to resolve the dichotomy that riddles his life. It is the practice of writing that ultimately rescues Manuel from his existential *impasse*, a practice that remains quite distinct, despite many similarities, from that performed by Trapo himself and which in fact contributed to his death. Manuel's writing

[88] See Marco Vasques, *Diálogos com a Literatura Brasileira* (Florianópolis: Ed. Da UFSC; Porto Alegre: Ed. Movimento, 2004), vol. I, 71.

activity, which by the end of the novel will have produced the book we just finished reading, is primarily characterized by the fact that it "overcomes" political engagement. Trapo's life and death are proof of the fact that political resistance and engaged writing, as Brazilian society is moving toward democracy,[89] are ceasing to perform a function integral to society and are fuelling instead a drive to self-destruction. After his encounter with Trapo's works, Manuel is brought to realizing that literature can only exist as a reflection on its own *esvaziamento* or "emptying out." Only by accepting its fictionality, the provisionality of its claims and its contingent nature—all aspects discussed by Manuel in the novel—can literature succeed both as an art form (as in Manuel's finished book as opposed to Trapo's inchoate scribbles) and as a life-practice (as in Manuel's new writerly life as opposed to Trapo's death). Yet it is crucial to realize that this acceptance does not utterly deprive literature of its former commitment, which can be retained in some form. It is not at all coincidental that Manuel decides to include a selection of Trapo's committed writing in his own book. In other words, Manuel's encounter with Trapo's works and story triggers in the elderly professor the creation of a literature that still includes Trapo's own engaged anarchism, but only as a longing. It is a new kind of writing characterized by discursive hybridity to be compared with João Almino's and Barbara Adair's involvement with forms of non-literary discourse, and which is also prominently metanarrattival, to an even greater degree than engaged literature. If *Trapo* is ostensibly a book on the death of Trapo, it is even more a book on the "death" of engaged literature and on its "overcoming," a move that nevertheless still retains engagement in a very specific form: that of the nostalgic realization of its impossibility. The literature of post-dictatorial Brazil can only start as a reflection on this absence.

[89] In my dissertation this historical dimension will be analyzed in far more depth, since it is the result of the crossing of narrative time (set in the Seventies) and of authorial time (the novel was written in 1982).

In *A Suavidade do Vento*, a novel written by Tezza approximately ten years after *Trapo*, the "overcoming" of engagement is still at issue, seen from a different perspective: that of the writer's waning social role. The novel's main character is Mattoso,[90] another Portuguese language lecturer clearly reminding the reader of professor Manuel. Unlike Trapo, however, Mattoso has already accepted the depoliticization of literature, and his writing appears utterly unconcerned with any societal question. Instead, he employs his literary practice to reach something approximating a state of spiritual emptiness, emphasized both by recurring quotes from Clarice Lispector, and by fictional citations from "a Chinese sage," which perform an ironical counterpoint to the former ones. Yet even if Mattoso's writing, unlike Trapo's, remains at the antipodes of political engagement, it still manages to nearly destroy him. The very publication of his first and only novel causes Mattoso's immediate ostracization from the small provincial community in whose midst he was living (in rural Paraná). Faced with the threat of becoming marginal, he has to make a choice, and recognizing that social exchange can only be predicated on the severance of his relationship with the literary, he eventually chooses to renounce his writerly ambitions. It is then from the particular perspective of the writer's social role that *A Suavidade do Vento* discusses the problem of literary engagement. In this narrative, engaged literature appears not just impossible but a contradiction in terms, since literature is precisely that which hinders social engagement, triggering instead (forced) social *dis*engagement. Yet once more the novel is not exactly what it seems. While what I've recalled so far descends from the novel's plot, *A Suavidade do Vento* is able simultaneously to remove itself, as it were, from its own narration. It does so by prominently announcing the contingency of its storyline through a number of metafictional inserts, which are especially prominent at the beginning and

[90] The name of the protagonist of *A Suavidade do Vento*, is in fact spelled in three different ways in the novel; this is an important feature of the text that I will discuss in my dissertation in relation to the novel's metanarrativity.

in the coda. It is not coincidental, then, that if *A Suavidade do Vento* stages the marginalization of the writer and his inability to encounter the social, it can also be read (against the grain already suggested by the text itself) as a piece of remarkable social critique, particularly in the way it portrays the society of developing Paraná. *A Suavidade do Vento* performs, in fact, a scathing assessment of this specific environment and Brazil's economic development, but one that simultaneously undermines its own engagedness by staging the impossibility of writing any literature that is socially relevant. These two aspects are linked precisely through the choice of setting: a non-specified booming town of Paraná. It is here that Mattoso can undergo the implications of the modernization forced upon Brazil by the military dictatorship, which has entailed, together with the birth of a culture industry, the crisis of the writer's social role in Brazil. However, while in this modernizing land the link between sociality and literature has been severed, thanks to the twists of its complex metanarrative, *A Suavidade do Vento* (not unlike *Trapo*) is able to make space for one persistent longing: precisely the longing for writing engagedly.

It is only once these two little known novels are recovered that we can adequately appreciate Tezza's most successful work *O Filho Eterno*. After being put in dialogue with *Trapo* and *A Suavidade do Vento*, Tezza's more recent novel reveals a dimension that reaches far beyond the main aspect of the storyline, which is ostensibly concerned with the narrative of a father's gradual acceptance of his down-syndrome child. In fact, *O Filho Eterno* intertwines that storyline with the narrative of a writer in the making; it is this apparently secondary theme which, in view of previous works such as *Trapo* and *A Suavidade do Vento,* will be revealed as being the central one of Cristovão Tezza's multi-decade oeuvre, a theme which recurs so often in it so as to make him best appreciated as an author writing primarily on the problem of writing.

Barbara Adair's fiction *End* (2007), which I will read in the final chapter of the thesis, addresses some of the outstanding issues raised by one of the most prominent South African critics of engagement, Njabulo Ndebele. I will argue that in *End* Adair responds to some of Ndebele's calls for a not-merely-engaged fiction in a very peculiar way. Adair's book stages some of the very concepts on which Ndebele constructed his aesthetics while at the same time bringing them to their very limit. In this way Adair is able to strip Ndebele's calls (themselves based on an assessment of Black engaged writing) of their underlying modernity, turning them into catalysts of a postmodern engagement, which thrives ultimately on a *longing* to engage. This longing, while unable to move beyond a defense of openness and contingency, can in the process open up new venues of post-political engagement, particularly in relation to the body. Adair's novel achieves such postmodern commitment by focusing on at least three specific issues: the autonomy of the text, the question of the spectacular, and the issue of characterization.

One of the major issues tackled by Ndebele in his attempt to imagine a literature unfettered by the "rhetoric of urgency" concerns the autonomy of the work of art. Engaged literature, Ndebele argues, gives precedence to its subject matter ("the specificity of setting, the familiarity of character, recognisable events"[91]) rather than to its "internal coherence." Such coherence is in Ndebele's view "a decisive principle for autonomy," and a prerequisite for literary depth.[92] Both aesthetic coherence and autonomy receive special attention in *End* in a characteristically ironic and self-undermining way. Through the introduction of a character who

[91] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 14.

[92] "Clearly then, according to this attitude [the attitude of commitment], artistic merit or relevance is determined less by a work's internal coherence ... than by the work's displaying a high level of explicit political pre-occupation which may not necessarily be critically aware of the demands of the artistic medium chosen. ... If the average South African writer has chosen this kind of preoccupation, what effect has it had on his or her writing? One major effect is that the writing's probing into the South African experience has been largely superficial." Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 14.

supposedly impersonates the author/narrator (while at the same time disclaiming such impersonation precisely by being *just* a character) Adair's text probes the nature of aesthetic coherence by staging an interrogation of the reasons behind its artistic choices. At many points in the narrative the narrator appears unconvinced, hesitant, and uncertain. His choices to direct the storyline in any given way are represented as unpremeditated and utterly contingent. As a result, artistic cohesiveness itself emerges as both a dominant concern (after all, the narrator often agonizes over his inexplicable choices) and ultimately unattainable. Yet while cohesiveness is called into question, autonomy is reinforced, as the narrator's metanarrative reflections on his own story bring about the story's detachment from the reality it represents and the ensuing achievement of a higher degree of self-sufficiency. Thus Adair seems on the one hand to give a nod to Ndebele's call by putting emphasis precisely on the domain of aesthetics *per se*, while at the same time twisting it into a critique of that same aspect. She has been able to fashion a work that is indeed autonomous to a remarkable degree, inasmuch as dominated by its own structural concerns, but that simultaneously *stages* its own autonomy in such way as to undermine one of its core characteristics, namely cohesiveness, and make it appear as thoroughly gratuitous. This self-undermining move, I will argue, is a way to raise Ndebele's approach from a dimension that in Vattimian terms was still modern, inasmuch as Ndebele's not-merely-engaged art still presupposed a teleological politics, to a fully postmodern dimension, where no positive ideology appears and where art is therefore free to perform its own irrelevance.

These remarks bring us to the discussion of another major issue, both in Ndebele's aesthetics and in Adair's novel, namely the problem of staging the spectacular. Ndebele believed that apartheid art and fiction in particular was plagued by a "numbing sensationalism"[93] that

[93] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 16.

mirrors the excessive spectacularity of South African society: "everything in South Africa has been mind-boggingly spectacular. [...] It could be said [...] that the most outstanding feature of South African oppression is its brazen, exhibitionist openness."[94] Adair's work responds precisely to this concern, although in a form that once again is double-pronged. On the one hand, she seems to be heeding Ndebele's call by choosing to portray less than spectacular events, while on the other hand, she also undermines such a response by employing a narrative form which emphasizes nothing less than the spectacle. So what happens in *End*? Adair has decided to set her story during the confused years of the interregnum, taking her characters right to the heart of Mozambique's civil war. Shouldn't we then await graphicness as a matter of course? She is in fact dealing with a political reality that seems to naturally call for an outright committed approach; yet she decides to focus on the private lives of the three characters of her story, whose psycho-dramatic love triangle remains well within the domain of the ordinary. At the same time, however, she consistently constructs her narration by employing a number of inter-textual and inter-medial references to the 1942 American film *Casablanca*, a film that possesses a remarkable "spectacularity" that is revealed as a function of its "clichéd" nature. The result is a work of fiction that ostensibly gives up on a fundamental dimension of engagement (the inclusion of the spectacle), but only to include it again in a twisted form (the form of a longing). It thus gives voice to a move beyond engagement that nevertheless still retains it in some form (the form of post-modern *Verwindung*).

Finally, the love triangle staged by Adair in *End* can be read from the perspective of characterization. Once again, Adair seems to be responding to another of Ndebele's pleas by constructing characters who are quite unlike apartheid heroes. They do not "posture" or engage

[94] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 31-32.

in "sloganeering," which are two of the characteristics of apartheid social life according to the aforementioned critic:

> Ultimately, South African culture, in the hands of whites, the dominant force, is incapable of nurturing a civilisation based on the perfection of the individual in order to permit maximum social creativity. Consequently, we have a society of posturing and sloganeering; one that frowns upon subtlety of thought and feeling, and never permits the sobering power of contemplation, of close analysis, and the mature acceptance of failure, weakness and limitation. It is totally heroic.[95]

Such a "heroic" attitude is precisely what Adair appears at first to be writing against. The love triangle she constructs is something relatively common and unremarkable, certainly less so than apartheid politics or the civil war in Mozambique, which both function as the spectacular setting of an otherwise *ordinary* story. However, at the same time, the way the ordinary is performed in Adair brings with it something that Ndebele would have rather avoided. In Adair's story, metanarrativity compromises precisely the subjective dimension that Ndebele wanted writers to develop through an attention to the ordinary.[96] Adair stages subjectivities that are in the process of being formed—or rather undermined—by the arbitrariness of their narrator/author/spectator. Such subjectivities, contrary to Ndebele's wishes, cannot offer the reader a basis on which to develop her/his own "subjective capacity."[97] As a result, neither can they offer any basis to the political commitment that Ndebele believed could be achieved, and to a higher degree, even by the literature of the ordinary: "the new literature can contribute to the development of this subjective capacity of the people to be committed, but only on the basis of as complete a

[95] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 42.
[96] See Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 52.
[97] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 52.

knowledge of themselves and the objective situation as possible. The growth of consciousness is a necessary ingredient of this subjective capacity."[98]

[98] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 52.

CHAPTER I

A STYLISTICS OF POLITICS: ON METAFICTION AND POST-IDEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT IN JOÃO ALMINO'S *O LIVRO DAS EMOÇÕES*

> Em 1985, o Brasil tinha regressado a um governo civil, já não havia presos políticos, e a democracia parecia uma opção viável para o país. A literatura tinha que mudar.
> João Almino

Very few of the critics who commented on João Almino's novelistic oeuvre failed to detect the complexity of the narrative voices at play in his fictions or overlooked the fragmentary, metaliterary character of his novels. Indeed, as Pedro Meira Monteiro wrote, "talvez o mais forte traço d*a* literatura [de João Almino] seja o exercício metanarrativo, as experimentações e a exposição das vozes de onde se crê emanar a história contada."[1] Despite these affinities with what can be labeled, at least provisionally, the *post*-modern novel, the art of João Almino is also characterized by other apparently contradictory elements. His novels reveal a strong emphasis on character development first remarked upon by João Luiz Lafetá,[2] as well as a sustained interest in various forms of modernity proper, whether politically engaged or urbanistic, as in the paradigmatically modern city of Brasilia, often portrayed in his works. In this chapter I will attempt to account for this compositional diversity. Almino's recent fiction (particularly his 2008 novel *O Livro das Emoções*[3]) is constructed around two main axes that are distinct from one another yet work together: a reflection upon and a recuperation of a politically

[1] Pedro Meira Monteiro, "Todo Instante: A Ficção de João Almino," in *Luso-Brazilian Review* 47, No. 1, (2010): 63.
[2] João Luiz Lafetá, "Entre a Fotografia e o Romance," Ilustrada, *Folha de S. Paulo*, October 25, 1987.
[3] This novel, originally published in Rio de Janeiro by Record, is now also available in an English transation: João Almino, *The Book of Emotions*, trans. Elizabeth Jackson (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011).

engaged dimension of art (ostensibly an expression of modernity in politics) and the endeavor to formulate a post-modern temporality. Almino is able to relate these two axes to one another through a sustained reflection on literary art. The concern for the literary dominates both his recuperation of engagement as well as his explorations of post-modern time, with the result that the *Livro das Emoções* elaborates an extremely peculiar and specific post-engaged stance based on a reassessment of the nature and role of fiction.

Almino's interest in political engagement, which dominated the final years of his humanistic education, found subsequently an important place in his historiographical and philosophical writings, and eventually provided a central theme for some of his most mature fictions. Engagement figures prominently not just in the thematic fabric of his third novel *As Cinco Estações do Amor* but also, and even more significantly, in the later and, in my opinion, more sophisticated work *O Livro das Emoções*. It is in this latter book that Almino's reflections on commitment in art are most profoundly developed in conjunction with a reflection on the changing status of literature in contemporary Brazil. If *O Livro das Emoções* is, as other critics have remarked in passing,[4] an impassioned defense of literature, it is one that is marked by a disillusion and melancholia stemming from an awareness of the increasing marginalization of the literary word. It is Almino's response to the decrease in cultural capital that affects writers of literature in Brazil, and in particular the sort of learned élite novelist he himself embodies. João Almino's fourth novel is a book about the desire to intervene as an artist in society, a longing that is steeped in the awareness of the impossibility of its fulfillment.

[4] João Cezar de Castro Rocha, "Uma Declaração de Princípios: João Almino Termina o 'Quarteto de Brasília' e Elege a Palavra Narrada como a Grande Lição," Idéias & Livros, *Jornal do Brasil*, October 4, 2008.

João Almino's Apprenticeship of Engagement

To make full sense of Almino's most recent "engagement with engagement," it is useful to go back a few decades and sketch a crucial section of his biography. The roots of this recurring preoccupation with political commitment can be traced to a circumscribed period of the author's education. In the second half of the 1970s, when he was in his twenties, João Almino left Brazil for France, going to Paris to conduct research at the Sorbonne for a doctorate in political science. In Brazil, these were the years of the Geisel government, which saw an encouraging, if slow, process of political opening which could be called the uncertain Brazilian "interregnum," to use the expression employed by Gordimer to characterize the confused transition to democracy in recent South Africa history. In those very years, Almino was studying with some of the most prominent leftist intellectuals then at work in Western Europe.

Although avowedly reluctant to write about his personal life (all of his novels are consistently, at times almost stubbornly, anti-autobiographical) Almino nevertheless commented upon his crucial time in Paris in a short autobiographical text recently published by the widely-circulating Portuguese literary magazine *Jornal das Letras*:

> Acompanhei e senti bem dentro de mim a chamada crise do marxismo, na segunda metade dos anos 70. Fiz meu doutorado em Paris numa época ainda marcada pelo marxismo e também pelo espírito de 68 e a cultura hippie, dos quais não fugi. Sartre ainda era vivo, frequentei as aulas de Foucault no Collège de France e seu seminário ristrito, aulas esparsas de Barthes e de Bourdieu, mas o que mais me atraiu foi o grupo da antiga revista *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Com Lefort, meu diretor de tese, aprendi não apenas a ler criticamente Maquiavel e Marx, mas também a respeitar algumas ideias liberais e conservadoras, de Tocqueville, Burke ou Aron, e descobri que os direitos humanos, os direitos sindicais, a liberdade de organização e de expressão não eram direitos burgueses: eram fundamentais para existência da sociedade. Daí surgiu *Os Democratas Autoritários*, que creio ter ajudado a lançar o debate sobre uma Assembleia Constituinte.[5]

There are at least three points that should be underlined in this passage: Almino's awareness of a crisis in Marxist thought, his familiarity with some of the most prominent French public intellectuals, and his special proximity to the "Socialism or Barbarism" group, in particular to its

[5] João Almino, "Vida Cigana," *Jornal de Letras*, January 12, 2011, 12.

leader Claude Lefort, who was also his doctoral advisor. These simple *points de repère* situate the beginnings of Almino's peculiar sense of engagement. The philosopher Claude Lefort develops a number of issues that resonate in Almino's works, and thus are worth recalling. These include the study of democracy, which will become a central theme in most of Almino's early essayistic production, a critical view of Marxism and openness toward more liberal positions, also evident in Almino's earliest works, and a critical view of the engaged intellectual (about which Lefort sparred with Sartre in a famous polemical exchange).

While Claude Lefort is probably best known today as a staunch critic of the bureaucratization of working-class politics,[6] his evaluation of the function of intellectuals is most relevant for Almino. In his famous response to Sartre's 1952 essay "The Communist and Peace," Lefort famously denied intellectuals the role of "mouthpieces of History."[7] In his article on "La Méthode des Intellectuels Progressistes," he laments the attitude of French leftist intellectuals: the French Left "en rupture avec l'ordre bourgeois établi, n'affiche des opinions communistes que pour mieux se raccrocher à un autre ordre, où elle réintroduit en les plaçant sous un signe positif tous les caractères qu'elle dénonçait comme négatifs dans son propre milieu."[8] As Bernard Flynn has pointed out, Lefort is concerned here with the question of the legitimacy of the act of speaking for someone else:

> Within a democracy the source of legitimate power is 'the people,' but who is to speak in the name of the people? According to Lefort, political life in a modern democracy is a continual debate on just this question. No one can claim to be authorized *a priori* to speak in the people's

[6] *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, ed. by Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 578.
[7] *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, ed. by Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 578. See in particular "La Méthode des Intellectuels Progressistes," in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, no. 23, Jan.-Feb. 1958, reprinted in Claude Lefort, *Élements d'une Critique de la Bureaucratie* (Genève : Librairie Droz, 1971), 260-284.
[8] Claude Lefort, *Élements d'une Critique de la Bureaucratie* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1971), 261.

> name; each person's claim must be discursively validated and every claim is always subjected to challenge.[9]

Almino's intellectual education took place in an environment characterized not by a generic sort of political engagement, but through this Lefortian, rather than Sartrian, connection by a specific critique of the nature and role of engagement itself. Indeed, the presence of Lefort's questions regarding the legitimacy of the act of "speaking for" can be sensed in the background of some of Almino's own early writings.

The first result of the academic work conducted by Almino in Paris was his book *Os Democratas Autoritários*, in which he investigates the limits of the promising and yet ultimately disappointing democratic opening of 1946 in Brazil, when a new constitution, purportedly liberal and yet still partly authoritarian, was drawn up and approved. In reviewing the documents that record this process of constitution drafting, Almino is particularly concerned to critique the superficial nature of the democratic shift that took place in Brazil. The main part of this book deals with the discussions of Brazil's 1946 constituent assembly, while also briefly describing some of the events that lead up to it:

> procuro mostrar as insuficiências de nosso melhor projeto liberal-democrático, os limites a que chega, e também o processo pelo qual, a partir de uma liberdade adquirida, se pode restabelecer uma nova ordem autoritária. Trata-se de um trabalho de conceitualização da democracia ao longo de uma crítica às várias expressões (a comunista, a liberal, a corporativista, etc.) de uma mesma ideologia autoritária.[10]

Os Democratas Autoritários forms a diptych together with a much shorter contribution published five years later, *Era uma Vez uma Constituinte*, in which Almino selects some of the documents employed in his previous academic study to show how past historical dynamics can illuminate the democratic transition taking place at the time in Brazil. In so doing, Almino upholds the

[9] Bernard Flynn, *The Philosophy of Claude Lefort: Interpreting the Political* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005), XXV.
[10] João Almino, *A Idade do Presente: Tempo, Autonomia e Representação na Política* (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1985), 15.

achievements of a liberal democratic position in Brazil, on the one hand, while also pointing out the shortcomings of its main political expression, namely the 1946 constitution:

> A própria Constituição de 1946 não tem equivalentes na história brasileira. Foi a mais liberal que tivemos e das mais efetivas historicamente, já que durou quase vinte anos e, na República brasileira, sò a de 1891 teve vida mais longa.
>
> Por outro lado, assim como nossos melhores liberais democratas foram 'democratas autoritários,' até mesmo nosso melhor projeto liberal continha defeitos de origem, que nos cabe apontar, com a esperança de que não se repitam.[11]

Quite interestingly, in these two books Almino is not positioning himself as the "progressive intellectual" of Sartrean descent: instead, we see here operative the Lefortian connection. Almino does not clearly lay down an ideological line in either of the two books but he provides the public sphere with material for an intellectual *discussion*. Of course, in both books his support of the process of democratic opening is rarely in doubt, nor are his liberal sympathies, quite obvious in the very choice of the various issues treated in *Era uma Vez uma Constituinte*, such as "liberdades individuais, de associação política e sindical." However, he refrains from openly speaking for something or somebody—his agenda can only be surmised from the structure of the books rather than from an overt statement of his stance. Lefort helps explain this approach as follows: Almino is reluctant to act as the spokesperson for any class or group interest, speaking instead as a slightly detached commentator, though one who is profoundly concerned with the future of his country.

Despite these beginnings as an analytic author whose writing is situated between political philosophy and historiography, once a democratic order emerged in Brazil Almino discontinued his critical practice and instead devoted himself mostly to fiction. The chronological concurrence cannot be overlooked: his first novel was published in 1987, just two years after José Sarney took office as the first civilian President of Brazil in more than two decades, although, to be sure,

[11] João Almino, *Era uma Vez a Constituinte: Lições de 1946 e Questões de Hoje* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1985), 8.

the novel had been in the making for a number of years. Almino has never explained this shift, which only becomes clear once we deal with the post-ideological aspect of Almino's fictions. What we can say for now is that in the process of this textual reconfiguration from political science and historiography to fiction, Almino did not discard engagement. It continued to play a role in Almino's fictional texts, although it was characterized differently. This reformulation of engagement was marked by a heterodoxy and inventiveness that appears to be related to Claude Lefort's treatment of the question of engagement. It triggered in his student an ongoing concern that was to characterize Almino's most mature works and would eventually inform the development of his 2008 novel *O Livro das Emoções*.

O Livro das Emoções: Structuring Multiple Discourses

The *Livro* is a complex fictional construction that involves several narrative levels. Its protagonist and narrator is Cadu, a character who first made his appearance in Almino's début novel *Idéias para onde Passar o Fim do Mundo* (1987), where he acts as the photographer. The whole novel revolves around the description of and commentary upon a single photograph he takes. Almino develops the idea of structuring the narration around a (fictional) picture further, twenty years later, in the *Livro das Emoções*. Here, he organizesthe novel's events around the description of what are now various, rather than a single, fictional photographs. Cadu has taken them at some point in his past, and he now describes them.

The structure of the book, when looked at more closely, is remarkably sophisticated. Cadu is represented in *O Livro* as the author and narrator of as many as three different *diaries*, two of which make up the actual text of the novel we read. We then come across the first striking feature of the book, which is a novelistic work presented as an autobiographical narrative—a

device already employed by Almino, although in a different form, in *As Cinco Estações do Amor*. However, while in *As Cinco Estações* the narration's multiplicity was achieved only as a serial succession, as the narrator of that novel *successively* employs a number of different modes of autobiographical recounting, here that multiplicity is posited from the very outset and has a number of specific characteristics.

The first in mere order of appearance of Cadu's diaries is written in the narrative present, and is meant to relate the process of writing a second one: I will always call this first account the "compositional diary"—it is printed in italics and I will always quote it in this form. The second diary comprises the bulk of the book, and is dubbed by Cadu himself "O Livro das Emoções," yet it should not be confused with João Almino's own *Livro das Emoções*, which comprises *both* the compositional diary and this latter piece, to which I will instead refer as "Cadu's Livro." Cadu relates the events of his past life in this latter work, and in doing so he bases his narrative on yet another diary (the third and final one) which is this time not a written but a visual one. It is a "diário fotográfico," an album that contains photographs taken by Cadu himself at different moments during his past life. Such pictures are, however, only conveyed through writing instead of being physically inserted into the text. Strikingly, despite the fact that this third diary is eminently visual, their description is carried out by an elderly Cadu who cannot see them any more, having lost his sight:

> *mais do que se fosse possível vê-las, aquelas fotografias se mostram na lembrança em riqueza de detalhes. ... Minha cegueira revelas suas essências, pois,* no fundo, para melhor ver uma fotografia é preciso fechar os olhos.
>
> *A idéia de usar aquele diário como base para escrever meu livro me veio hoje, conversando com minha afilhada, Carolina. Ela me trouxe a versão digital das crônicas de Clarice Lispector sobre Brasília, para que eu as ouça no computador, e passou aqui toda a manhã.*[12]

[12] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 10. Whenever I quote from the *Livro* I will leave in italics the passages that are so typed in the original text.

That *O Livro das Emoções* begins with an explicit reference to a particular work by Clarice Lispector (*Visão de Esplendor*) is quite significant, particularly in regard to the reflection on time that occurs in the novel. For the moment I will limit myself to pointing out that Cadu himself—elderly and blind—reminds one precisely of the race of mythical inhabitants of Brasilia imagined by Clarice in her *crónicas*: Lispector's *brasiliários* "eram todos cegos. ... Quanto mais belos ... mais cegos e mais puros e mais faiscantes, e menos filhos."[13]

It is clear even from this short initial description that the narrative voice of *O Livro das Emoções* is constructed around a double conflict: one of time and another of discourse. To start with the former aspect, we notice that at least two different Cadus confront one another within the narrative. One, the principal narrator, is a blind old man without sight but in command of the written word, and the other a young photographer and the object of the former's narration. The two are separated by a time lapse of around twenty years:[14] "*Tive uma idéia para* O Livro das Emoções. *Vou dar a voz não a mim, mas a outro Cadu, vinte anos mais novo, o que enxergava e compôs o diário fotográfico. É uma maneira de esconder minha bengala, bem como meu caminhar lento e cansado.*"[15] Almino thus achieves the superimposition of two temporally distinct versions of the same character, a choice which in Brazil is perceived as distinctly Machadian in tone, and certainly hearkens back to the famed double narrators of *Dom Casmurro* and *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*:

> como *memórias*, então, o livro tem um narrador que, velho e cego, transforma eventos pessoais e sociais ocorridos no seu passado em texto escrito posteriormente. ... Não se espere, contudo, uma

[13] Clarice Lispector, *Visão do Esplendor: Impressões Leves* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Francisco Alves Editora, 1975), 10. This passage is quoted in João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 11.
[14] "*Estou escrevendo minhas memória da perspectiva de um homem vinte e cinco anos mais novo.*" João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 110 (the words are italicized in the original text).
[15] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 16. This passage contains most probably a cryptic quotation from Petrarch: see for instance, *Il Canzoniere*, sonnet no. 16. I explain *infra* Petrarch's role in the critical interpretation of the *Livro.*

> narrativa em que predomine um descritivismo cronológico do passado, porque o narrador (como os de Machado) é propenso a digressões e não segue uma linha temporal estrita.[16]

Yet in the case of Almino's novel, the superimposition in rendered more distinctive and complex by a peculiar temporal structure. The compositional diary is written in the narrative present about events that take place in a fictional *future*—with respect to the reader—while Cadu's diary is written in the narrative past about events that appear to be mostly contemporary with us and that are bygone only in relation to their narrator: "quanto aos tempos da narrativa, cuidei sobretudo para que a sobreposição de um tempo presente, que se faz no futuro, ou seja, em 2022, a um tempo passado, que se faz no presente, ou seja, do 2001 à atualidade, não fosse percebida como complexa."[17]

This temporal *décalage* is doubled by a discursive conflict. While, on the one hand, the compositional diary and Cadu's Livro are both written texts, the diary on which Cadu's Livro is based is a non-written composition. It is a diary composed of pictures taken by a person whose problem was at the time "ver demais."[18] Indeed, each of the 62 sections of Cadu's Livro with only one exception, include the description of one of the photographs found in the ancient "diário fotográfico." In other words, we come face-to-face here with a prominent example of contemporary *ekphrasis*. As in its most famous Homeric antecedent, Almino's descriptions of visual artifacts represent objects—pictures, in this case—which do not exist in reality, but only through their fictional rendering. Thus, unlike other significant works of contemporary world literature (most remarkably Sebald's *Austerlitz*) *O Livro das Emoções* does not physically include pictures, even though it is centrally concerned with them. This contrast with Sebald's

[16] José Luís Jobim, *João Almino, o Crítico como Romancista* (paper presented at the Tenth International Conference of the Brazilian Studies Association, Brasilia, July 22-24, 2010).
[17] Paulo Paniago, "Imagens da Cegueira: o Escritor João Almino Conta como Construiu a História de Encontros e Desencontros a Partir de Personagem Secundário de Romances Anteriores," Pensar, *Correio Braziliense*, June 21, 2008.
[18] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 20.

Austerlitz can be taken a step further, and, indeed, can shed some light on the peculiar function of pictures in Almino's *Livro*. Here, photographs do not function individually as a support for memory by visually representing things or events, as in Sebald's book. It is only their *collective* rediscovery, the newly appraised idea of their continued existence, at the hands of Cadu that triggers memory, while whatever the pictures themselves depicted needs in turn to be recollected by their photographer, since he cannot even see the pictures anymore ("*ainda o guardo na memória, página por página, porque cada uma d[aquelas fotografias] exala sentimento*").[19]

The presence of photographic *ekphrasis*, while it introduces an apparently disruptive element, counterposing visuality to literary discourse, serves an important structurial function, providing the climactic moments in each of the different sections. The passages that describe the pictures are usually located at the end of each of the chapters and are characterized by a noticeable stylistic intensification. I will provide only one example, the description of the very first picture. After a chapter title that sets up obvious visual expectations ("Geometria da Dúvida") we are given a few eventual details of Cadu's life, which, contrary to expectation, do not anticipate further events to come. They quickly lead to a visual, rather than narrative, resolution:

> Trata-se da fotografia da fachada de um prédio dos anos cinqüenta do século passado, tirada de cima para baixo. Há um geometrismo na composição definido pelos limites das janelas iluminadas nos vários andares e pela disposição das pessoas na entrada. A partir de uma distância de nove andares, vêem-se várias cabeças pequenas e dispostas como num tabuleiro de xadrez, cada uma voltada para uma direção. O calçamento brilha no fundo da foto, espelhando alguma luz de poste. Somente uma pessoa, bem no centro, olha para cima. É um homem de meia-idade, um pouco calvo e de cabelos claros. Um motorista segura a porta do carro de luxo aberta atrás dele.[20]

[19] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 10.
[20] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 17-18.

As in this instance, time and again *ekphrasis* functions in the *Livro* as the coagulating moment of each of its chapters. Thus, it defines the expectations of the reader and assumes the role ordinarily given, in novelistic writing, to narrative events.

These intratextual levels of narration and discourse intersect with further dimensions of referentiality as they involve intertextual references to the other four books of the Brasilia Quintet. In all four Cadu plays various roles, though he is never the narrator in these other works. There are a number of characters that recur in the *Livro* who had first been introduced in previous works: Joana, Ana, and Eduardo Kaufman are the most notable. Only a few significant characters are introduced anew, in particular Laura, the young woman who helps the blind Cadu identify, select, and arrange the pictures of his old photographic diary. In the course of writing, Cadu develops an unrequited sentimental feeling for her, the one woman he could love without having ever set eyes upon her.

The story begins when Cadu is left by his long-standing lover, Joana, who has become attached to Eduardo Kaufman. Now on his own, Cadu decides to leave Rio de Janeiro for Brasilia, where he at first works as a photographer for Kaufman, having no other source of employment. In Brasilia he needs to provide a photo service for the former president of Brasil, the kidnapped and murdered Paulo Antônio (who, in Almino's fiction, is the first black president of Brasil). Kaufman intends to "reavivar a lembrança do ex-presidente desaparecido para parecer herdeiro de uma causa nobre, reforçando, assim, suas chances de se eleger deputado federal."[21] A great lover of women and sex, Cadu spends his ensuing years divided between his recollection of Joana, his other long-standing love for Ana, and a great number of minor affairs. His resentment toward Kaufman drives most of the successive years of Cadu's life, which are characterized by his financial decline and his increasing disappointment with the lack of recognition for his art, as

[21] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 29.

well as his repeated and failed attempts to take revenge against Kaufman by making public some of the criminal acts he committed in office. In doing so, Cadu tries to employ his own art, photography, in a peculiar form of political engagement, bestowing on it not just its art-value but something else besides.

What is clear from the outset in this novel is that there is no attempt on the part of the author to set up a particularly compelling suspense-creating device. The absence of suspense is clearly willed; in fact, it is commented upon in the course of the book, particularly in an exchange of views Cadu has with his brother Guga about Cadu's project of composing a photographic diary which will later become the nucleus of the *Livro das Emoções*:

> —queria pedir tua opinião sobre um projeto que tenho. No teu campo, a literatura. Penso em escrever um livro—lhe revelei.
>
> —tu es favelado?
>
> —ainda não, mas chego lá.
>
> —Transexual?
>
> —O que tu achas?
>
> —Se não estás no meio de nenhum conflito étnico, cultural, ou racial, sua história não interessa. A menos que substituas a narrativa por uma catástrofe ou uma cena hiperviolenta.
>
> —Não tenho pretensão literária. Quero modestamente ser exato sobre o que vi e vivi.
>
> —Então, sobre o que é?
>
> —É uma espécie de diário, usando minhas fotos; digamos: um diário fotográfico.
>
> —Ainda assim, precisa haver uma trama na tua vida, que possa criar o enredo ou o suspense. Ou pelo menos tua história deve ser exemplar em algum sentido: deve mostrar que tu conseguiste construir alguma coisa, ainda que seja uma família ou uma empresa, entendes?
>
> Entendi. Por culpa de meu caráter dispersivo, eu de fato nada construíra.[22]

Instead of having a "trama," an "enredo" or "suspense," Almino decides to fragment the narrative into a great number of short chapters, some of them just a few lines long (the shortest are the entries of Cadu's diary). The result is striking because it creates a plot that does not feel emplotted. The story line simply exists. It is a given reality, but at the same time it refrains from acting as a narrative mechanism. The author instead strives to render each of the sections (particularly those belonging to the book written by Cadu) as self-sufficient as possible. While

[22] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 39.

they do indeed relate portions of Cadu's life, they also appear self-enclosed, especially insofar as they are generated by the photograph which forms their core.

The lack of a mechanism which creates any sort of expectation, together with the superimposition of different temporal dimensions and the parcelization of the narrative into semi-independent sections, charges the temporal flow with uncertainty: "*A vida não se mede por minutos*" says Cadu "*nem memórias são escritas com a enumeração de tudo que se passa diante dos ponteiros do relógio*."[23] More specifically, this creates a post-modern temporality.

Toward Post-Engagement: (Post)modern Time and the City

It has been said by Pedro Meira Monteiro that Almino's novelistic oeuvre consistently reflects on various aspects of instantaneity and on the fugitive nature of time:[24]

> Para além do primeiro romance, seus personagens revelam, através de seus movimentos, uma trama complexa, que se faz e desfaz diante de um espaço e de um tempo vazio: o *instante* é aquilo que mais insistentemente buscam os livros de João Almino, como se todos (inclusive o narrador morto do primeiro romance, mas também os narradores dos demais livros) se movessem diante de um rumo para sempre ignorado, um futuro para o qual todos olham sem nada enxergar precisamente. A metáfora de um narrador cego, em *O livro das emoções*, publicado em 2008, é quase uma consequência da ordem narrativa que se anuncia nos romances anteriores.[25]

Such peculiar focus on the momentary, which is certainly a remarkable feature of Almino's works, however, finds a striking counterpoint in the author's concurrent interest in the *longue durée*. In *O Livro das Emoções*, while Almino enacts a number of figures of the instant especially by basing his story upon the description of instantaneous snapshots, they find themselves included in a dense web of intertextual references that link the novel cross-chronologically to some of the foundational texts of Brazilian literature and to many Western

[23] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 15.
[24] See Pedro Meira Monteiro, "Todo Instante: A Ficção de João Almino," in *Luso-Brazilian Review* 47, No. 1 (2010): 61-70.
[25] Pedro Meira Monteiro, "Todo Instante: A Ficção de João Almino," in *Luso-Brazilian Review* 47, No. 1 (2010): 64.

European classics, thus hinting at a longer temporal dimension that always remains crucial to the construction of this narration. These two contrasting attitudes toward time introduce a central aspect of our discussion, since they can be read as two complementary ways of rejecting one of the key tenets of the temporality of modernity, namely the value of the new. As Vattimo wrote:

> For the arts, the value of the new, once it has been radically unveiled, loses all possibility of foundation or value. The crisis of the future which permeates all late-modern culture and social life finds in the experience of art a privileged locus of expression. Such a crisis, obviously, implies a radical change in our way of experiencing history and time, as is somewhat obscurely anticipated by Nietzsche in his 'doctrine' of the eternal return of the Same.[26]

In other words, in *O Livro das Emoções* Almino constructs a literary configuration that presents itself from the very start, both in the choice of setting and in its peculiar temporality, as engaging both Brazilian modernity and the question of its "overcoming."

In order to illuminate the postmodern dimension in Almino's work, one has to go beyond the apparently overweaning importance of the photographic theme. It is easy to be tricked into granting all-dominant centrality to the presence in the text of pictures as *ekphrastic* renderings. Pictures are clearly instantaneous creations, whose temporal structure reflects the momentary perhaps more than any other form of representation. Yet the way in which Almino frames the presence of the pictorial in the text of the *Livro* results in the addition of further layers of temporality. We have already encountered one while detailing the structure of the novel: the choice of having two narrators superimposed one onto the other, an older and a younger Cadu, hearkens back to a classic of Brazilian literature, *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas.* Almino thus contrasts, right off the bat, the emphasis on instantaneity brought forth by the presence of the photographic element with another temporal dimension characterized by a *longue durée littéraire* which emphasizes the continued presence of literary models.

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[26] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Synder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 106-107.

It is, however, the peculiar emplotment of the novel, the result of a combination of instantaneity and persistence, that is the ideal expression of the *Livro's* postmodernity. As we saw, the plot of the *Livro* seems to refuse to use suspense-creating devices, and consciously so, as is attested to by Cadu's own metaliterary reflections. As a result, there is no clear evidence of narrative progression. Only the mildest anticipation is created, for example the subplot of Cadu's involvement with Eduardo Kaufman, and this fails to turn the fabric of the plot into anything resembling narrative progression. The very use of moments of *ekphrasis* as the climactic points in the various chapters, together with the intense fragmentation of the text, reinforce the impression that the work is divided up into bits which tend toward instantaneous duration rather than to narrative development. The book's careful emplotment is not just commented upon by the narrator himself, a first expression of the author's own awareness, but is structured so carefully as to include some references to one of the most prestigious texts of the Western canon: Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.[27] The *Livro* is divided into 122 sections, although only 62 are numbered, a number corresponding exactly to a third of the *Canzoniere*'s 366 poems. Also, in the very last section of the *Livro*, Cadu states that he prints his diary on "9 de dezembro," a cryptic reference to Petrarch's work.[28] Furthermore, as I have already mentioned, the character who helps Cadu putting together the book is named Laura, like the Petrarchean character whose praises are sung throughout the *Canzoniere*.

Constructed as it is around a reference to Petrarch, the plot of the *Livro* reveals once more a combination of a degree of instantaneity with a peculiar attention to the *longue durée*. Through

[27] Almino has kindly confirmed the details of this crucial literary resonance in a private communication.
[28] "Finalmente, você esteve atento a algumas piscadelas de olho literárias para o leitor e inclusive a brincadeiras internas do texto – a referência a Petrarca, por exemplo, ou mais especificamente a Laura (até a impressão de 'O Livro das Emoções' em '9 de dezembro,' o livro está dividido em partes que correspondem a um terço dos poemas de *Il canzoniere*). Passamos algumas férias na Provence, sempre próximos a Carpentras e, portanto, também a Avignon, Fontaine de Vaucluse e ao Mont Ventoux." João Almino, e-mail message to author, April 17, 2011.

this learned allusion, Almino endows the book with a profound cross-chronological dimension, which triggers a forceful intertextual conversation with texts going back to the very beginning of the Romance literary tradition. As the author fragments the narrative and thus deprives it of developmental and therefore narrative *essor*, he also declares its continuity by constructing it after a collection of poems that famously balances the autonomy of each section with an overarching storyline in which each poem takes its position. This peculiar, indeed unique, combination points to the post-modern dimension of the temporality configured in the *Livro*, a post-modernity which is at the same time a reflection on the literary. This concern with post-modern time also informs the reflections on Brasilia present in the *Livro* as well as Cadu's peculiar engagement.

Even though Almino's first books are books of philosophy, he began to think very early about writing a novel. While he was in Paris, he embarked on the singularly long composition of his first work of fiction, originally called *Fantasia Para Plano Piloto* and later published, when Brazil had already become a democratic country, as *Idéias para onde Passar o Fim do Mundo* (1987). This work is of fundamental importance for the subsequent career of its author. In this first novel, Almino introduces not only most of the characters who will later reappear in all of his other books of fiction, but he also defines the recurrent setting of his subsequent novels, which is nearly always the capital Brasilia. Only a very few pages out of the five novels published so far by Almino are set outside of Brasilia. If Almino's personal past in Paris, as we saw previously, can offer an important point of entry into his attitude toward engagement, the choice of Brasilia as the exclusive narrative environment of his work can, in turn, lead us into two other crucial thematic avenues prominently developed in *O Livro das Emoções*: reflections on post-modernism and on the crisis of the literary in Brazil.

So why this intriguing privileging of the new capital of Brazil? Almino himself has widely commented on this choice, certainly a marked one given at least two factors. Firstly, almost no literary writing in Portuguese on Brasilia existed at the time Almino began to publish his fiction,[29] and secondly, Almino's own life brought him to a variety of places around the world which could have easily offered themes and settings to his fictional practice. Yet Almino chose to remain loyal to Brasilia. He renewed this commitment over a remarkable amount of time. More than twenty years elapsed between the composition of *Idéias para onde Passar o Fim do Mundo* and *Cidade Livre*.

What comes to the fore from the interviews given by the author is his desire to engage with a place representative of the whole of Brasil and able to stand for the entire country. In a country characterized by regional diversities, and whose major urban communities are culturally, ethnically, economically, and even linguistically very distinctive, writing about Brasilia, a city peopled by immigrants who come from all over Brasil (although primarily from the northeast) and therefore even deprived of a local dialect, became an opportunity for Almino to conceive fictional literature once again as a reflection on the national community: "É verdade que, além de ser uma cidade onde vivi, Brasília na minha literatura é também mito, ideia, projeto e metáfora do Brasil, um Brasil de muitos brasis."[30] Yet in the same interview, Almino is careful to remark with an apparent contradiction, that the particular setting of Brasilia does not deprive his stories of a universal rather than national dimension:

> acredito no caráter universal da literatura e acho que podem ser mais próximas uma da outra histórias que se passam respectivamente em São Paulo e em Nova York, do que duas que se passam numa mesma cidade, seja ela São Paulo ou Nova York. Ou seja, uma cidade não é suficiente para definir uma literatura. Minhas histórias poderiam por certo se situar noutros

[29] See Antonio Miranda, *Brasília Capital da Utopia: (visão e revisão)* (Brasília: Thesaurus, 1985), 86-87. Lispector's famous "crónicas" were a notable exception.
[30] Paulo Paniago, "Imagens da Cegueira: o Escritor João Almino Conta como Construiu a História de Encontros e Desencontros a Partir de Personagem Secundário de Romances Anteriores," Pensar, *Correio Braziliense*, June 21, 2008.

> lugares, mas Brasília lhes dá uma cor particular, me ajuda a fugir dos estereótipos e a tratar de temas que me são caros, como o novo, a pós-utopia e os processos de desmodernização.[31]

While one should certainly not attribute overwhelming importance to the occasional commentaries an author makes on his own oeuvre, this remark on the universality of Brasilia has, in my opinion, significant implications, and not just because it recurs on at least one other occasion, when Almino articulates even more subtly the reasons for his obsession with the capital of Brazil:

> Algumas das características de Brasília são estimulantes para a literatura: sua artificialidade, seu *caráter universal*—por ser fruto de um projeto modernista que transcende as fronteiras nacionais—e seu desenraizamento, sua *desfamilizariação* e seu *estrangeirismo*, que, no fundo, tornam mais fácil ao escritor eliminar os estereótipos. Acho interessante pensar a idéia de uma *identidade múltipla* e em aberto, de um local onde as origens podem parecer o que são de fato: mitos ou referências em mutação, de uma cultura que não seja corpo normativo, uma moral ou uma coleção de pensamentos congelados; de uma cidade que, por não ter ainda um longo passado, recebe os legados de *memórias* também múltiplas. O vazio não apenas do espaço, mas também de *história*, no fundo legitimiza a liberdade de imaginação. Tudo explica que a trilogia tenha virado um Quarteto de Brasília.[32]

Almino presents a number of themes in this passage as the reasons behind his interest in the city. In the first part of the quote, he reiterates the position we have already encountered: namely, that Brasilia represents a universal entity and yet, at the same time, is endowed with such great particularity as to be characterized by nothing less than "estrangeirismo." It is as if Brasilia was characterized by such a complete universality that anything particular taking place on its stage would be by contrast rendered most vivid. In Brasilia, people, things, and actions are defamiliarized, cleansed of their stereotypical nature. Almino introduces a new dimension in the second part of the quote, the dimension of time: Brasilia is characterized by an emptiness of history ("vazio da história") yet this aspect, instead of making it a place inhospitable to memory,

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[31] Paulo Paniago, "Imagens da Cegueira: o Escritor João Almino Conta como Construiu a História de Encontros e Desencontros a Partir de Personagem Secundário de Romances Anteriores," Pensar, *Correio Braziliense*, June 21, 2008.

[32] João Almino, Entrevista no ig.com, http://www.joaoalmino.com/LivEmoEntrevista.html (accessed August 28, 2011). The italics are mine.

in fact makes space for "memórias múltiplas." It is a discrepancy which I believe becomes clearer once it is investigated jointly with some other texts on time authored by Almino.

The problem of time, particularly the time of modernity, has always remained a capital one in his oeuvre, both philosophical and literary. In 1985, Almino devoted an entire book to this problem, *A Idade do Presente*, in which he studied the temporality of contemporary Brazil from the point of view of political philosophy. Brazilian society is characterized by a profound developmentalism that deeply impacts the temporality structuring its perception:

> A contradição é clara: nossa sociedade e nossa nação que aparecem, em muitos discursos, como imutáveis no presente, surgem, nesses mesmos discursos, em suas imagens de futuro, o futuro em que os problemas que se colocam no presente com vistas à mudança estarão superados.[33]

Such developmentalism remains somewhat paradoxical, as the "present" of Brazil, Almino argues, is often perceived as unmoving. This perception, instead of structuring a temporality characterized by stability, leads to the opposite, namely to a sense of constant modification and progress, since that "immutable" present requires a future where all the problems of the present will be "overcome:"

> É que vivemos um presente representado como transição que se equilibra entre a defesa contra a ameaça ao que nós somos e a esperança de que o momento da redenção nos transforme em nós mesmos.
>
> É como se a própria nação ou sociedade vivessem um tempo intermediário, estratégico. É como se deixássemos de ser e fôssemos nos tornar. Ainda não somos, mas já não somos mais.[34]

As a testimony to the persistence of this theme in Almino's work, we can also detect it in his very first work, *Os Democratas Autoritários* (1980). Here, he presents some conclusions as to the way time was conceived by the people who drafted the 1946 constitution, and briefly broaches the topic of intermediate time:

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[33] João Almino, *A Idade do Presente: Tempo, Autonomia e Representação na Política* (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1985), 31.
[34] João Almino, *A Idade do Presente: Tempo, Autonomia e Representação na Política* (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1985), 31.

> Em todos os discursos, presente e futuro eram pensados em dimensões diferentes. Era como se o país ou tivesse no presente que fugir do fascismo ou do comunismo ou tivesse que caminhar para seu destino socialista ou democrático. Era como se o país ou tivesse no presente que fugir à crise econômica ou tivesse que construir seu futuro econômico. Nestas alternativas, o passado podia ser conservado de duas formas: ou se preservava o passado em nome do futuro ou se preservava o passado contra a ameaça futura.
>
> O tempo do Brasil é, nestes discursos, um tempo intermediário, um tempo de transição, tempo estratégico. Era como se o Brasil deixasse de ser e fosse se tornar. O Brasil ainda não era, mas já não era mais. O Brasil não existe: ou ele existiu—tem que se opor ao que foi--,ou ele vai passar a ser—tem que olhar o retrato gravado do seu futuro, a fotografia de um *outro* que tome de empréstimo para sua esperança, o seu sonho.[35]

Brazil is then characterized, according to Almino as a political scientist, by an "intermediate time," not unlike the temporality of modernity as investigated by Vattimo. "Ainda não somos, mas já não somos mais," thus Almino describes what for the Italian author is the instability generated by the never-ending progressive motion of modernity: "the ideal of progress is finally revealed to be a hollow one, since its ultimate value is to create conditions in which further progress is possible in a guise that is always new."[36] It is in this sense, I believe, that one should understand the deep significance of the expression "vazio da história" when applied to Brasilia, which in Almino's interview remains in excess of its superficial meaning of "absence of past." After all there are still memories in Brasilia, and therefore a form of the past is carried on. The new capital is indeed the place which best embodies the "intermediate sense of time" that characterizes modernity, since it represents the ultimate architectural expression of Brazilian developmentalism. The universality of Brasilia and its temporality are therefore domains tightly knit together, as they are presented together in the quoted interview. The commentators who have remarked how this city represents the emblem of the "progressive" impetus of the country are indeed innumerable. As Brazilian economist and politician Celso Furtado wrote just a few years after the construction of Brasilia:

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[35] João Almino, *Os Democratas Autoritários: Liberdades Individuais, de Associação Política e Sindical na Constituinte de 1946* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1980), 355.
[36] Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Synder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 8.

> As decisões de construir Brasília, de rasgar o território nacional e de abordar de frente o problema dos desequilíbrios regionais, assim como o grande movimento de opinião visando romper a anacrônica estrutura agrária, indicam, claramente, a direção em que estão apontando as forças mais progressivas do país. Se persistirmos nessa direção, teremos iniciado uma época de pionierismo, que poderá fazer do Brasil uma das áreas de maior dinamismo demográfico e ímpeto econômico do mundo, na segunda metade do século.[37]

The utopian dimension of the city is also widely known. Brasilia was to be the materialization of the socialist dream conceived by the two architects who designed it, urban planner Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, who was the principal architect: "une cité modèle, monumentale, rectiligne, socialement intégratrice, et soigneusement dessiné."[38] At the same time Brasilia was to realize the settler's utopia of the occupation of the interior of the country: "le projet étant d'y développer des activités primaires pour alimenter principalement la région littorale sud-est à 'vocation industrielle.' Cette conjugaison était conçue comme la base d'une économie forte capable de concrétiser le grand destin national du Brésil."[39] The third utopia represented by Brasilia, in the opinion of De Andrade Mathieu and Barbosa Ferreira, was, finally, the national one: "dans la mesure où l'idée sous-jacente à ce transfert de la capitale au centre du Brésil était l'émergence d'une nouvelle construction nationale."[40]

To this widespread reading of Brasilia as the quintessentially "progressive" city, Almino brings a number of crucial additions. In *O Livro das Emoções* we see, in fact, Brasilia not merely as the emblem of a new future, but *in* its future during the year 2022: a time characterized by the failing of the dream Brasilia's very existence was supposed to bring to fruition.[41] This idea of

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[37] Celso Furtado, *A Pré-Revolução Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fundo de Cultura, 1962), 115.
[38] *Brasília, Ville Fermée, Environment Ouvert*, ed. by Marcia Regina De Andrade Mathieu, Ignez Costa Barbosa Ferreira, Dominique Couret (Paris: IRD Éditions, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, 2006), 67.
[39] *Brasília, Ville Fermée, Environment Ouvert*, ed. by Marcia Regina De Andrade Mathieu, Ignez Costa Barbosa Ferreira, Dominique Couret (Paris : IRD Éditions, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, 2006), 67.
[40] *Brasília, Ville Fermée, Environment Ouvert*, ed. by Marcia Regina De Andrade Mathieu, Ignez Costa Barbosa Ferreira, Dominique Couret (Paris : IRD Éditions, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, 2006), 67.
[41] There is ample literature in Brazil on the issue of the failing(s) of modernity, intended either as the impossibility of reaching a fully blown Western style modernity or as the attainment of modernity's failings without reaping its benefits. See for example Cristovam Buarque, *A Revolução na Esquerda e a Invenção do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992), 24: "Talvez nenhum outro país ... mergulhou tão profundamente e fracassou tão rotundamente na sua

looking at the future of the city (a future that lies in ruins) is not new in Almino, as his first two novels had already been set in the fictional future of the Brazilian capital, in both cases a very indeterminate time, but certainly characterized by dystopia rather than utopia. Pedro Meira Monteiro has suggested a reading of these compositional choices that links the melancholia reflected in them to a bitter assessment, on the part of Almino, of the years of the military regime:

> Não se pode esquecer que o tempo da escrita e da publicação da primeira obra ficcional de João Almino (1987) é precisamente o momento em que o Brasil experimentava o enfraquecimento, enfim, de mais uma longa ditadura. Como para grande parte da esquerda latino-americana, o legado daquele tempo era a constatação amarga de que a potencia libertária dos anos sessenta dera em praticamente nada. Esta a marca que carregara a Brasília de seus livros: a cidade e um ideal sempre um pouco falho, ou antes, como nas figurações clássicas da melancolia, ela é o espaço em que o arruinamento já se iniciou, com a inexorabilidade própria ao tempo que, como bem sabem os leitores de Machado de Assis, roi e roi, completamente indiferente às veleidades e aos desejos dos homens.[42]

Yet Meira Monteiro could perhaps have added that although such melancholia of development first appears in a novel that was chronologically close to the period of military rule, the military regime is never represented in Almino's books. All of his characters live their fictional present in democratic times although they might have spent their pasts under dictatorial rule. The melancholia of their Brazil can only tangentially be attributed to the bleak years of dictatorial Brazil. Their decaying world is a world that had the chance to regenerate itself through democratic renewal. Indeed in all of his subsequent books of fiction (published in 1994, 2001, 2008, and 2010), Almino never shows any enthusiasm for what came after the restoration of democratic rule even though his criticism of authoritarianism, to which I have already referred, is

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experiência de modernidade. Dos poucos que fracassaram tanto, nenhum outro dispõe de tantos recursos; além de uma infra-estrutura econômica, científica e tecnológica já implantada, ainda que em processo de sucateamento." See also p. 26: "O que está em jogo ... é ... como redefinir o sentido da modernidade ... no sentido de crescente aproximação com o futuro que o país deseja, e não como repetição, a qualquer custo, de um futuro já envelhecido nos países-com-maioria-rica e impossível nos países-com-maioria-pobre, especialmente aqueles com população grande, como o Brasil."

[42] Pedro Meira Monteiro, "Todo Instante: A Ficção de João Almino," in *Luso-Brazilian Review* 47, No. 1, (2010): 64.

well known. His melancholia is therefore at least as much if not more a melancholia of democracy as it is a melancholia of dictatorship. Thus in his second book, *Samba-Enredo* (1994), democratic Brazil is described as a chaotic carnevalesque monstrosity, while in *As Cinco Estações do Amor* (2001) Brasilia lives in the grip of crime and disaffection for the grand dream it had at some point in its past thought it would be able to embody. Meira Monteiro's position should not then be completely discarded and the fact that Almino looks at the dream of modernity in its aftermath needs to be retained. Almino's perspective stems from a sense of failure that is both the historical outcome of decades of military rule and the result of a lack of socio-economic renewal in democratic Brazil. Such a peculiar "post-utopian" approach (as Almino himself has described it) has precise temporal implications, endowing *O Livro das Emoções* with a very peculiar temporality.

It is not coincidental that Cadu, the protagonist of *O Livro*, recalls the famous legend of the "brasiliários" in the opening pages of his "compositional diary." His character, that of an extremely long-lived blind old Brasilia resident, cannot but make us think of the story created by Clarice Lispector in a 1962 short piece of prose (and later appearing in the selection of "impressões leves" *Visão do Esplendor*, in 1975), where she forges a fictional foundational myth to literarily account for the creation of such an intriguing city as Brasilia. This is probably the most perceptive text ever written by Clarice Lispector on Brasilia and its peculiar sense of time:

> Brasília é de um passado esplendoroso que já não existe mais. Há milênios desapareceu esse tipo de civilização. No século IV a.C. era habitada por homens e mulheres louros e altíssimos que não eram americanos nem suecos [they didn't belong to any of the quintessentially modern nations] e que faiscavam ao sol. Eram todos cegos. È por isso que em Brasília não há onde esbarrar. Os brasiliários vestiam-se de ouro branco. Quanto mais belos os brasiliários, mais cegos e mais puros e mais faiscantes, e menos filhos. Os brasiliários viviam cerca de trezentos anos. Não havia em nome de que morrer. Milênios depois foi descoberta por um bando de foragidos que em nenhum outro lugar seriam recebidos: eles nada tinham a perder. Ali acenderam o fogo, armaram tendas, pouco a pouco escavando as areias que soterravam a cidade. Esses eram homens e mulheres, menores e morenos, de olhos esquivos e inquietos, e que, por serem fugitivos e desesperados,

> tinham em nome de que viver e morrer. Eles habitaram as casas em ruínas, multiplicaram-se, costituindo uma raça humana muito contemplativa.[43]

Clarice Lispector has here anticipated the post-utopian approach of Almino, giving incipient fictional form to some of the intuitions Almino will fully explore and develop in *O Livro das Emoções*. To start with, Brasilia appears in this text in its future, as already in existence. It was not built as the new capital but rather discovered—it came into being at a point far into the past. "Brasília é um futuro que aconteceu no passado," as Lispector would write a few years later in a second *crónica* on the capital.[44] The city only exists as ruins: the runaways ("foragidos") who came across them "habitaram casas em ruínas." Thus Clarice, in a different way than Almino but with similar implications, tries to turn Brasilia's temporality, namely the progressive temporality of modernity as embodied in the futuristic city, into a reality that already belongs to the past. Brasilia's utopia becomes, in turn, something that has already happened, so that it has to shed its utopian value, becoming instead a "pós-utopia." Yet the question of why the "brasiliários" disappeared remains. Were they aware of the failings of their model of development or was that failure only realized by the "foragidos" who arrived at the site of the former city much later? The "brasiliários," as Lispector wrote, were blind. This blindness, I would suggest, can be a sign of their incapacity to look forward. In other words, they lack that particular ability so necessary to the progressive development modernity: they cannot see in any direction, much less into the future. Indeed, as Lispector remarks only one line later, the mythical inhabitants of Brasilia were people without ideals: "não havia em nome de que morrer," they didn't have "anything to die for," unlike the runaways which in this sense are the complete opposite. They have something to die for and precisely because of this, they are "desesperados." This further element is crucial. The "brasiliários" lacked what we would call today an ideology—they could not commit

[43] Clarice Lispector, *Visão do Esplendor: Impressões Leves* (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves Editora, 1975), 10.
[44] Clarice Lispector, *Visão do Esplendor: Impressões Leves* (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves Editora, 1975), 19.

themselves to anything. As we will see, this is precisely the case of Cadu in *O Livro das Emoções*. Not unlike the "brasiliários," the (blind) *regard* Cadu casts onto the past of his city, together with all the political aspirations that this place embodied, is quite a disenchanted one. It is imbued by a profound melancholia generated by the very awareness of the necessity of rethinking modernity, of embracing a post-modern attitude—one that this text by Clarice in my opinion already incipiently shows.

As I anticipated at the beginning of this section, the centrality of Brasilia in Almino's work more generally, and in particular in the *Livro*, turns it into a crossroad of major themes and critical concerns. If the first regards the crucial problem of the conception of a post-modern temporality, the other one that I would like to emphasize here concerns the question of literary value, in particular of the value attached to the choice of setting a whole series of fiction in Brasilia—two quite different concerns, but only in appearance. In fact, both of them have already come together in the way the *Livro*'s plot is constructed, that is combining prestigious literary references to a non-developmental emplotment, and they will once more encounter each other when, exploring his character Cadu, Almino puts forth a particular formulation of post-engagement. Almino tried to account for his choice of Brasilia as the recurring setting of his novels in a number of interviews. However, interestingly enough, there is one important aspect which I think the author was remarkably hesitant to tackle, namely the one I just mentioned: the literary value, here very close to the notion of cultural capital, inherent in his choice to remain loyal to this setting.

When Almino began writing on Brasilia, the city was indeed empty narrative territory. Only very few works of literature, none of them of much interest, had been set there prior to

1985.[45] Confronted with this lack of literary precedent, the impetus and constancy shown by Almino's loyalty to this new setting are admirable. His novels were, in my opinion, a forceful and inventive response to the weakness of the status of literary art today in Brazil, a predicament he tackled by employing a literary strategy to be found in some of the most respected Western works of fiction. As Tânia Pellegrini has argued in *A Imagem e a Letra*, contemporary Brazilian fiction has gradually been losing both autonomy and centrality within the field of Brazilian public discourse. On the one hand it has been subjected to ever-increasing editorial controls and to the constraints of the book market, while on the other it has been marginalized by other media.[46] In Brazil, as in most of today's world, literature cannot be considered any more as the prime means employed in representing the nation, at least in terms of its discursive resonance. Almino's choice to consistently set his novels in the emblematic urban space of Brasilia was made, I believe, partly in response to precisely this predicament. The decision to employ the same characters in different books, and to have different novels set in the same place, cannot help but remind us of the great cycles of fiction of Western modernism. Faulkner and Proust spring to mind right away, and it is indeed the Proustian reference which is here the pertinent one, given the abundance of references to Proust in many of Almino's books, including *O Livro das Emoções.* This is particularly evident in the way some characters are constructed in part as *personages à clef*, as Proust not infrequently did, and in the ever present discussions on memory. Instead of following Saint-Loup or Charlus, we can trace here the "biografias literárias" of Ana, Cadu, Berenice, Paulo Antônio or Eduardo Kaufman – although in Almino's series, to be sure, the narrative voice changes at every book, something that doesn't happen in the *Recherche*.

[45] See Antonio Miranda, *Brasília Capital da Utopia: (Visão e Revisão)* (Brasília: Thesaurus, 1985), 86-87. A novel by José Geraldo Vieira (*Paralelo 16: Brasília*) was published in 1967.
[46] Tânia Pellegrini, *A Imagem e a Letra: Aspectos da Ficão Brasileira Contemporânea* (Campinas: Mercado das Letras, 1999), 147 and following.

Through this choice as with others, particularly the cryptic inclusion of Petrarchean elements, Almino clearly tries to uphold an idea of literature nurtured by an intertextual dialogue with the classics not just of his own national literature—we have already seen the importance of Machado in the *Livro*—but of the West as a whole, within whose literary community he makes a literary intervention that remains thus, as Brasilia is in his reading, both situated and universal. Yet Almino is too lucid not to ignore how much his attempt to recuperate a learned way of writing fiction is marginalized today and ultimately destined to fail.

Cadu's Metafiction: the Question of the Literary

As by now should be apparent, the question of the literary represents one of the major dimensions explored in Almino's *Livro.* While sometimes coded into the very fabric of the work, as when Petrarch is cryptically quoted or when Proust is referred to in the construction of a literary cycle occupying the space of Brasilia, in the novel the question of the role and nature of the literary is also the subject of deliberate self-reflection, mostly through the words of its main character, Cadu. It is not at all coincidental that we find right in the title, where the novel proudly calls itself a "book" (a "*livro* das emoções") as if considering itself from a distance, the seed of the metafictional approach that will be developed throughout the work. It is these metafictional reflections that hold the key to the conception of the literary that Almino proposes in this work.

As we saw previously, the elderly Cadu who composes the "livro" is a former photographer now blind, who devotes himself to the reconstruction of his previous life. He bases his narrative on pictures taken at salient moments of his past, themselves part of a "diário fotográfico." His blindness, which I have already read as a reference, via Lispector, to the post-modernity of Almino's interpretation of Brasilia, obviously makes Cadu-as-narrator a very

different person from Cadu-as-photographer, which does not simply endow him with an ideal detachment in regard to his own past, but also detaches him from his previous art, of which he therefore becomes a peculiar commentator. I have so far referred several times to the idea of the literary, which we saw at the root of a number of issues. In order for us to define this ever-elusive term, I believe the most consistent approach would entail an analysis of the elements internal to the book, namely Cadu's own reflections on art. The first question we would naturally ask would then be, "How is it that a character who was a former photographer can tell us something about literary art?" Indeed, in the book Cadu rarely gives any thought to the verbal aspect of his literary practice (he does that only passingly in his "compositional diary"), but mostly reflects on his activity as a photographer. Yet these reflections remain *in excess* of that very art in two ways: they seem to refer *metonymically* to art in general and *metaphorically* to literature in particular. As Castro Rocha has remarked:

> De um lado, recorde-se que o autor do Quarteto de Brasília também é fotógrafo. As inúmeras e instigantes reflexões sobre o ato de fotografar tanto são de Cadu quanto de Almino, e, pelo avesso, constituem uma declaração (de princípio) sobre a importância da escrita e da leitura: "Fotografar é ver com olho treinado" – assim como ler e escrever, claro está. "No fundo, para melhor ver uma fotografia é preciso fechar os olhos" – assim como, segundo a lição de Bento Santiago, os melhores livros são aqueles que nunca dizem tudo: é como se devêssemos lê-los com olhos fechados, a fim de concebermos o que não há.[47]

If "Cadu's Livro" can be then considered as a highly meta*literary* narrative, I believe that we can discern at least three main thematic clusters among the formulations of literature that are developed within its fabric: a consideration of the question of realism, a reflection on the issue of literary (and artistic) prestige, and a definition of (post)-engagement.

That the first major topic introduced by Cadu as a (peculiar) critic is realism doesn't necessarily come as a surprise: photography is, after all, an eminently mimetic art, and therefore

[47] João Cezar de Castro Rocha, "Uma Declaração de Princípios: João Almino Termina o 'Quarteto de Brasília' e Elege a Palavra Narrada Como a Grande Lição," Idéias & Livros, *Jornal do Brasil*, October 4, 2008.

one whose interpretation naturally brings forth the problem of representation, which in turn, according to the figurative reading we suggested, would shed light on specific literary dynamics. It is only once we take into consideration the contemporary literary scene in Brazil that Cadu's (and Almino's) choice of emphasizing the issue of realism reveals all of its import. It is in fact the surging wave of the "novo realismo" that seems to rule the seas of literary reception in Brazil today. This national phenomenon is in turn part of a much wider trend, which has recently seen a spike in the publication of historical novels, biographies, autobiographies, autobiographical novels and essays, and so forth, that consistently thrive in what can be vaguely described as "Western markets." Cadu's intervention appears, therefore, akin to what in Italy is called "critica militante," something quite different from "engaged writing." "Militare" in Italian means "to be a soldier" and the war here is a thoroughly literary one. The "critico militante" is the one who takes a stand for or against recently published works. This is what Cadu and Almino through him are doing here: they are (certainly polemically, even if not openly so) marking their position *against* the "novo realismo brasileiro."

The character who embodies this literary current in the novel is Escadinha, distinguished by an iron will to climb socially combined with a great marketing ability. As I previously stated, I believe that Almino might have combined the traits of actual people in order to create Escadinha, in a way similar to what Proust did with some of his characters. While they were not *personages à clef* (as I think Escadinha is not) they could be traced back at least in part to actual living beings. While I cannot state with certainty who in this case the real authors are, I think there is a good possibility that Escadinha might be a narrative device hinting at writers such as Caco Barcellos, Fernando Bonassi, or André Sant'Anna, together with some authors who have been grouped under the label of "literatura marginal," such as Drauzio Varella and Luiz Alberto

Mendes. On the other hand, I can state with certainty that other authors often listed as belonging to the "novo realismo" should be left out, particularly one of the most technically sophisticated, João Gilberto Noll, whose writing is characterized unlike that of most of the authors quoted by very profound stylistic research. As we will see, it is style that plays a major role in Cadu's attempt to found the validity of art on something other than realistic mimesis.

So how is the "novo realismo brasileiro" characterized in the *Livro*? This is particularly relevant to the issue of literary engagement, since in some ways contemporary Brazilian realism, particularly the "marginal" variant, can be considered an active seat of political commitment. However, this is not what Cadu's emphasizes in his first introduction of Escadinha, "um artista plástico com o apelido de um famoso bandido."[48] On the contrary, he highlights the graphic nature of his art, its self-complacency, and Escadinha's rejoicing in marginality:

> Há alguns anos o Escadinha ficara famoso com quadros feitos de excrementos. Matérias fecais coloridas e sem cheiro, vistas por uns como bonitas, por outros como dotadas de alto poder crítico. Agora me anunciava que fazia sucesso com suas fotos digitais, expostas no Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil. ... [Lindas] não eram. Tinham um excesso de efeitos visuais, as cores da noite deixando listras coloridas sobre travestis, bandidos, prostitutas, cadáveres...[49]

"Thugs, prostitutes and corpses" are the marks of poverty and urban decay in Brazil, but if Escadinha's art seems to reflect on these issues on the surface, in Cadu's view, it is also exploiting them. Cadu is thus reluctant to follow Escadinha's success story: "Tive escrúpulos de fotografar as famílias de mendigos que se perfilavam em bom ângulo. Preferia os manacás-da-serra, as quaresmeiras, que podiam compor o painel que eu concebera."[50] While Escadinha rejoices in the exhibition of the life of the slums, he couples this attitude with a knack for self-promotion which turnsit into a consummate *parvenu*: "Escadinha desfilava de um lado para o outro, distribuindo sorrisos e cumprimentos. Freqüentar todas as recepções era um ingrediente de

[48] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 40.
[49] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 40-41.
[50] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 47.

sua formula do successo, que também incluía ser simpatico, contar vantagem sobre o que fazia e inventar conceitos incompreensíveis. Não era difícil enganar quem, como a maioria da humanidade, era incapaz de ver."[51] Cadu's complaint is directed at Escadinha's contradictory politics, which turn marginality into an object of consumption. This is compounded with a lack of technical sophistication: "O trabalho do Escadinha não tinha a consistência, a qualidade estética nem o acabamento técnico do meu."[52]

However, despite all of his deep reservations about Escadinha's artistic career, Cadu feels the pressure to conform to the predominant currents of artistic research so strongly that he decides to give realism at least one try. The results, though, are not convincing:

> Logo me dei conta que aquelas foto [da vila Paulo Antônio] eram frias. Nelas não cabiam o sonho nem a imaginação. A miséria não é um dado apenas objetivo. Não consiste em materiais precários, nem na inexistência de coisas ou alimentos. Precisa de um rosto onde se possa observar o sentimento da falta e o desejo não satisfeito. *Eu queria fotografar não apenas a necessidade, mas também a inveja, o desejo e a revolta.*
>
> Eu já adquirira a prática de fotografar pessoas – políticos e mulheres, principalmente. *Agora usaria minha máquina não para exaltar o personagem, nem para festejá-lo, nem mesmo para criticá-lo, mas sim para entendê-lo.* Seguindo os preceitos de grandes mestres da fotografia, disparei o motor da máquina sobre uma mulher que encontrei casualmente na rua, como se fosse uma metralhadora na busca do instante preciso e da exposição certa não apenas da luz, volumes e textura, mas também da pobreza, exploração e dignidade.[53] (The italics are mine).

This quote presents some significant remarks that can help us better understand the nature of Cadu's critique of realism. Cadu is concerned, first of all, with the thematic limitations that would result from the choice of representing marginal milieux along the lines employed by Escadinha, when only the social reality of "necessidade" would emerge, obfuscating the wider spectrum of human feeling ("inveja, desejo, revolta"). Second of all, Cadu is uncomfortable with the moral attitude assumed by this sort of "marginal" realism. He is not willing to let his art become the conveyor of openly moral and therefore political stances ("Agora usaria minha

[51] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 119.
[52] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 53.
[53] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 183.

máquina não para exaltar o personagem, nem para festejá-lo, nem mesmo para criticá-lo, mas sim para entendê-lo.") Cadu strongly distances himself from the commitment of "novo realismo," where an ethical stance, however compromised by its occasional superficiality or contradictory nature, is almost always discernible. Cadu's misgivings toward the particular sort of mimetic art emblematized by Escadinha run even deeper as he begins to question the very possibility of an art about the real. In foregrounding the mimetic potential of art, we forget that any representation remains inherently problematic ("A essência da fotografia é representar a realidade, você sabe disso," Aída tells him; "Uma realidade instantânea," Cadu replies "passageira e muitas vezes mentirosa").[54]

Cadu thus questions not only the ethical and the political but also the epistemological status of realism, and this drives his life-long series of attempts at formulating an alternative artistic practice, which will in time find its climactic moment in the exhibition where he eventually is able to show his pictures to the public. The exhibits are a number of large "panéis" or stands, some of which, on the "parede intimista,"[55] include pictures of objects that are linked in Cadu's memory to his relationship with Joana. Some (the "painéis de triângulos") are composed of photos of "pêlo púbico,"[56] arranged entirely according to formal elements (their texture and geometrical shape) though with a history "por trás de cada uma delas,"[57] and, finally, others include pictures of flowers. In Cadu's photographs "reality" appears to be filtered through at least two main synergic attitudes that, significantly, are also active in the literary art of João Almino himself. These are, firstly, a stylistic sensibility, and secondly, the decision to combine mimesis with memory. It is memory, this unrepresentable and impermanent element, which

[54] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 67.
[55] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 81.
[56] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 76
[57] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 65

lends the "parede intimista" its artistic value.[58] The result is that representation becomes for Cadu and, it is safe to add, for Almino as well, an operation where the mimetic element is not necessarily the most prominent one: "A realidade" indeed "também são flores."[59]

If realism, in its local variant of the "novo realismo," forms one of the two foci of Cadu's considerations of art, and, metaphorically, of literature, the other appears to be his constant preoccupation with the issue of the socio-economic implications of art, namely with what we could call the problem of cultural capital. This should not, by now, come to us as a surprise. As we previously saw, Almino's preoccupations with the literary go further than compounding novelistic mimesis with stylistic climaxes to include the issue of literary prestige. Once again, then, Cadu's predicament is a metaphor for Almino's own concerns and, more generally, for those of the contemporary novelist, like many of today's authors with whom Cadu has been saddled throughout his professional life without receiving adequate recognition: "Meu problema era que os outros, me considerando fotógrafo medíocre, não reconheciam o grande artista que vivia dentro de mim."[60] These preoccupations cannot help but remind us of the general crisis in cultural capital undergone by writers in contemporary Brazil, a crisis that has one of its causes, as noted by Tânia Pellegrini and Renato Franco,[61] in the onslaught made on literature by a host of media that competes for the public's attention, and among which those that have been more successful have been the visual ones. But then, isn't Cadu himself a photographer? Here, indeed,

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[58] In this interesting quote Cadu summarizes the two attitudes: "- Toda foto é única. Nenhuma é jamais igual à outra, e isso por uma razão muito simples: porque nenhum instante da vida se repete. Concordas?

- No caso dessa tua série, chega-se a perder essa dimensão da fotografia.

- Guga, veja a enorme variedade de formas! As fotos não são homogêneas, irmão. De jeito nenhum! Depois, há um interesse pelo que está por trás de cada uma. E também por suas texturas, desenhos e volumes, sem falar do diálogo sutil entre os triângulos." João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 78.

[59] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 222 (this is the title to section no. 57).

[60] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 24. See also, 83-84.

[61] See Tânia Pellegrini, *A Imagem e a Letra: Aspectos da Ficão Brasileira Contemporânea* (Campinas: Mercado das Letras, 1999), 147 and following; see also Renato Franco, *Itinerário Político do Romance Pós-64: A Festa* (São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 1998), 122.

we find ourselves in an interpretive predicament: on the one hand the unsatisfactory reception of Cadu's *photography* hints metaphorically at a crisis in *literary* prestige, yet such a crisis has happened precisely because of an onslaught of *visual* media. As if this entanglement were not enough, Cadu's reflections on his failures as a *photographer* are performed in *writing*. João Cézar de Castro Rocha's argues that Almino's finally vindicates the primacy of literature:

> O Quarteto de Brasília, porém, é a resposta de Almino à situação contemporânea: a literatura torna-se indispensável precisamente porque a terra virou residência de gente como Eduardo Kaufman. Mesmo nas faculdades de letras apressados funcionários do contemporâneo discutem cinema, ciberespaço; em suma, rendem-se ao universo audiovisual. E a literatura? Como em Até o fim do mundo, de Wim Wenders, o que permite a Cadu articular sua visão perdida é a palavra, é a narrativa—ou seja, a literatura. Eis, talvez, a lição mais importante que João Almino oferece a seus leitores.[62]

Things are, I believe, somewhat more complex. Almino's *Livro* cannot be simply considered as a manifesto stating a renewed commitment to literature in the face of the hardships today's writers endure in a public sphere progressively more impervious to the written word. It is true that despite facing continual disregard and despite being eventually compelled to sell his works for a pittance, Cadu has been remarkably persistent in his belief in the continued practice of a not-merely-mimetic photography, and, at the metaphorical level, a not-merely-mimetic literature. It is also true, outside of the metaphor, that Cadu's descriptions of his pictures become vehicles for a veritable obsession with cultured style in the *Livro*, so that while Almino acknowledges that literary art is assaulted by visual media, he also, with the very same operation, reabsorbs the visual into the fabric of literary discourse. Yet a problem emerges where the two levels of interpretation, the metaphorical and the literal, cross. This crossing cannot be ruled out because the vicinity of the two levels is too intimate not to elicit their mutual encounter. Since Cadu recounts his commitment to photography/literature through a different artistic medium, namely

[62] João Cezar de Castro Rocha, "Uma Declaração de Princípios: João Almino Termina o 'Quarteto de Brasília' e Elege a Palavra Narrada Como a Grande Lição," Idéias & Livros, *Jornal do Brasil*, October 4, 2008.

literary writing, and since the former hints at the second, this triggers a loop of signification where any notice of Cadu's metaphorical persistence in photography/literature needs to deal with the realization that photography/literature is eventually substituted by something that remains, despite the metaphorical connection, *other* than itself (in his old age, Cadu doesn't even try to publish the old *diário fotográfico*, but decides instead to employ it to *write* the *Livro*). Cadu's writing becomes an account not just of persistence but, *at the same time*, supersedes photography/literature. All of Almino's disenchantment resides in this loop of meaning. His celebration of the literary under the guise of photography also recounts a final abandonment. The celebrated photographer eventually decides to discard that form of art to which he had devoted his whole life, and literature goes with it. Thus any celebration of the literary cannot but remain a melancholic one, a melancholia not far from that elicited by Almino's disenchanted gaze toward Brasilia and the failed modernity it represents. Such celebration, in brief, is a self-undermining one, and this is the reason Almino's peculiar "recovery" of the literary remains different from that, say, of Renato Pompeu or Ivan Ângelo. While in their work the "empreitada literária" was considered a new form of commitment alongside political engagement, in Almino's case the literary is embraced with the knowledge that this embrace is tantamount to a defeat. Only after we mark this distance between Almino and those others from the seventies can we consider them as precursors of certain aspects Almino's fiction. Grasping such disenchantment, utterly integral to Almino's vindication of the literary, remains crucial to an accurate appraisal of the import of his reflections on literary engagement.

Cadu's Post-Engagement

The issue of literary engagement and, more specifically, the question of the nature of its formulation in Almino's novel, is crucial not just because engagement clearly represents one of the main themes running through the *Livro das Emoções*, but especially because it is into this very theme that we can follow the several fundamental threads developed throughout the book which we have tried to track in the course of the chapter. Indeed, in the *Livro,* the conceptualization of literary engagement is integrally linked to the specific discussions we presented earlier: those on temporality, on the post-modernity of Brasilia as a failed post-utopia, and on the role and nature of the literary. I believe that his work cannot be fully comprehended without acknowledging that it is the site of this remarkable accumulation.

Almino's interest in formulating a peculiar conception of engagement can be traced, as we have seen *supra*, to his early studies in political theory. Thanks to his academic work at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, he had come into contact with Claude Lefort, an intellectual who was himself trying to test the limits of the conception of engagement that prevailed at the time. Around a decade later, Almino published his first work of fiction, just a few years after the democratic rule in Brazil began. Despite his inclusion in that novel of a chapter on a "subaltern" woman from the northeast (the paradigmatic "nordestina," a type closely associated with Brazilian engaged literature) his particular treatment of this character was noted as deliberately trying to avoid an engagé caricature. As João Luiz Lafetá wrote, "a delicateza com que o autor trata a interioridade de Berenice revaloriza o tema regionalista e ultrapassa a caricatura engajada a que fomos tão habituados."[63] Cadu, the protagonist of Almino's fourth novel, is the last-to-date and most sophisticated attempt by the author at providing a fictional reflection on this problematic. While Cadu, as we saw, criticizes the ethics

[63] João Luiz Lafetá, "Entre a Fotografia e o Romance," Ilustrada, *Folha de S. Paulo*, October 25, 1987.

inherent in the "novo realismo brasileiro" (the very basis of its engaged attitude), he nevertheless himself acts as an "engaged" artist of sorts, in a whole subplot entailing his confrontation with a corrupt politician, Eduardo Kaufman, against whom Cadu decides to employ his art—as well as against the sort of Brazil Kaufman represents. It is precisely in this fine equivocation between criticizing any ethical commitment and taking part in ethical behavior through art that the *Livro* develops its take on literary engagement.

While Cadu's art—we shouldn't forget—operates in a different register most of the time, namely one thoroughly deprived of any ethical import, those almost-engaged moments remain crucial in understanding Cadu's overall outlook. Almino emphasizes their importance when he has Cadu state early on in his compositional diary that his confrontation with Eduardo Kaufman, from which all of Cadu post-engaged art originates, plays such a significant role in the *Livro* that the very existence of this work hinges on Cadu's finding the right relationship to the memory of Kaufman:

> *Não vou conseguir adiantar o livro. Há dois dias não paro de pensar em Eduardo Kaufman, o que me paralisa. Tenho de me decidir. Ou o esqueço e serei econômico em meus comentários sobre ele, ou então o livro todo será sobre aquele canalha e suas canalhices. Um ser desprezível não merece um livro.*[64]

Despite his unwanted closeness to the hated Kaufman, who was responsible for Cadu's loss of his lover Joana, for which Cadu relentlessly seeks revenge, Cadu knows that only a suitable degree of detachment from his rival can enable him to continue the book. This is all the more necessary since in the *Livro* Kaufman's character has wider resonance, and is depicted as the paradigmatic Brazilian politician. He is utterly hypocritical, consumed with lust for power, and does not stop at anything in order to achieve his objectives. He appears to embody throughout the novel the human type responsible for the failings of the Brazilian state. Thus if, on the one

[64] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 21-22.

hand, Cadu is careful to remark that for him Kaufman is more than anything a personal enemy, on the other he cannot avoid commenting, in his compositional diary, both on the state of Brazil and, shortly afterwards, on Kaufman:

> *Hoje é o dia da pátria, e estão comemorando na rua minhas virtudes e defeitos nacionais. Ouvi no computador a descrição do desfile militar feita por um canal de televisão. Escutei também um discurso sobre tudo o que o país conquistou no mundo, na indústria, na agricultura, no espaço... Loas e mais loas aos avanços tecnológicos... Não cheguei a me emocionar. Preferia avanços morais e políticos. Meu patriotismo nunca foi além da tentativa de destruir Eduardo Kaufman, um câncer em nossa cultura política.*
>
> *Na verdade, ainda não decidi sequer se sou contra ou a favor de fronteiras nacionais.*[65]

In another passage, the double-pronged nature of Cadu's confrontation with Kaufman is even clearer. Kaufman's actions can have both personal and collective implications for Cadu, and at the very same time:

> Mas algo havia ali. Eu ouvia rumores sobre aplicações espúrias dos fundos de pensão, sobre superfaturamento em publicidade estatal... As leis escorregavam pelo lamaçal. Queria contribuir para o engrandecimento moral da nação, que era também de meu interesse particular. Afinal, Eduardo havia roubado o país e minha mulher. Eu estava livre, e minha liberdade ia custar caro a Eduardo Kaufman.[66]

Cadu's conflict with Kaufman circles this ambiguity, as Kaufman inevitably stands for something beyond himself (Brasilia, the nation), while Cadu tries constantly to quash any wider significance ("*meu patriotismo nunca foi além da tentativa de destruir Eduardo Kaufman*"). Through this very attitude, one that refuses the almost inevitable political import of his response to Kaufman's actions, Cadu exercises a refusal of any ideological commitment, in a move of melancholic detachment not unlike that at the origin of the post-modern (blind) gaze by which Cadu appraises both Brasilia and the country.

In his construction of Cadu's character, Almino included a crucial reference to Lispector's short depiction of the "brasiliários," a people who "had nothing to die for." Cadu blindly gazes at Brasilia with a similar attitude. It is without any enthusiasm or sense of rejection,

[65] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 170.
[66] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 96.

while he tries not to inform his opinions by any set of principles or ideological lines in a way that would appear to be politically un-committed:

> *Mas se não me entusiasmo com o que melhorou, tampouco me revolta o que piorou. Tantos problemas novos têm surgido... Novas guerras, novas doenças... Brasília ficou mais humana e por isso mais cruel, capaz de crimes mais terríveis. Perdeu a aura de cidade futurista para virar uma cidade como as outras*.[67]

This peculiar attitude also possesses striking temporal aspects (as we discussed earlier), since the sense of time it generates exits the developmental ascent of "intermediate" or emplotted time to inhabit instead a dimension where future, past, and present relinquish their linearity. Such temporal entanglement emerges, for instance, in this passage from Cadu's compositional diary: "*já estou velho o suficiente para saber que o futuro que vislumbrávamos nunca foi nem sera atingido, mas ainda guardo juventude bastante para viver sem passado nem futuro e sobretudo para jogar conversa fora com uma jovem simpática.*"[68] There can be no observable development or regression when the subject is bent on eschewing an ideological commitment. Any teleological perspective would, in turn, disappear and together with it any evidence of a narrative. The singularity of Cadu's endeavor resides in the way in which, while he still expresses a sensibility that can be considered in both political outlook and temporal sense distinctly postmodern, he attempts to recover an engaged and therefore modern dimension. Cadu's post-modernity, in other words, is both haunted and nurtured by the inclusion of some form of modernity, from which it moves away as soon as it recognizes its presence, only to end up including it once more. This movement of rejection and inclusion is perhaps not unrelated to the complex interactions taking place in the novel between written and visual discourse, where one ekphrastically includes the other.

[67] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 33.
[68] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 210.

Here I would like to reiterate a point that I have already introduced, and which I think is relevant to an understanding of Cadu's peculiar post-engagement: the post-modern detachment he feels as he considers Brazilian recent history represents at least as much a response to the failings of democratic rule as it does to those of the dictatorial period. Cadu's melancholic assessment of Brazil's developmental modernity takes place once *all* the modernist projects have exhausted themselves, *including* the democratic one. Eduardo Kaufman is an example of this attention to Brazil's most recent society. Kaufman's political ascent only takes place after the democratic opening of the Brazilian political system, which is certainly presented in the *Livro* as a not very substantial improvement upon the years of the military regime. I cannot stress this point enough: in order to understand the particular formulation of (post)engagement that Almino is proposing through Cadu it is essential that we grasp the fact that it follows a thorough exhaustion of Brazil's modernizing dreams. Despite the gloom that already characterized Brazilian literature in the seventies and early eighties, when the country was in the throes of autocracy's last years, those dreams, however tarnished, had still some life in them. It is once democracy itself has failed that the gloom becomes an all-encompassing melancholia, that is, a detachment without revolt or enthusiasm. This is the melancholia that oozes from every line of the *Livro,* as well as from other books by Almino, and which appears to be the melancholia (if the reader forgives me the self-contradictory expression) of "mature" post-modernity.

Cadu's melancholic assessment of Brazilian modernity is fundamentally akin to the novel's sophisticated attitude toward the literary which I previously illustrated, imbued as it is by a profound sense of failure and disillusion, which makes any commitment to literature always already marked by the awareness of its ultimate futility. Once again, attachment and detachment, exclusion and inclusion, work together to suggest that post-engagement can only be conveyed

through a literary medium that is at the same time a reflection on its own vanity. If, as Benoît Denis wrote, "l'engagement aboutit toujours plus ou moins à un questionnement sur l'*être* de la littérature,"[69] then when post-engagement comes to the fore the "questionnement" becomes much more than an interrogation of the literature. It becomes a process of critical undermining of the literary which nevertheless refuses to let go of it, and clings to it all the more stubbornly. However, if by now we have clarified the theoretical underpinnings of the complex triangulation between post-modernity, metafiction, and engagement carried out in the *Livro*, another question opens up: how is Cadu able *in practice* to solve this convoluted riddle? What would such a post-engaged art actually look like? Can we find specific instances of it within Cadu's own confrontation with Kaufman?

There is, of course, an obvious answer to this question. It is Almino's own novel as a whole that represents precisely the actualization of the theory of literature it fictionally develops. Isn't the metafiction precisely a way of combining an aesthetic to a theoretical dimension? I believe that the full import of this position cannot be grasped without having first examined whether the major character who operates *inside* that fiction, Cadu, is able to respond successfully to the same question, and if so, how. There are instances in the novel where post-engagement is carried out in actuality, which happens when the three elements of the triangulation come together as a whole. More concisely, that response consists in an *identification of the aesthetic and the political,* with the temporal aspect informing each of the two terms. Cadu's confrontation with Kaufman and with Kaufman's Brazil represents, as we saw, a sort of non-principled protest: "ao contrário de Aída, eu não tinha o otimismo da revolta.

[69] Benoît Denis, *Littérature et Engagement: de Pascal à Sartre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 296-297.

Além disso, não precisava provar uma bondade que me era alheia;"[70] yet this doesn't stop Cadu from taking action:

> Não esperava nada da vida, nem do amor, não esperava sequer a conquista do nada e do vazio. Contudo, isto ... me deixava ... aliviado e combativo. Sem a angústia de quem teme a derrota, me esforçava para atingir meus objetivos e principalmente para vencer meu maior inimigo, o que roubara o país e minha mulher, Eduardo Kaufman.[71]

Such actions are in turn qualified in the text by a number of very precise and significant expressions, among which I would like to emphasize a few, as they shed light on Cadu's major instance of post-engagement. Cadu's actions appear in the *Livro* as tantamount to a life-style (a "maneira de viver"), they hinge on a sense of "opportunity," and they are driven by a "pure, strong wind." These terms and expressions create a configuration of meaning that points progressively closer toward the domain of the aesthetic and the idea of style: "não consigo ver a política como o partido azul contra o vermelho—respondi, reproduzindo uma opinião de Guga.—O que me interessa é certa *maneira de viver*."[72] In the absence of any overarching political ideology, such a "way of living" is bound to refer only to itself, and this is why it become a life-*style* in the sense that there is nothing governing it but its own rule. As a result, its temporal dimension would not belong to the developmental paradigm of modern time, but rather belong to a post-modern dimension. It is indeed "a *oportunidade,* [and not any sort of telos] "que faz o homem e faz o ladrão," and that "também faz o fotógrafo e sua ética."[73] The fact that the word "ethics" is employed is of course significant, since it is here invoked only so as to thwart any presupposition of an ideological telos. These are the ethics of the post-politics, the ethics of post-engagement. Such an absence of ideological commitment does not bar action or movement, which on the contrary become quite distinctive in nature, and thus are likened to a particular sort

[70] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 128.
[71] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 113.
[72] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 139. The italics are mine.
[73] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 50.

of wind: *"tenho a impressão de que as forças motoras de minha vida foram puros ventos, mas ventos fortes, destes que dão sentido certo ao movimento e levam consigo o que encontram pela frente.*"[74] Once again these "*ventos fortes*" and "*puros ventos*," "*que dão sentido certo ao movimento*" lead us back to the centrality of style, which is also a particular sort of movement, a pure movement imbued by a sense of necessity (the "*sentido certo*") which nevertheless does not refer to anything outside of itself. Post-engagement, in other words, gradually becomes a stylistic statement.

This becomes clear when Cadu, already old, finally has the "opportunity" to employ his photography against Kaufman. It is Kaufman himself, just elected for his third stint as Congressman, who asks Cadu for some of the pictures Cadu has taken of him, with the intention of publishing them in a book:

> Eduardo propunha reunir num livro as fotos que eu fizera dele e me pagaria por minha autorização para expô-las.
>
> Pensei muito no que responder. Seria a segunda vez que me venderia a ele. Além disso, fora uma falta de respeito a compra daquelas fotos. Quanto reais valiam meus princípios?
>
> Concluí que não estaria me vendendo. Eduardo não percebia a armadilha em que caía. As vinganças que eu planejava iam constantemente diminuindo de tamanho com o tempo, mas, em compensação, se tornando mais viáveis. Aquela era minúscula, porém concreta e possível. Dei-lhe por escrito a autorização que me pedia. ... O grotesco daquelas fotos não era invenção do fotógrafo. Estava patente nos gestos e comportamento do fotografado. Podia haver prova maior do que a foto teatral de número 61 acima, em que Eduardo Kaufman aparece de boca aberta, em pose de cantor de ópera, olhos semifechados, ao lado de uma Ana estupefata? A propaganda de um banco conhecido, visível ao fundo, é alusão a suas negociatas. As notas de reais e a frase que, com o corte feito pelo enquadramento, se limitou à palavra "contribua" são referências ao dinheiro ilícito que circulou em suas campanhas. A criancinha que passa e aparece embaixo, no primeiro plano, um índio barrigudo e miserável, bem como a palavra "nunca" em destaque num cartaz afixado atrás de Eduardo, acrescentam mais uma sugestiva camada de interpretação. Escolhi aquela foto para a capa do livro proposto, pela nitidez de todos os seus planos, sua luminosidade e o ótimo contraste de suas cores.[75]

Cadu's opposition is performed through a medium whose effectiveness—"minúscula"—or rather lack thereof is certainly not in question; it is also the result of an ethico-political compromise, as

[74] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 236.
[75] João Almino, *O Livro das Emoções* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 237-238.

those pictures will be actually published at the behest of Kaufman himself, who intends to turn them into an instrument of political propaganda. Once again it is the "ethics of opportunity" which override any concern with ideological principles. Cadu carefully selects pictures intended to perform a criticism both subtle enough not to be perceived by Kaufman himself while potentially able to be detected by the book's readers (or rather, watchers). This is achieved by a sophisticated use of photographic *style*, as they are carefully constructed as complex combinations of signs in close dialogue with each other: "a propaganda de um banco conhecido, visível ao fundo, é alusão a suas negociatas. As notas de reais e a frase que, com o corte feito pelo enquadramento, se limitou à palavra "contribua" são referências ao dinheiro ilícito que circulou em suas campanhas." In order to elicit the political message their author wants to convey—in order, that is, to be read as engaged art—they need to be perceived not as political messages (which indeed they are, ostensibly, only for Kaufman) but primarily as aesthetic artifacts. It is only when a hermeneutical reading examines the pictures' style that the political disappears into the aesthetics, that their deeper (post)political dimension come to the surface. It reveals a dimension that includes an awareness both of the precariousness of such an aesthetic-political experience and of the post-ideological attitude of their author. These pictures, in other words, embody a peculiar, post-engaged *stylistics of politics.*

If in the *Livro* we then find an intriguing instance of post-engaged art, it should not be lost on us that a further, crucial level of reference is in place—the one we have previously called *metaphorical*, which implicates photography and literature in a peculiar loop of signification. This leads us to consider the very literary artifact we are reading (Almino's rather than Cadu's *Livro*) as another of the terms with which Cadu's photography (together with Cadu's reflections on photography) is in conversation. The complex combination of stylistic sophistication, post-

ideological (meta)theory and metaliterary reflection makes Almino's own *Livro* the prime referent of Cadu's own attempt at post-engagement. All the steps we have taken so far, illustrating first the persistences of Almino's Parisian education in this mature work, then its formulation of a post-modern temporality and its emphasis on the literary, attest to it. However, when we look at this larger aesthetico-theoretical artifact we need to keep in mind one crucial *caveat*: the fictionality of Almino's novel which bars us from ultimately holding onto its theoretical reflections as conclusions with actual epistemological validity. Such conclusions appear to state a truth only to withdraw into their fictional nature, thus realizing the peculiar aptitude of fictional thought for giving voice to the postmodern condition. This deduction, when seen within the larger framework of our discussion will give, I hope, a new depth to Castro Rocha's early guess about another of Almino's novels: "salvo engano, por isso mesmo, Almino vislumbra na ficcionalidade uma forma especial de pensamento, um modo particular de propor perguntas que não supõem respostas... O romance de Almino propõe assim a verdadeira força da experiência literária: literatura é pensamento em ação; *literatura é filosofia que não pára de pensar*."[76] Indeed, in Almino's *Livro* post-engagement, belonging to the literary domain appears to us not as an answer or as a solid epistemological gain, but rather as a never fulfilled and yet constantly renewed melancholic longing.

Finally, I would like to touch upon a new aspect of the philosophical and aesthetic operation carried out by Almino in *O Livro*, which might open up an avenue for further investigation while reinforcing some of the fundamental characteristics of this work as I have tried to illustrate them. Clearly, the character of Cadu retains some of the traits (though he misses many others) that Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda counted among those that characterize the

[76] João Cezar de Castro Rocha, "As Estações de um Autor: o *Work in Progress* de João Almino," in *Imaginário* 13, no. 14 (2007).

sociability lying at the "root" of Brazilianness.[77] In particular, Cadu shows the flair for personal relationships typical of the *homem cordial*, to the extent that a set of personal motivations is always present in his dealings with Kaufman. Almino's *Livro*, instead of emphasizing the exotic potential of these traits, activates an essayistic dimension where they cease to refer back to a specific setting, to assume instead a larger signification. This is a peculiar result of the two-pronged nature of post-engaged literature as I've attempted to explore it: its longing for engagement is always rooted in a very specific socio-political setting (most directly, in this case, in Brazil's dictatorial past), yet the theoretical and stylistic devices employed in giving literary shape to the "overcoming" of engagement may be in conversation with the most distant authors. We have already found such local-universal duplicity in Almino's treatment of the theme of Brasilia. *O Livro* employs the capital city of Brazil as a setting in order to reinforce the situatedness of the novel. As it is the result of a peculiar blending of all of its people, it stands for the whole of the country. At the same time, Brasilia, through the peculiar ideological structure of its very space, takes us once more to a level of signification that is abstracted from the local, and attains universal theoretical import. It is thus not a coincidence that in the *Livro* we detect a long polemic against the "novo realismo brasileiro," a literary movement that carries out the exoticization of Brazilian society. Almino is careful to steer away from it, which is a decision that can be read through the framework of interpretation that I have proposed in these pages, in the hope that the set of characteristics which I have tried to map under the label of "post-engaged" may offer a key to further the investigation of this new issue as well.

[77] See Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, *Raízes do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio Editora, 1988), 101 and ff.

CHAPTER II

"IDEOLOGICAL DECENTRALIZATION" AND THE VOICE OF THE UN-SELF: CRISTOVÃO TEZZA'S POST-ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN METAFICTION AND AUTOFICTION

> Entendo o ato de escrever como uma aventura ética, que mexe com tudo que está em nossa volta, e não apenas o ato de polir um objeto brilhante que repousa docilmente nas nossas mãos.[78]
>
> Cristovão Tezza

Regrettably if not unexpectedly, the body of criticism extant on Cristovão Tezza, one of the major writers at work today in Brazil and Latin America, appears quite limited if compared to the impressive amount of this writer's literary output and to the longstanding nature of his commitment to fiction: here is one more testimony to the small critical attention given to contemporary writers in Brazil today. Yet despite its relative scantiness this critical corpus manifests an intriguing amount of disagreement as to the specificities of Tezza's literary oeuvre: while Karl Erik Schøllhammer focuses on the role of autobiography in his fiction,[79] Mónica Rector and Verônica Daniel Kobs[80] prefer to foreground Tezza's commitment to metafictional writing, and others praise the plurilinguism and even the polyphony of his novels (Clarice Nadir

[78] Cristovão Tezza, "Diálogo," interview with Carlos Alberto Faraco, in *Cristovão Tezza*, edited by Rosse Marye Bernardi and Carlos Alberto Faraco (Curitiba: Universidade Federal do Paraná, 1994), 30.
[79] See Karl Erik Schøllhammer, *Ficção Brasileira Contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2009), 105-109.
[80] See Monica Rector , *Cristovão Tezza: o texto como pretexto* (paper presented at the Sixty-Sixth Annual SAMLA Convention, Savannah, Georgia, November 8, 1996). http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/p_textocomopretexto.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012). See also Verônica Daniel Kobs, "A metaficção e seus paradoxos: da desconstrução à reconstrução do mundo real/ficcional e das convenções literária" in *Scripta Uniandrade*, no. 4, (2006): 27-43.

von Borstel,[81] Léa Penteado Sajnaj, and Marcelle Elissa Wittkowski Hamann[82]). Rosse Marye Bernardi,[83] however, discusses the recurrence in Tezza's works of the theme of the middle-class, while several of the aforementioned critics have noted Tezza's *hippy* credentials.[84] If such critical disarray can be taken as evidence of the significance of Tezza's literary contributions, in my own intervention I will try to understand whether it is possible to suggest a more unified and coherent vision of his oeuvre. Obviously, I will not be able here to discuss in depth the whole of his production, which spans fifteen books of fiction written over more than three decades. However, by anchoring my reading within three specific works—*Trapo* (published in 1988, but written in 1982), *A Suavidade do Vento* (1991) and *O Filho Eterno* (2007)—I will suggest an interpretation which I believe is relevant to most of Tezza's fictional writings. In order to account for a number of the peculiarities of his fiction, it is necessary to understand how his narratives deal fictionally, meta-fictionally, and autofictionally with the legacy of anti-dictatorial political engagement. While critical readings of contemporary texts, especially of those that employ techniques often considered post-modern, frequently overlook this legacy, I believe that it is only when we trace the persistence of intellectual concerns first developed under the dictatorship that we are able to grasp, even in the case of an author like Tezza who published mostly after the fall of the authoritarian regime, the thematic configuration and peculiar relationship to the literary that obtains in his major works, including the most elaborately metafictional ones.

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[81] See Clarice Nadir von Borstel, "A heterogeneidade sociolingüística/pragmática na obra Trapo, de Cristovão Tezza," in *Espéculo*, no. 33 (2006), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/p_heterogeneidadetrapo.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).

[82] See Léa Penteado Sajnaj and Marcelle Elissa Wittkowski Hamann, "O dialogismo no romance *Trapo*, de Cristovão Tezza" in *@Letras*, 4, no. 4 (2002), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/odialogismo.doc (accessed on January 23, 2012).

[83] See Rosse Marye Bernardi, "A construção de um escritor" in *Cristovão Tezza*, ed. by Rosse Marye Bernardi and Carlos Alberto Faraco (Curitiba: Universidade Federal do Paraná, 1994), 5-16.

[84] Especially Rosse Marye Bernardi and Verónica Daniel Kobs in the recalled texts.

Cristovão Tezza owes much of his long-overdue fame to his recent novel *O Filho Eterno*. This book was awarded virtually all of the top literary prizes in the Lusophone world, and finally sanctioned Tezza's national stature. This exceptionally talented author has been continuously based in Curitiba, the capital of Paraná state, over the last two and a half decades and from there, he has had to confront a number of powerful obstacles to the circulation of his art: its distance from the national publishing centers, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro; the relatively muted nature of the local critical environment, where his works elicited only tepid and less than fully articulated responses; and finally—something with which any Brazilian author has to deal—the relative apathy of a public sphere where book reading has always been a marginal phenomenon. If through the success of *O Filho Eterno* Tezza eventually prevailed over these constraints (incidentally, this was also the first of his works to be published subsequently in translation), this achievement has also meant that the reception of his oeuvre has become even more jumbled. Given that *O Filho Eterno* is an ostensibly autobiographical book, or somewhat more precisely, an autofiction, Cristovão Tezza has found himself attached as a result to that "retorno do autor" in which recent critical work has identified a widening trend in Brazilian contemporary literature.[85] Yet if the "autobiographism" of this recent novel remains of central importance, it is my contention that it must be viewed within the general configuration of Tezza's multi-decade oeuvre, which in preceding years and for so long had stubbornly resisted precisely this sort of writing. The fact that Tezza ultimately relented, and produced an interesting instance of autofiction, must be carefully explained. To answer this question I will argue that it was Tezza's peculiar attempt at the literary formulation of a post-engaged attitude that consistently brought him to write novels which could not be classified as autofictional, and instead had to be *meta-*

[85] For a brief discussion of Tezza's success, see Karl Erik Schøllhammer, *Ficção Brasileira Contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2009), 106.

fictional. Yet even by resorting to metafiction, the particular formulations of post-engagement that Tezza's art reached remained ultimately unsettled. It was in order to further reflect on such instability that an autofiction was eventually required. It was the only kind of writing that could provide the author with the possibility of taking stock of his own oeuvre, to view it as an integral portion of his biographical narrative.

Educated during the military dictatorship (at the time of the 1964 coup he was only twelve), Tezza's own personal and intellectual life entailed a commitment to political radicalism early on. Son of a lawyer and teacher and thus born into an almost paradigmatic middle-class Brazilian family, Tezza nonetheless embarked as a teenager on a quest for an alternative way of living whose hallmarks were political engagement and a longing for an unmediated encounter with "nature."[86] These attempts were mainly inspired, as we will see in the following pages, by the Brazilian intellectual Wilson Galvão do Rio Apa and the theater group he directed, which despite their very local genealogy can be read as specific instantiations of larger leftist trends that operated on a national and international scale. Notwithstanding the radical character of these beginnings, as the Brazilian political landscape began to normalize Tezza himself came under increasing pressure to conform to a standard of middle-class respectability, a class that in democratizing Brazil quickly shed the taint of its former association with the power-block that supported the military governments. As a result of this drastic change in the configuration of political discourse, as well as Tezza's own integration into the machinery of the state through the institution of the university, any engaged position became increasingly untenable. However, at the same time he began to investigate the possibility of a post-engaged attitude in the pages of

[86] Léa Penteado Sajnaj and Marcelle Elissa Wittkowski Hamann, "O dialogismo no romance *Trapo*, de Cristovão Tezza" in *@Letras*, 4, n. 4 (2002): 30. http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/o dialogismo.doc (accessed on January 23, 2012).

his fiction in a consistent manner, which implies his longing to engage through literature as well as an awareness of the ultimate impossibility of doing so.

It was the choice of eschewing autobiographism that provided Tezza's art with some of the devices instrumental to formulating such post-engaged stance. By refraining from autofiction he was able, for instance, to stage in his narratives the confrontation of multiple subjectivities: almost every novel he wrote intertwines several voices and a number of storylines, with the significant outcome of fashioning fictional universes that while artistically cohesive remain ultimately uncentered. I will argue that this methodology is aimed at creating "ideologically decentered" fictional environments in which no ethico-political stance is ever committed to as a message to be openly conveyed to the reader. The most radical positions of the anti-dictatorial period are thus reformulated as merely partial truths, and they are constantly confronted by the middle-class conformism of the post-dictatorial period. *Trapo*, written during the uncertain "interregnum" of the last years of the military government, represents one of the foremost iterations of this compositional choice, which Tezza, as I will try to show in the course of the chapter, made in a number of works. While this flourishing of multiple subjectivities entails a very elaborate linguistic dimension described by some as a "polyphony,"[87] it is my contention that it covers a recurring duality between characters distributed around the two poles of engaged life and middle-class respectability, two foci that indeed appear to coincide with those that determined Tezza's own personal trajectory as he reports it in fiction in *O Filho Eterno*. Tezza's particular take on post-engaged art resides in the effort to reach a resolution between these two foci. In *Trapo,* it is expressed by two opposing characters as well as by two distinct linguistic

[87] See for instance Léa Penteado Sajnaj and Marcelle Elissa Wittkowski Hamann, "O dialogismo no romance *Trapo*, de Cristovão Tezza" in *@Letras*, 4, n. 4 (2002), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/o dialogismo.doc (accessed on January 23, 2012).

universes. Any attempt to resolve this conflict could not be based on the development of a decentered fictional environment alone, however, but had to be reached through meta-fiction.

This is the second characteristic of Tezza's writings that I will analyze, one that is, indeed, so prominent that other critics have considered it one of the hallmarks of his fiction. Still, there are not many compelling interpretations of this aspect of his work, and Tezza's metafiction has most frequently been read as a way of expressing the author's generic commitment to the practice of literature.[88] It is crucial to uncover a different, indeed almost directly opposed, dimension of Tezza's metafictionality, however, which is evident not only in *Trapo,* but most of all in the second novel I will closely analyze, *A Suavidade do Vento*. In my reading of this work, I will foreground the notion that an act of *discarding* is encoded at the heart of its peculiar metafictionality. This literary strategy is here employed in order to grasp the necessity of an *abandonment* of—rather than a commitment to—a certain form of literary practice. Tezza's peculiarly unresolved post-engagement is informed by a singular attitude of relinquishing, which is not limited simply to the development of uncentered narratives. In his writings, metafiction becomes a means for reflecting on the impossibility of writing a certain kind of literature (namely engaged fiction), which today seems unable to exist as anything other than a reflection on its own absence.

Only after analyzing these major issues—Tezza's engaged beginnings, the dichotomous polyphony of most of his novels, and the metafictional discarding at the heart of his literary practice—can *O Filho Eterno* be finally assessed. This book will then appear not just as the account, however successful and compelling, of the "real life" of the father of a child affected by

[88] See for instance Monica Rector , *Cristovão Tezza: o texto como pretexto* (paper presented at the Sixty-Sixth Annual SAMLA Convention, Savannah, Georgia, November 8, 1996). http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f artigos/p textocomopretexto.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012). This intervention, while not openly considering the question of metafiction, seems to touch upon precisely this problem even if from a less technical perspective.

Down syndrome—the theme emphasized in the book's reception—but rather as a profound and (again) painfully unresolved attempt at putting the writer's house in order in its two aspects, the literary and the autobiographical, in their reciprocal entanglement. In order to do this, Tezza elaborates his own take on the disputed question of autofiction, crafting a mildly fictionalized autobiography with a deep conceptual side that is also imbued with significant intertextual overtones. In this work, Tezza constructs one more duality between a quest for nature and the aspirations of bourgeois society, which he couples with that dividing father (his autofictional self) and (his) son. This time, in other words, instead of crafting multiple autonomous fictional subjectivities, he applies the dichotomy to his own represented life in the attempt to finally make sense of the polarities that structured his particular brand of post-engagement. The confrontation generated by this latest encounter of separate-and-joined poles eventually produces—unlike in a book like *Trapo*—a profoundly disenchanted resolution, though one which will confirm, yet for reasons different from those so far suggested by the critical discourse, the centrality of this work within Tezza's oeuvre. *O Filho Eterno* reveals Tezza's post-engagement as more than a mere literary construction, but rather as the *autofictional* fate of a post-dictatorial Brazilian writer as *both* a character and an author, whose profound commitment to radical living and communal life has found itself uncontrollably entangled with the bourgeois overtones of a disappointingly democratized and modernized society.

Radical Beginnings: Literature, Ethics, and Community

Tezza's intellectual life has been characterized by an early commitment to non-bourgeois living, which entails a vocal stance against the dictatorship. Such commitment found its first ideological articulation during Tezza's period of collaboration (starting in 1968) with the Centro

Capela de Artes Populares (CCAP), directed by W. Rio Apa, with whom Tezza worked until 1977.[89] During these crucial years, Tezza developed not only the motivating thrust that would sustain him as a writer for the rest of his life, but also some of the themes that would remain among his foremost and most consistent intellectual concerns and some of the techniques that would define his literary style. It is precisely as attempts to deal with the legacy of this early stage of his intellectual education, I will argue later, that we can read some of the most memorable narratives he crafted in the ensuing years.

Cristovão Tezza's formative period spanned the late 1960s and 1970s, the years of the military dictatorship's greatest authoritarianism. During these years, through his collaboration with Rio Apa and his group, Tezza played a small yet distinct role within that wider trend that saw leftist opposition organizations move from an emphasis on active and armed resistance (which by the beginning of the 1970s had been all but broken by the regime) to a nonviolent articulation of alternate values. The Centro Capela de Artes Populares, with which Tezza collaborated, can be considered a significant instance of this second phase of anti-dictatorial radicalism, which saw a significant recognition of "difference" as a marker of personal and social value. Maria Paula Nascimento Araujo is, to my knowledge, the only historian who has mapped this important socio-political shift in the landscape of the Brazilian left in detail. She provides a concise view of this transition in the following passage:

> Entre os personagens políticos mais importantes da década de 1970 estavam sem dúvida os movimentos das chamadas minorias políticas: negros, mulheres, homossexuais, índios, imigrantes, loucos, deficientes físicos, etc.
>
> Num certo sentido, esses movimentos eram produto das idéias e posturas suscitadas pelos acontecimentos de 1968. ... No entanto, em outros aspectos, tais movimentos, a partir de meados da década de 1970, passaram a representar uma ruptura com todo o movimento anterior. Basicamente são dois os pontos de ruptura: a rejeição à violência e a valorização da diferença, da singularidade e da alteridade. ... No Brasil, quase todas as organizações de luta armada criadas entre 1966 e 1969 desapareceram durante os primeiros anos da década de 70, desbaratadas pelo

[89] Cristovão Tezza, "Biografia," http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/p_biografia.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).

> órgãos de repressão política do governo militar ou dissolvidas por seus próprios militantes, que não encontravam mais caminho de ação política possível através delas. ... *A ferida da luta armada abriu campo para a visceral rejeição à violência que, em contraste com a década anterior, marcou a esquerda no Brasil e no mundo, a partir de meados dos anos 1970*. No Brasil, ainda sob ditadura militar, grupos, partidos e organizações rearticularam-se, buscando uma nova inserção na vida política do país, forçando a legalidade, procurando espaços abertos e públicos de atuação. A partir daí, um novo conjunto de organizações políticas se formou, desvinculado da opção pela luta armada e permeado por novos debates—em especial, pela discussão em torno da tática de enfrentamento da ditadura militar. A luta democrática, sua importância, seus impasses, limites e alcances tornou-se a questão principal.[90]

Many of the characteristics listed by Nascimento Araujo in her analysis of the "esquerda alternativa" can be found in Tezza's own immediate environment: the attempt at creating new public and open spaces for the negotiation of radical values, the effort to challenge the limits of legality and convention without resorting to violence, and the "valorização da diferença, da singularidade e da alteridade" can be all traced to the coterie that functioned around Rio Apa in the early Seventies and of which Cristovão Tezza was for so long a member.

While the Centro Capela de Artes Populares took part in this wider shift toward an "alternative left," the ways in which it enacted this trend remained quite specific. If there is regrettably very little critical literature on the CCAP and on its guiding figure, Wilson Galvão de Rio Apa, we do have one article, opportunely penned by Tezza himself, where the former disciple retrospectively assesses Rio Apa's intellectual contributions, both in drama and in fiction (Rio Apa was also an author of novels).[91] It is apparent from Tezza's discussion that a first capital trait of his mentor's dramatic projects was the attempt to employ theater as a means of creating a non-bourgeois public space in which an alternative social and personal life could

[90] Maria Paula Nascimento Araujo, *A Utopia fragmentada: As Novas Esquerdas no Brasil e no Mundo na Década de 1970* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 2000), 97-98.

[91] Cristovão Tezza, "W. Rio Apa: as trilhas da Utopia" in *Letras*, no. 50 (1998): 59-71, http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/textos/resenhas/p_98_revletras.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012). The relative objectivity required by the genre of this piece (it's an academic article) as well as the effort on the author's part to reach a suitable distance from the object of the study (very rarely does Tezza refer to his own participation in the CCAP), certainly allow us to grant enough epistemological value to this piece of writing, yet even if a bias had crept onto Tezza's assessment of his former mentor, this would certainly not jeopardize our discussion. On the contrary, it would be quite to the point, as we are here concerned above all with Tezza's own perception of the environment where most of his artistic education took place.

take place. This endeavor reached one of its most sophisticated instantiations in the organization of yearly "representations," starting in 1975, of the Passion of Christ. These dramatizations had a number of very specific characteristics, which all contributed to actualizing a set of particular ethico-political beliefs:

> [Rio Apa] representou anualmente durante a Semana Santa - primeiro em Alexandra, Paraná, e a partir de 1977 nas dunas da Lagoa da Conceição, em Florianópolis - uma Paixão de Cristo por princípio descompromissada de proselitismo religioso, num espetáculo ao ar livre de dois dias que envolve cerca de uma centena de atores e é aberto à participação da platéia. Com o objetivo de eliminar (ou pelo menos suavizar) a fronteira entre a assistência e os atores, o espetáculo aceita desde cenas fixas com diálogos elaborados (mas com ampla margem de improviso e criação própria), até a liberdade de cenas paralelas em meio ao povo, refeições comunitárias, discussões, debates, movimentos de massa, etc. A cada ano, a figura de Cristo ganhava uma face diferente: o revolucionário, o santo popular, o quixote, o poeta, e até mesmo, surpreendentemente, o ateu - Cristo recusando-se a ser Deus em meio a um povo que exige dele esse papel.[92]

In the "Paixão," which Tezza fictionalized a few years later in *O Ensaio da Paixão*, one of his most interesting early works, a number of borders were broken down, including those between actors and audience, artistic genres, classes (the intellectuals and "o povo"), and religious faiths. During dictatorial Brazil, such proposals for a socio-political renovation could not but appear to be subversive, or at best to exist at the very margins of the law, although Tezza does not seem to have been harassed at all by the police during his many years of collaboration with the CCAP. His fictionalization of the "Paixão," however, does end with the jailing of all participants.

If the political message which informs this recreation of public space was clearly an anarchist one, in Rio Apa's thought anarchism was joined to a longing for a "natural" life:[93] "a proposta de Rio Apa," Tezza wrote, commenting on one of Rio Apa's literary works, "oculta nos traços anarquistas, tem uma raiz claramente rousseauniana. [...] Se hoje esse projeto parece irremediavelmente datado, para uma parte da minha geração—e eu me incluo inteiro aí—tinha

[92] Cristovão Tezza, "W. Rio Apa: as trilhas da Utopia" in *Letras*, no. 50 (1998), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/textos/resenhas/p_98_revletras.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).
[93] The setting of the "Paixão" was in fact not an urban but a fairly bucolic one: "as dunas da Lagoa da Conceição." Cristovão Tezza, "W. Rio Apa: as trilhas da Utopia" in *Letras*, no. 50 (1998), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/textos/resenhas/p_98_revletras.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).

um apelo irresistível."[94] As we will see in the final section of this chapter, Rio Apa's reference to Rousseau reaches far into the future and eventually structures Tezza's late autofictional novel *O Filho Eterno*. This anarchist's dream in a natural setting cannot but reveal a profound utopian drive, which was indeed a trait deeply ingrained in Rio Apa's mentorship:

> Enfim, qualquer que seja a avaliação que se faça do trajeto de W. Rio Apa, dos tempos de marinheiro aos últimos ensaios, o fato é que o conjunto de sua vida e de sua obra e o caráter multifacetado de sua arte jamais perderam de vista um nítido ponto de liga, que é a dimensão da Utopia.[95]

The utopian dimension that pervades the activities of the CCAP was once again in line with that which informed many other leftist organizations of the time.[96] As Tezza stated in another text (an interview given in early 2000), he felt that this component was central in his intellectual education:

> sou alguém cuja formação se deu nos anos 60 e 70, em que o ato de escrever tinha um forte conteúdo político, ético e existencial. Ser artista era, antes de tudo, 'tomar uma atitude.' O Brasil vivia sob uma ditadura militar, e qualquer projeto artístico acabava por bem ou por mal tomando esse fato como referência. No meu caso, 'ser de contra' era ser contra tudo. Vivi plenamente a utopia dos grandes sonhos da transformação da vida que fazia parte do imaginário de boa parte da minha geração.[97]

These two aspects of Rio Apa's intellectual guidance—his attention to socio-political spaces and his Rousseauian utopianism—were anchored in a third crucial one, namely, his emphasis on artistic practice. Indeed, in Rio Apa's thought, any attempt to realize a radical politics must necessarily pass through art.

A capital tenet in the thought of Tezza's mentor, and one that had an immense impact on Tezza's own intellectual outlook, was Wilson Galvão de Rio Apa's identification of art,

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[94] Cristovão Tezza, "W. Rio Apa: as trilhas da Utopia" in *Letras*, no. 50 (1998), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/textos/resenhas/p_98_revletras.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).
[95] Cristovão Tezza, "W. Rio Apa: as trilhas da Utopia" in *Letras*, no. 50 (1998), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/textos/resenhas/p_98_revletras.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012). Right afterwards Tezza revealingly adds: "Para um final de século tão esterilizado de sonhos como esse que vivemos, as trilhas seguidas por ele permanecem vivas como um contraponto necessário que tem muito a nos dizer."
[96] See for instance Marcelo Ridenti, *Brasilidade Revolucionaria* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2010), 10 and ff.
[97] Cristovão Tezza, interview with Marco Vasques, in *Diálogos com a Literatura Brasileira* (Florianópolis: Ed. Da UFSC; Porto Alegre: Ed. Movimento, 2004), ed. Marco Vasques, vol. I, 69.

particularly dramatic art, and life: "um teatro poético de temática popular, mas sempre centralizado na catarse e na liberação emocional. Para ele, esta seria a essência do teatro que cumpria fazer renascer. O teatro deveria ser uma espécie de rito existencial, e a comunidade de atores a realização concreta de uma vida alternativa."[98] It was the enactment of theater, in Rio Apa's teachings, that was to be instrumental in bringing about a new, non-bourgeois way of living. The idea of being an arts professional was thus a sort of contradiction in terms, and indeed most of the actors of his troupes were "common people:" "à parte dois ou três atores profissionais convidados, todo o resto do elenco era composto de amadores ou mesmo pessoas comuns subitamente envolvidas num projeto de teatro, de acordo com a idéia central de Rio Apa de unir a arte e a vida."[99] If participation in his dramatic projects was a way of reformulating one's life, such life clearly went far beyond the discrete instances of dramatization. Yet pivotal in this wider project of ethico-political renovation was always artistic practice: the "Centro Capela de Artes Populares, em Antonina, era na verdade uma comunidade vivendo um projeto existencial do qual o teatro significava apenas uma das faces."[100]

The conception of art as it informed Rio Apa's activity, both in his directorship of the CCAP and in his fictional writing, was in many ways an engaged one. Three aspects in particular stand out as constituting an engaged approach, one very akin to that which was elaborated in the 1950s in France and became an almost universal reference for Leftist culture worldwide:[101] first, the attempt to intervene through art into a very specific socio-political reality (in this case the dictatorial Brazil of the 1970s), with the assumed objective of changing it as radically as

[98] Cristovão Tezza, "W. Rio Apa: as trilhas da Utopia" in *Letras*, no. 50 (1998), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/textos/resenhas/p_98_revletras.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).
[99] Cristovão Tezza, "W. Rio Apa: as trilhas da Utopia" in *Letras*, no. 50 (1998), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/textos/resenhas/p_98_revletras.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).
[100] Cristovão Tezza, "W. Rio Apa: as trilhas da Utopia" in *Letras*, no. 50 (1998), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/textos/resenhas/p_98_revletras.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).
[101] See for instance Benoît Denis, *Littérature et Engagement: de Pascal à Sartre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 43 and ff.

possible; second, the effort to reach a wide audience (an aspect reflected in the CCAP's own name—Centro Capela de Artes *Populares*—as well as in the openness to wide public participation in the dramatic representations); and finally, the attempt to communicate the fairly specific political ideology whose import I have detailed above through both drama and literature. All of these aspects render Rio Apa's engagement more than a simple commitment to the ethico-political dimension of artistic practice, and approximate it to a direct political intervention. For the whole of his professional life Cristovão Tezza continued to formulate his own (changing) conception of literary writing as a response to Rio Apa's own idea of the nature of artistic practice.

Before moving on to Tezza's early writings, I would like to point out that there are (and not unexpectedly) some inconsistencies in Rio Apa's theory of art. In particular, we can notice that the balance between the ideological and the aesthetic dimension (to use Benoît Denis' critical vocabulary)[102] is not exactly the same in Rio Apa's dramatic projects as in his literature. While in the representations of the "Paixão" the aesthetic and the ideological were almost completely interdependent—to the extent that it would have been impossible to formulate an alternative public space without the actual representation of the "Paixão"—in his literary writings Rio Apa seems to subordinate the domain of the aesthetic to the the domain of the ideological. His literature, in other words, tends to transcend itself and incline towards another dimension that provided a justification for the writerly activity:

> Depois deste romance [*Um Menino Contemplava o Rio*, published in 1956], a temática de W. Rio Apa volta-se para o mundo urbano, ou, mais propriamente, contra o mundo urbano, que se lhe afigura como um espaço incompatível com o desenvolvimento das potencialidades criativas do homem. Nesse sentido, sua literatura ganha nesse momento, nitidamente, um caráter de "tese" que jamais o abandonará - é interessante observar que o traço que será a marca registrada de Rio

[102] See for instance Benoît Denis, *Littérature et Engagement: de Pascal à Sartre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 33.

> Apa será também o seu limite estético, que afinal (nos anos 90) transbordará para a escrita de textos diretamente místicos e filosóficos.[103]

The "caráter de tese" here that defines Rio Apa's literary engagement is, then, an extreme case of rupture of the "autonomy of the aesthetic."[104] If such rupture was performed by all of Rio Apa's artistic projects, where the aesthetic was always linked to the political, in his fiction Rio Apa makes the former dimension contingent upon the latter. What is particularly interesting here (more than the fact in itself) is the way in which this characteristic of Rio Apa's fiction gives Tezza the opportunity to elaborate on the issue of the interdependence of political ideology and aesthetic practice:

> O descompasso surge pelo fato de que, embora ele domine a técnica romanesca moderna, o que ele provou desde as incursões experimentais de *Um menino contemplava o rio*, Rio Apa na verdade nunca se sentiu à vontade com a descentralização ideológica que tal prosa supõe. Mais do que na literatura, na verdade ele sempre esteve interessado na doutrina; para ele, a prosa de ficção é claramente um meio de veicular um discurso filosófico unitário, homogêneo e fechado.[105]

Tezza is led to introduce a significant concept, "a descentralização ideológica," put forth here as a constitutive characteristic of novelistic prose, and one that Rio Apa's fictions crucially lack. It is as a search for ideological decentralization that we can read the development of Tezza's own fiction since its very beginnings. Indeed, while in his early works and even later on Tezza retained many aspects of Rio Apa's mentorship, he was determined to shed some others. Only in later years, however, would this progressive yet never complete distancing develop into a fully-fledged ideological decentralization.

Beginning in the late 1970s, Tezza tried to differentiate his own artistic practice from that of his mentor while retaining the imperative to produce texts that were profoundly imbued by

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[103] Cristovão Tezza, "W. Rio Apa: as trilhas da Utopia" in *Letras*, no. 50 (1998), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/textos/resenhas/p_98_revletras.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).
[104] This expression is taken from Benoît Denis's conceptualizations, among which he elaborated the idea of an "autonomie du littéraire." See for instance Benoît Denis, *Littérature et Engagement: de Pascal à Sartre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 25.
[105] Cristovão Tezza, "W. Rio Apa: as trilhas da Utopia" in *Letras*, no. 50 (1998), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/textos/resenhas/p_98_revletras.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).

radical ethico-political values. There are two short works, in particular, on which I would like to pause briefly here: *A Cidade Inventada* (published in 1980 but written by 1975) and *O Terrorista Lírico* (written by 1980 and published in the following year).[106] Both of them contain some significant aspects of his work, though they have suffered, together with the rest of Tezza's early production, from limited circulation and from minimal critical acknowledgement, partly because they belong to Tezza's phase of literary apprenticeship. The first book, a collection of short pieces, mostly stories, on urban life, is particularly interesting for our discussion, especially in its last section, "Memória." This short text is a fictional academic article which describes a long-dead urban civilization and which appears to the narrator (a fictional scholar) as centrally concerned with literature, and more specifically with debate around the possibility of literature's reach into a wider society. As we saw, to aim for a popular audience is a constitutive characteristic of literary engagement and, what is more, was an attitude central to Rio Apa's own preoccupations with art. Yet in this piece, Tezza subjects these same preoccupations to a process of fictionalization, distancing them from a purely conceptual dimension and relocating them in a more fully literary one in a move (somewhat inchoate) toward the reconstitution of the "autonomy of the aesthetic." At the same time, however, Rio Apa's presence remains quite palpable in both the themes of the book as a whole (of which he also signed the blurb) and in this same short piece, in which Tezza, despite the ironic fictionalization, continues to ponder the (undesired) implications of *dis*engagement:

> Fato é que os artistas, recolhidos e cada vez mais reduzidos em seu trabalho nos subterrâneos, sem o necessário eco, a resposta, a viva reação dos outros homens, confinavam-se cada vez mais e mais se sofisticavam na sua codificação. Mas não podiam esconder de si próprios que por baixo do requinte residia uma morbidez insolúvel. Sem sol, os frutos murchavam; sem a irrigação das origens, do contacto com a humanidade em seu sentido mais terreno, visceral, a obra atrofiava-se,

[106] See Rosse Marye Bernardi, "A construção de um escritor" in *Cristovão Tezza*, ed. by Rosse Marye Bernardi and Carlos Alberto Faraco (Curitiba: Universidade Federal do Paraná, 1994), 5-16.

> aleijava-se, perdia a cor. A chaga estava aberta. Eles estavam velhos. Ou, melhor dizendo, estavam mortos.[107]

In this early text we then find, *in nuce*, Tezza's ambivalence toward engagement: on the one hand, he tries to acknowledge the main concerns of an engaged writer, such as reaching out to the people and conveying a political ideology; on the other, he does so by removing these concerns from a purely conceptual terrain into a fictional one, and avoiding an open conveyance to the reader of his own stance.

He makes a similar choice in the very first pages of the short novel *O Terrorista Lírico*, where, in the section entitled "Introduction," the narrator reflects metafictionally on the text he is writing, a procedure that reappears many times in Tezza's ensuing fiction. In so doing, the narrator touches upon a fundamental characteristic of engaged literature, i.e., its ability to teach the reader a particular ideology (or a "fundo moral"):

> Como se sabe, na Introdução o autor expõe as linhas mestras do seu pensamento. Traça as diretrizes e bases do seu processo lógico e dá pinceladas gerais de sua filosofia. Há que se ter um objetivo elevado, mesmo neste mundo. A obra servirá, em última instância, para educar e ilustrar o leitor, dando-lhe subsídios importantes ao entendimento da vida. ... Em qualquer caso, sempre, haverá um fundo moral. É impossível não ensinar nada.[108]

It is significant that while the narrator states the object of the Introduction as "expor as linhas mestras do seu pensamento," he stops there without actually fulfilling his own injunction. The result is that, once again, the issue of engaged imperative is brought forth, only to be pushed away from the terrain of ideological discussion and into the realm of fictionalized thinking. However, at the same time the attitude Tezza develops in the rest of the book entails a conception of art, and of literature in particular, as an activity profoundly imbued by ethico-political values. We can detect, once again, the presence of a number of themes that were central in Rio Apa's own thinking, including the dysfunctional nature of city life and the formulation of

[107] Cristovão Tezza, *A Cidade Inventada* (Curitiba: Coo Editora, 1980), 121.
[108] Cristovão Tezza, *O Terrorista Lírico* (Curitiba: Criar Edições, 1981), 8.

subversive utopian visions (the protagonist of *O Terrorista Lírico*, after he bombs his own city to destruction, resolves to seek a redeeming Rousseauian life on the seaside). Unlike other texts that come afterwards, such as *Trapo*, this work therefore remains firmly engaged. While the kind of engagement it performs does not exactly coincide with that practiced by Rio Apa himself particularly because of the slight downplay of the ideological dimension, at the same time it does not diverge enough from it so as to be considered an entirely new and distinctive approach which will soon appear with *Trapo*, written in 1982.

If Tezza, particularly through his participation in the CCAP but also through his own literary production, was fully part of the wider Leftist trend toward "uma esquerda alternativa," during these same years Brazilian society as a whole experienced a contrasting evolution, which resulted from the processes of forced modernization carried out by the military regime. While Tezza sought actively to eschew these latter trends, they eventually left a strong mark not just on his personal life as only a few years later, by 1984, he had become part of the state apparatus, taking up a position at a public university but, more significantly, on his fictions as well. In enduring these pressures, Tezza was not alone. The trends toward modernization triggered by the military government had an impact on many of the very people who, by participating in Leftist movements, had been trying to forge an alternative path to authoritarian modernization:

> Concomitantemente à censura e à repressão política, ficaria evidente na década de 1970 a existência de um projeto modernizador em comunicação e cultura, atuando diretamente por meio do Estado ou incentivando o desenvolvimento capitalista privado. A partir do governo Geisel (1975-1979), com a abertura política, especialemente por intermédio do Ministério da Educação e Cultura, que tinha à frente Ney Braga, o regime buscaria incorporar à ordem artistas de oposição.[109]

The scope of concerted, government-led action that aimed to control the production of culture was certainly impressive, and it spawned a multitude of state agencies and media companies:

[109] Marcelo Ridenti, *Brasilidade Revolucionária* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2010), 103.

> Na década de 1970, instituições governamentais de incentivo à cultura ganharam culto, caso da Embrafilme, de Serviço Nacional de Teatro, da Funarte, do Instituto Nacional do Livro e do Conselho Federal de Cultura. A criação do Ministério das Comunicações, da Embratel e outros investimentos governamentais em telecomunicações buscavam a integração e a segurança do território brasileiro, estimulando a criação de grandes redes de televisão nacionais, em especial o Globo, que nasceu, floresceu e se tornou um potência na área à sobra da ditadura—que ajudava a legitimar em sua programação, especialmente nos telejornais. A Globo empregava também artistas da brasilidade revolucionária.
>
> Intelectuais como Sérgio Paulo Rouanet e Renato Ortiz já salientaram que a indústria cultural brasileira dos anos 1980, Rede Globo à frente, seria uma herança caricatural, mas reveladora, das propostas nacionais e populares da década de 1960.[110]

These institutions and firms would not, however, have been as significant as they were, had not the military government stimulated at the same time the creation of a mass public, something that had never existed before in the history of Brazil. This phenomenon was dependent, of course, on the economic reforms of the dictatorship, and on the rise of the middle class they had brought about. The outcome, a mass market for a mass culture, clearly stood in stark contrast to the attempt of the "esquerda alternativa" to open up new public spaces. Instead, it went in the opposite direction, and promoted the *aburguesamento* of formerly radical intellectuals and artists:

> Com apoio estatal, durante a ditadura, foi criada uma indústria cultural merecedora desse nome, não apenas televisiva, mas também editorial—que publicava livros e especialmente jornais, revistas, fascículos o outros produtos—, fonográfica, de agências de publicidade e assim por diante. Empregavam-se, frequentemente, artistas e intelectuais nas agências de publicidade, cujo crescimento vertiginoso[111] acompanhou a modernização conservadora promovida pelo Estado, que se tornou ainda um anunciante fundamental para os meios de comunicação de massa.[112]

Tezza tried to remain at the periphery of these socio-economical developments by consorting with Rio Apa and his Centro Capela de Artes Populares. This was not just a conceptual periphery, but also a physical one: the CCAP operated around Antonina, a little sea-side town in provincial Paraná far from the main axes of Brazilian economic development. Nevertheless, by

[110] Marcelo Ridenti, *Brasilidade Revolucionária* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2010), 104.
[111] The character of Trapo is an example of this trend.
[112] Marcelo Ridenti, *Brasilidade Revolucionária* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2010), 105.

the first half of the 1980s, the sweeping processes of modernization, as well as the increasing appeal of the state educational apparatus, came to dominate his fictional world.

Polyphonic Binarism and Ideological Decentralization[113]

A number of critics have remarked Tezza's surprising skill at constructing, in almost every novel he wrote, a multiplicity of autonomous subjectivities. These constructions entail both a sophisticated ideological orchestration, what he himself called a process of "ideological decentralization," and a complex mix of linguistic registers. Somewhat rashly, these critics have applied the concept of "polyphony" to these compositional characteristics, a term that was first employed by Bakhtin to analyze Dostoevsky's fiction.[114] Superficially, this Bakhtinian category, as well as the related one of "heteroglossia," do seem applicable to several works by Tezza. Many of them painstakingly develop autonomous discursive spheres for each of their main characters, and are often characterized by complex novelistic constructions resulting in the integration of different generic forms. Yet it is my contention that the application of the aforementioned Bakhtinian terms runs against one defining characteristic of many of Tezza's works: a tendency toward emphasizing *binary* rather than multicentric relationships. This tendency is evident in a number of Tezzian novels, especially in *Aventuras Provisórias* (written

[113] The two concepts of polyphony and "descentralização ideológica" have been first put in relationship by Cristovão Tezza himself in his discussion of Bakhtin's early essay "For a Philosophy of the Act." See Cristovão Tezza, *Entre a Prosa e a Poesia: Bakhtin e o Formalismo Russo* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2003), 223.

[114] See for insatance: Rita Felix Fortes, "O Careta e o Porra-Louca: Dois Amantes da Literatura," in *Anais da 4ª Jornada de Estudos Lingüísticos e Literários* (Cascavel: EDUNIOESTE, 2002), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/p_cascavel.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012); Clarice Nadir von Borstel, "A heterogeneidade sociolingüística/pragmática na obra Trapo, de Cristovão Tezza," in *Espéculo*, n. 33 (2006), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/p_heterogeneidadetrapo.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012); Léa Penteado Sajnaj and Marcelle Elissa Wittkowski Hamann, "O dialogismo no romance *Trapo*, de Cristovão Tezza" in *@Letras*, 4, n. 4 (2002), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/o dialogismo.doc (accessed on January 23, 2012); Verônica Daniel Kobs, "A Obra Romanesca de Cristovão Tezza" (master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Paraná, 2000), 41-43. http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/d_romanesca.pdf (accessed on January 23, 2012)

by 1987), *O Fantasma da Infância* (1994), *Uma Noite em Curitiba* (1995), and *O Filho Eterno* (2007).[115] It is in *Trapo*, however, that Tezza first experimented with a dichotomous discursive structure, and it is for this work that I suggest a closer interpretation. Tezza was able to develop a peculiar literary formulation of post-engagement in *Trapo* through the construction and management, despite the presence of more than two characters, of a dichotomous main relationship structured around two individuals who show ostensibly distinct forms of engagement. Once we recognize this, we will be able to discern behind the apparent polyphony of this work—which, as Bakhtin argued, is always in excess of any authorial position—what appears to be a concern that belongs to a different order, most likely that of the "author's conscience."

Written in 1982 but published in 1988, when Brazil's transition to democratic rule was already very advanced, *Trapo* has been considered by more than one critic to be Tezza's first mature work.[116] Set in the 1970s, it is narrated by Manuel, a retired university professor living in downtown Curitiba. He relates the chain of events triggered by his encounter with the writings of Trapo, a young writer who has recently committed suicide. When Izolda, Trapo's former landlady, takes the young man's writings to Manuel hoping for a quick publication and for monetary return, Professor Manuel's orderly routine is utterly upset. Unable to contain the external world's onslaught into his private life, Manuel becomes gradually more interested in Trapo, trying to make sense of this latter's life by talking with Izolda and with some of his friends. Through this process of investigation and discovery, Manuel is eventually lead to make a

[115] See for instance how Tezza developed the duality of Pablo and the narrator in *Aventuras Provisórias* (Porto Alegre: Mercado Aberto, 1989); or the dichotomy between André and Odair in *O Fantasma da Infância* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1994); or again that between the father and the son in *Uma Noite em Curitiba* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1995).
[116] See for instance Rosse Marye Bernardi, "A construção de um escritor" in *Cristovão Tezza*, ed. by Rosse Marye Bernardi and Carlos Alberto Faraco (Curitiba: Universidade Federal do Paraná, 1994), 10.

momentous decision regarding Trapo's writings. He finally chooses to employ them in fashioning a book—the one we have just read—which is neither a mere collection of Trapo's writings nor a simple history of his life, but a story of Manuel's own encounter with Trapo's legacy. While Cristovão Tezza clearly inserts a number of autobiographical details into this story, to the extent that many of the poems included as written by Trapo were originally to be considered the author's independent creations, the result cannot be considered autobiographical as there is no attempt on Tezza's part at writing *factually* about his own life. Nor, however, is the novel autofictional, as Tezza is not trying to write *fictionally* about the facts of *his* own life either—even if, as we'll see in the last section, *Trapo* can be interestingly compared to the autofiction of *O Filho Eterno*. Instead, Tezza is trying to fashion a fully fictional narrative, constructing characters that can be perceived as independent from his own biographical self. No character, in other words, clearly speaks for the author in this novel, so that the fictional universe of *Trapo* appears "ideologically decentered." In the absence of an openly conveyed "central" ideology, *Trapo,* therefore, cannot be considered an engaged piece of literature under any circumstances. This fact, however, does not stop the narrative from conveying a striking reflection on engagement and on the (im)possibility of its continuation.

While Bakhtin's definition of narrative polyphony cannot be fully applied to *Trapo*, it still provides a useful starting point in our reading of the book. What we find in this work might indeed appear, at least at an early stage of analysis, as an attempt at fashioning a narrative in which

> a hero appears whose voice is constructed exactly like the voice of the author himself in a novel of the usual type. A character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the

> author's word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters.[117]

There are three apparently autonomous characters that seem to have their voice "constructed exactly like the voice of the author himself" in *Trapo.* These are the two co-protagonists of the novel, Paulo also called Trapo, which means "rag" in Portuguese, and Manuel, plus the inn-keeper Izolda, who is responsible for bringing Trapo's writings after his suicide to Professor Manuel. Yet we quickly discover that Trapo and Manuel position themselves in opposition to each other thus configuring a dichotomy, while Izolda functions as a *trait d'union* between them both narratively and ideologically. She thus loses her autonomy, in a sense, in the interests of the main interaction between the other two. I will therefore mostly treat Paulo and Manuel , although I'll refer frequently to Izolda as well.

Trapo's and Manuel's perceived discursive autonomy is a function of a number of elements: the linguistic distinctiveness of their two voices the two different narrative levels at which these voices operate, and the ideological divide which appears to separate the two characters. On the one hand, then, Trapo's enunciations are characterized by "frases curtíssimas," "palavrões," and other "marcas da oralidade;"[118] moreover, his voice is conveyed by texts (poems and letters) that are not part of the main narration, but are inserted into it as separate bodies: it is a case of "inserted genres,"[119] an instance of heteroglossia. On the other hand, the voice of Professor Manuel, who is also the narrator, appears formal and learned, and

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[117] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 7.
[118] Léa Penteado Sajnaj and Marcelle Elissa Wittkowski Hamann, "O dialogismo no romance *Trapo*, de Cristovão Tezza" in *@Letras*, 4, n. 4 (2002): 16-17, http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/o dialogismo.doc (accessed on January 23, 2012).
[119] "The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types ... and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia ... can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized)." Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Bakhtin Reader* (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1994), 114.

narrative-wise it is Manuel's speech which provides the framework for the development of the whole story. Moreover, in the third domain of perceived autonomy, the ideological one, the two characters appear at the onset of the narration to have utterly dissimilar ethico-political outlooks. As Rita Feliz Forte writes, in the novel "a trajetória de Trapo, o egocêntrico e apaixonado adolescente em crise, com pretensão de reformar o mundo e abalar os pilares da família e o sistema capitalista, se imiscui na do misantropo professor de Língua Portuguesa, cujo único projeto, após a aposentadoria, é fazer dos estudos de literatura uma espécie de muralha entre ele e o mundo."[120] On one side, then, we have a young writer, Trapo, ostensibly rebelling against the Brazilian socio-political order (in the 1970s the military dictatorship still held a firm sway over the country); on the other side stands a retired professor who is utterly disengaged, living with close to no contact with the outside world, and apparently ultra-conservative.[121] This initial ideological dichotomy is reinforced by the mutual perception the two characters have of each other. Manuel views Trapo as somebody with completely different values from his own ("Nunca vi jamais ninguém tão oposto ao que fui e ao que sou"[122]), while Trapo (who died without meeting Manuel) feels contempt for the whole category of faculty members, who he considers to be people abiding by an entirely alien set of ethico-political values.[123]

I would like to focus here on Trapo's ideological world, and particularly on the relationship between his ideological outlook and his writing. This issue is crucial for our argument, since not only are Trapo's ethics profoundly non-conformist, but they also deeply inform his writerly practice. His criticism of bourgeois values begins with the family ("eu só

[120] Rita Felix Fortes, "O Careta e o Porra-Louca: Dois Amantes da Literatura," in *Anais da 4ª Jornada de Estudos Lingüísticos e Literários* (Cascavel: EDUNIOESTE, 2002), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/p_cascavel.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).
[121] "Não estou mais interessado em consertar o mundo." Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 10.
[122] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 59.
[123] See for instance Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 95.

queria pegar o infeliz que inventou a família"[124]) and includes other aspects of Brazilian modernization, such as state authority, industrialization and consumer culture ("os idiotas são os que compram, minha querida"[125]), and generally middle-class conformism.[126] The result is an outlook with evident anarchist political implications, which would, however, have remained fairly nondescript had Trapo not developed a specific attitude towards writing. This attitude is described by two main facets: firstly, Trapo attempts to approach art (aesthetics) and life (ethics and politics) as aspects of one another to such a degree that his aesthetico-cum-ethico-political project can only be viewed as a whole. Virtually all of his free time is jointly employed—a paradoxical situation which is, significantly, remarked upon by the narrator[127]—in writing and leading a disorderly life in which he routinely breaks the law, to the extent that the two aspects of *farra* and *escrita* can hardly be detached from each other. Such co-implication of art and life is seen particularly clearly in Trapo's relationship to Rosana, the elusive girlfriend to whom he addresses most of his letters. In line with Trapo's other beliefs, this relationship is remarkable for its anti-bourgeois character, manifest in its clandestine nature (Rosana's parents are firmly against it), in the extremely young age of Rosana, and also in her peculiar, almost disciple-like attitude vis-à-vis Trapo, which allows Trapo to turn his love letters into literary essays. The letters he writes to her, moreover, are not merely an instrument of his affection. They are not, in other words, merely a prelude to their own supersession, namely, to the continuation of the relationship by other means (that is, in person). They are instead instrumental both in establishing the basis for a personal and not just written relationship, and, vice versa, in containing that same relationship within the writing itself. The latter sometimes appears almost

[124] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 15.
[125] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 15.
[126] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 16.
[127] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 26.

as a surrogate for life ("que estranha tara é esta que me deixa em pânico a cada perspectiva de encontrar você? Porque tenho um medo diabólico de ver e tocar você? Por que passei meses protelando e adiando um encontro, enquanto me empanturrava de escrever cartas?"[128]). It is as if Trapo's relationship, as well as his politics, had to exist in *both* life and art ("Rosana [...] doravante, minha literatura é você"[129]). Secondly, Trapo's political values have a deep influence over the literary structure of his writings, since they support his literary vocation on the one hand while making it impossible for him, on the other, to resolve the stylistic tensions that inform his texts with an acceptable degree of coherence. The whole generic structure of his writing is in fact upset by his anti-establishment views, which generate a destructive attitude vis-à-vis the literary past itself, in whose place Trapo is unable to construct anything else, as none of the projects he announces or formulates reach any realization.

Is Trapo, then, an engaged author? Certainly so, and in a number of ways. To start with, he undoubtedly stands for a certain radical literary practice that was, as we saw, not infrequently met with in the Brazil of the 1970s. His writings openly convey a specific political ideology and clearly attribute a role in fostering political views to literature. Moreover, his own literary voice is always determined by his ethico-political beliefs, to the extent that it cannot be comprehended without reference to them.[130] Trapo's engagement, however, is of a particular kind: it is a "weakened" one since it lacks a constructive dimension and remains, since Trapo is incapable of developing a set of viable political or literary propositions, always utterly negative. In this sense,

[128] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 108.
[129] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 179.
[130] See, for instance, the following passage (particularly its last lines), in which, after embarking on a fantasy of parricide, he goes on to imagine what life would be like in jail, where he might end up teaching literature: "Quantos anos de cadeia? Vinte? Quarenta? Prisão perpétua? Seria o único modo de eu ler todos os livros que preciso ler para o amadurecimento final do meu talento. Começaria pela Ilíada, de Homero. Seria o professor da cadeia. 'Prisoneiro Trapo! Está na hora da aula! Os presos estão aguardando no refeitório!' Os presos me olham com admiração, no refeitório adaptado em sala de aula. Bom dia. Hoje vamos falar da função da literatura. A literatura é uma arma, e, do mesmo modo que o revólver, mata, assalta, corrompe e faz justiça com as próprias mãos." Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 61-62.

he sheds the utopian dimension that had been so prominent in the teaching of people such as Wilson Galvão de Rio Apa. His writing, furthermore, is always on the verge of breaking down, which compromises its communicative potential, a potential which should ideally always remain significant in any piece of engaged literature. Only Rosana seems willing to listen to Trapo, so his whole audience is reduced to a silly teenager, a "tarazinha." Despite these limitations, some of which are, as we saw in the thesis' introduction, to be found in other anti-dictatorial writers of the 1970s as well, Trapo's voice still conveys a clear ideological position. However, the author neither embraces it or represents it exclusively, since Trapo's voice is always confronted by other fictional voices, particularly Manuel's, so that it remains a position which does not come to dominate the novel. In other words, within the discursive universe of the novel, Trapo's position is always *ideologically decentered*. Although Trapo is an engaged author, *Trapo* is not an engaged book.

The peculiarities of Trapo, however, do not stop here. Both his character and Manuel's reveal a number of fissures that render them not only inherently contradictory, but also lay down the conditions of possibility for their final (problematic) reconciliation. As they find themselves inextricably tied to each other, their own autonomy becomes imperiled. It is by looking at these fissures and at how the novel takes advantage of them in reaching a resolution that we are able to realize the extent to which the Bakhtinian category of polyphony can*not* be applied to this work. At the same time, we realize that *Trapo*'s fictional dynamic contains a specific reflection on *post*-engagement. Upon a closer reading, we discover that if Trapo is a radical writer and a subversive political subject, he also plays an economic role thoroughly integral to the modernization processes triggered by the military regime. After all, he works in the advertising industry, a key profession in Brazil's accelerated development: "fui à Agência e recolhi a grana

do meu último trabalho, uma frase seca, enxuta, contundente, que há de vender todo o estoque encalhado de máquinas de lavar louça do Clientão."[131] Moreover, Trapo is repeatedly haunted by his own origins, as he is the son of a well-to-do businessman. While he hates his own family ("meu irmão é um babaca, só pensa em se encher de dinheiro. Meu pai é um sem-vergonha"[132]), he is unable to overcome a past which constantly compromises his radical attitude,[133] with the result that he ends up appearing both middle-class and "marginal," or, in Trapo's own words, a "Príncipe dos Poetas Maconheiros"[134] (as Izolda says, "podem falar o que quiserem—e falaram: que era maconheiro, ladrão, marginal, vagabundo, traficante, o diabo. Mas Trapo era um menino muito querido"[135]). To further complicate this fissured ethos, Trapo betrays a profoundly conformist attitude in relation to what he holds dearest, namely literature. Despite his anti-bourgeois ravings, his drive to write is imbued by the utterly bourgeois "ideology of success":

> meu projeto de vida não permite erro: é tudo ou nada. E a bosta—confesso docemente pra você, Roseira Roseiral Rosana Mitológica—é que estou impregnado até a alma da ideologia do sucesso, que forma me insinando desde que nasci (quando me comparavam com o bêbê do lado) até agora, quando se faz indispensável que me torne o maior escritor do mundo.[136]

This search for success in its literary guise, coupled with Trapo's anti-establishment views, contributes to pushing him into a literary but also existential *cul-de-sac*. Trapo talks to Rosana about the difficulty of formulating his literary voice in many of his letters, as he finds himself between the unequivocal *successes* of his literary forefathers and the imperative to destroy those same literary fathers to build something radically *successful* of his own, which he is, however, unable to conceive. Thus, at one point he reaches the paradoxical extreme of considering past literary achievements something that was stolen from him:

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[131] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 15.
[132] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 37.
[133] "o poetinha que tem um pai com o rabo cheio de dinheiro e fabrica uma vocação de mendicância." Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 16.
[134] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 93.
[135] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 21.
[136] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 107.

> É que houve alguns filhos da puta no passado (não muito longínquo) que ... rascunharam, escreveram, datilografaram e publicaram TODOS OS POEMAS que por direito imanente, impostergável, genético, soberano, absoluto, ME PERTENCIAM ... Sou a vítima de um crime perfeito.[137]

Despite his radical posturing, Trapo is filled with fear at the necessity of starting to write.[138] As we will see later, this realization plays a critical role in our understanding of the novel's *dénouement*. Moreover, as this fear of writing also characterizes Manuel's fictional persona,[139] it plays a role in breaking down his and Professor Manuel's discursive autonomy, thus creating an initial link between the two characters that will find a stronger basis in the homology of the fissures that define both.

If Trapo's character is in some ways inherently contradictory, so is Manuel's. This retired professor seems at first to project a coherent image. He is attached to the values of middle-class respectability and to the conventions of dignified urban life. He has also served for many years as part of the state establishment. In his dealings with other people, he is constantly concerned about maintaining his middle-class status so that when the inn-keeper Izolda comes to visit him his first preoccupation is with her vulgarity, which Manuel perceives as a clear class marker. He even goes so far as to pay attention to each of Izolda's mannerisms, interpreting them according to his "fichário interior,"[140] a clear reference to the police practices of the regime. In many ways, then, Manuel's character appears as the bearer of an ideology opposed to Trapo's radicalism. He seems to be the perfect example of a petit-bourgeois, obsessed with order and respectability and espousing the dictatorship's drive toward a conservative modernity. "Modernidade

[137] This very same letter ends with a "vontade de morrer." Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 27.
[138] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 114-115.
[139] "A verdade é que Trapo me estimula a escrever, não a ler. Uma espécie de inveja deste galinho suicida. Passei a vida, falsamente modesto, a esperar o momento de escrever meu epitáfio. Mas a grandeza do projeto me impede começá-lo. Ridículo, um velho como eu metido a letrado acabaria encontrando em alguma academia de província, um fim melancólico para um viúvo severo como o professor Manuel. Melhor não escrever nada, ir para o Céu, reencontrar Matilde no silêncio purificador do Paraíso." Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 58.
[140] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 33.

conservadora" is indeed a characteristic which Tezza publicly recognized as a defining trait of Curitiba, the city where Manuel lives:

> Curitiba é uma senhora bastante reservada, muito consciente do seu espaço, entre as casas, as árvores e as pessoas. Eu sinto que Curitiba tem uma atmosfera diferente, mas só consigo traduzi-la na ficção. Devo muito das eventuais qualidades do que escrevo a esse impalpável universo curitibano, que não se mostra, mas é muito forte. O espaço urbano que tem se tornado marca nacional de modernidade abriga uma população fortemente conservadora, contraste que considero literariamente muito rico.[141]

Yet in Manuel's case, conservatism seems to go just a bit too far, breaking up the ideological compound typical of Brazil's dictatorial years. It goes almost so far as to imperil its commitment to modernity:

> Como eu, minha casa resiste ao tempo, espremida entre prédios, quase no centro de Curitiba, de certo modo conformada com a velhice. ... Uma casa ao pedaços, com uma fachada sem estilo, com janelões quadrados e frisos de mil cores, e com a data denunciadora—1940—, isto quando o resto do mundo desenfrea-se no progresso e acasala-se nos planos do BNH.[142]

His retirement allows Manuel to live with an almost complete lack of social exposure, outside of time, as it were. Everything around him betrays his lack of concern for progress and economic development, those same objectives that the state establishment of which Manuel had been part pursued intensely. Manuel's intense conservatism, in other words, is so extreme as to make him, almost paradoxically, into a radical figure—radically *dis*engaged, in contrast to Trapo, who is radically engaged. He could even be considered, not unlike Trapo, to be both bourgeois *and* marginal. The tension generated by this rift has distinct literary implications, which are reflected in Manuel's own inability to realize his long-entertained dream of writing. It is as if his extreme conservatism—as opposed to Trapo's extreme anti-conformism—were impeding any actual attempt to fashion a text:

> Passei a vida, falsamente modesto, a esperar o momento de escrever meu epitáfio. Mas a grandeza do projeto me impede de começá-lo. Ridículo, um velho como eu metido a letrado

[141] Cristovão Tezza, "Diálogo," interview with Carlos Alberto Faraco, in *Cristovão Tezza*, ed. by Rosse Marye Bernardi and Carlos Alberto Faraco (Curitiba: Universidade Federal do Paraná, 1994), 19.
[142] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 8.

> acabaria entrando em alguma academia de província, um fim melancólico para um viúvo severo como o professor Manuel. Melhor não escrever nada, ir para o Céu, reencontrar Matilde no silêncio purificador do Paraíso.[143]

It is only through reflection on Trapo's end that he will be able not only to integrate the contradictory aspects of his self, but also to fulfill his literary vocation: "A verdade é que Trapo me estimula a escrever, não a ler."[144]

These two sets of fissures, which traverse both Trapo's and Manuel's characters, ultimately result in the possibility of a reconciliation. Thanks to their very contradictions, Trapo and Manuel possess the potential to break through the oppositionality that divides them so as to reach instead a particular kind of resolution. This resolution is, and crucially so, a literary one, in the sense that it is reached by devising a peculiar attitude toward the literary. Brought into sustained contact with Trapo's heritage and in particular with the memories preserved by his friends and the literary legacy represented by his works, Manuel gradually comes to acknowledge the possibility of an empathic link between him to Trapo—an empathy which stems from the similarity of their obsessions:

> E havia algo neste filho nascido morto que era um mistério maior, sob o pretexto da literatura: a morte. Entendê-la em Trapo era entendê-la em mim. Talvez essa—e o álcool me estimulava a elucubrações—talvez essa a razão de recusar e querer Trapo tão sistematicamente. Por trás do comodismo, o medo da revelação. Trapo exige um mergulho que é também um mergulho na minha própria realidade, à tristeza bem comportada da minha solidão. A literatura, mero pretexto. Interessa-me a figura torturada que deu um tiro na cabeça. Não entendo—e, súbito, a idéia me faz suar, a extensão da minha mediocridade—não entendo como me arrastei décadas e décadas sem dar um tiro na cabeça.[145]

Manuel's "mergulho" into Trapo is triggered precisely because both characters are "figura*s* torturada*s*," that is, they are severed by their strikingly similar fissures, and Manuel carries out this "dive" into Trapo's universe through the decision to *write* about him. As a result, the metafictional nature of the novel, already present in Trapo's own reflections on literature,

[143] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 58.
[144] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 58.
[145] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 137.

becomes, as the work progresses, ever more emphatic as it brings the issue of post-engagement progressively into focus. As we have seen previously, by setting up ostensibly autonomous discursive spheres for each of the two characters, that is, something that *resembles* a polyphonic system, Tezza was able to construct an *ideologically decentered* fictional universe; in other words, he built the narrative in such a way as not to commit to any ethico-political line, either Manuel's or Trapo's or any other. By doing so, Tezza fashioned a text which, unlike Trapo's letters to Rosana, cannot be considered engaged, since it lacks the foundational dimension of engagement—namely, a commitment to an ethico-political view. Yet the way in which the novel metafictionally reflects on itself brings the issue of engagement to the fore, since by writing about Trapo and Trapo's relationship to literature, the narrator Manuel develops a conception of literature which defines itself through its relationship with Trapo's engaged literary practice. What is more, the resulting literary conception—indeed a real poetics—no longer seems to be as decentered as the two distinct ideologies which characterized either character at the onset of the story. On the contrary, it is the work *as a whole* that by the end emerges as structured around the formulation of this poetics.

It is at this point in our discussion that the timing of *Trapo* becomes relevant: this book was written during the last years of the military dictatorship, when the process of democratic normalization had already begun, and at a time when the crucial question for Brazilian writers was what to write once the fight against the dictatorship was over. *Trapo* responds precisely to this problem. Manuel's writing activity, which by the end of the novel will have produced the book we just finished reading, is primarily characterized by the "overcoming" of political engagement. In the course of his encounter with Trapo's works, Manuel is brought to realize that literature can no longer exist as an engaged practice; it can only function as a reflection on the

emptying out, as it were, of such an ethico-political function. Only by accepting its fictionality, the instability of its claims and its contingent nature, all aspects discussed by Manuel in the novel, can it succeed both as an art form (as in Manuel's finished book as opposed to Trapo's inchoate scribbles) and as a life-practice (as in Manuel's new writerly life as opposed to Trapo's death). Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, post-engaged literature needs to be the result of an act of "discarding."

If Izolda initially proposes that he simply edit and publish Trapo's works, Manuel soon realizes that this is not a viable option. Those works are too weak, too unstructured, and they lack a suitable poetics ("faltava-lhe principalmente um objetivo literário"):

> Ele tinha uma massa enorme de informações, intruições, sensações, toda a matéria-prima do trabalho literário. Mas tudo em estado bruto, alucinante demais, demasiado na moda, excessivamente próximo da realidade para entendê-la em profundidade. Faltava-lhe, também, disciplina. Faltava-lhe principalmente um objetivo literário. De tudo que li dele até agora não encontrei nada que represente, rigorosamente, um gênero. A rigor, escreveu cartas.[146]

His response to Trapo's literary heritage should be other than it is. It is a novel, after all, that Manuel has always wanted to write ("É evidente que sempre tive vontade de escrever um romance, com traços autobiográficos. Um belo projeto, mesmo que não se realize nunca").[147] What Manuel eventually settles on and narrates is, significantly, an autofiction: a novel that relates the story of his own life ("com traços autobiográficos"; "como explicar a Izolda que doravante o livro será mais meu do que dele? Inútil, ela não entenderia"[148]), yet not in a wholly factual way:

> Vagarosamente o romance de Trapo—e o meu—começava a se compor na minha cabeça, fragmentos isolados. Hélio atiçava:
>
> —E tem mais, professor: invente à vontade. O povo gosta de história complicada, muita emoção. Já que as coisas do Trapo vão ficar à parte, integrais, do seu lado o senhor pode enfeitar o pavão. Se bem que vai ser difícil inventar mais que o Trapo.[149]

[146] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 103.
[147] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 134.
[148] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 145.
[149] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 136.

We detect in Manuel's narrative a peculiar equivocation between fact and fiction that we will find again in the later novel *O Filho Eterno*: so if *O Filho Eterno* is Tezza's autofiction, then *Trapo* is Manuel's. Manuel's narration never reveals its fictional nature except at the very end of *Trapo*, when instead of reporting the events of his own life (as he had done so far), Manuel *imagines* the reasons behind Trapo's end:

> —Só tem uma coisa que não me entra na cabeça, Manuel. Você quer *mesmo* que eu acredite que aquela bruxa da Isaura [Rosana's mother], que mal e mal atendeu o interfone pra você, que eu acredite que ela pessoalmente bateu naquela porta ali, entrou nessa sala, sentou aqui onde estou sentada, e contou pra você toda essa história maluca?
>
> Quase me ofendo, mas eis que consigo pela primeira vez controlar o formigamento que me avançava careca acima. Respondo, reclinando na minha cadeira estofada, com um sorriso superior:
>
> —E por que não?
>
> —Mas é *absurdo*!
>
> —Pode ser absurdo. Mas faz sentido. É o que me basta.
>
> —Mas Manuel, isso parece novela de rádio![150]

Thus, when Manuel finds it necessary to represent Trapo, something he had not done until this point, letting Trapo's own texts speak for themselves, he takes him into a further level of fictionalization. The result is that Trapo's ideological commitment finds itself subsumed into Manuel's autofictional story. Transformed into the story of a retired professor's untimely awakening, its radical import is blunted, especially since it is now distanced by another's imaginary literary construction. By the same token, through Trapo's transformation into a character (here, Trapo is a curious kind of character squared), Manuel destabilizes Trapo's engaged message, rendering it less autonomous and severing its unmediated relation to the reader.

Trapo's fictional destabilization at the hands of Manuel is coupled, at the end of the book, by a linguistic one. As Manuel grapples with Trapo's heritage, he is compelled to at least partially abandon the exhausted conservatism of his speech, which begins to absorb a number of

[150] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 203-204.

expressions that had been the hallmark of Trapo's radical prose. This transformation destabilizes Trapo's engaged style, which is now compounded with the conventional linguistic habits of the old retiree.[151] This is a very significant linguistic operation because the whole work is ostensibly structured around two quite different discursive spheres: by effecting this stylistic transformation Manuel breaks through this difference and fashions a new voice which brings the end of Trapo's linguistic autonomy with it, and any trace of linguistic polyphony finally disappears. In its stead, we have a linguistic practice characterized by an unstable hybridity, so that while at its opening the narration appeared to be constructed around two distinct stylistic poles (so as to be perceived as *decentered*) at its end a *single* discursive idiom is born, yet one *without a center*.

Manuel's post-engagement has a few other crucial characteristics. As we saw in the Introduction, a recurring feature of engaged literature has historically been a tendency to tackle the question of the very status and nature of the literary. As Benoît Denis has shown, there are precise conceptual reasons for this peculiarity of engagé writing ("l'engagement aboutit toujours plus ou moins à un questionnement sur l'*être* de la littérature, à une tentative de fixer ses pouvoirs et ses limites"[152]). It is not at all incidental, then, that Trapo's writings constantly return to an interrogation of the nature of literature. As for Manuel, when he wants to write about Trapo, his narration ends up including extensive passages in which he tries to assess Trapo's art. Manuel's work is thus a book of poetics (um "estudo") as much as it is a novel:

> —Um livro sobre o Paulo?
> —Sim, um estudo literário. Ele me entregava periodicamente... ahn... algumas poesias e contos, para eu opinar sobre eles..."[153]

[151] "Na citação ... que fecha o romance, Cristovão Tezza reitera a mescla discursiva entre o estilo de Trapo e do professor. Expressões como é das boas e que tal, plausíveis apenas nos textos de Trapo, passam gradativamente a fazer parte não apenas dos escritos do professor, como também do seu vocabulário oral usual." Rita Felix Fortes, "O Careta e o Porra-Louca: Dois Amantes da Literatura," in *Anais da 4ª Jornada de Estudos Lingüísticos e Literários* (Cascavel: EDUNIOESTE, 2002), http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/p_cascavel.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).
[152] Benoît Denis, *Littérature et Engagement: de Pascal à Sartre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 296-297.
[153] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 141.

The metafictional function is so prominent in his project that in Manuel's own musings on this literary enterprise, *romance* and *estudo* recur almost indifferently to describe his work.[154] What I want to emphasize here is that in the transition between Trapo's engagement and Manuel's post-engagement, a substantial change in the employment of metafiction takes place. Whereas Trapo's metafictional musings were centered around his own literary vocation, Manuel's post-engaged stance is characterized by a questioning of the literary which remains structured around Trapo's writings rather than the retired professor's own. Manuel's post-engagement, in other words, is informed by a sort of contingent metafiction which constantly drives his text to address some *other* text. His post-engaged poetics appear, in other words, to be crucially concerned with an *absence* rather than the presence of the literary event.

In bringing this section to a close, I would like to present an additional key aspect of post-engagement as it is formulated in *Trapo*, one which stems from the fact that this work, as it is narrated by Manuel, is the result not only of an act of commitment to the literary on the part of both Trapo, for whom literature is a major concern, and Manuel, who is himself consumed by the long-unfulfilled ambition of becoming a writer; but also of something which appears at first to be remarkably different, namely an act not of commitment but of discarding. This paradox is embodied in Manuel's dilemma vis-à-vis Trapo's writings. In order to write a novel-essay about him, Manuel first needs to solve the question of what to do with Trapo's own works, which Izolda has left at his house:

> —Digamos que sim, que eu escreva esse romance. E o Trapo? O problema continua. O objetivo é publicar as coisas dele, não as minhas.
>
> —Bom, no final do livro o senho transcreve as melhores coisas que ele escreveu. Uma espécie de apêndice. Ou um estudo. Misturando cartas, poesias, contos, notas de rodapé.[155]

[154] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 135.
[155] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 135.

Manuel's post-engagement is then the result of an inclusion of Trapo's works into his own narration, but also of a discarding. Most of those works had to be excluded from the narrative, effectively becoming "lixo" – namely, what Manuel thought they were at the opening of the story.[156] This double dynamic of inclusion and exclusion is, I believe, emblematic of the new mode of literary writing formulated by Tezza in *Trapo*. To find a voice for a changing Brazil, engagement needs to be retained and to be left behind simultaneously. If Trapo lives again in Manuel's book, albeit in a new, fictional form, so does engagement, since the narrative generated by Manuel's encounter with the memory of Trapo still includes the latter's engaged anarchism, but only as an impossibility or a longing. The literature of post-dictatorial Brazil can only start as a reflection on this paradoxical absence-and-presence.

Metafiction and the Discarding of Literature

Before proceeding to the discussion of *O Filho Eterno*, which will be the second major focus of this chapter, I would like to linger briefly on another of Tezza's most significant works, one which, unfortunately, has not received the critical attention it deserves.[157] In *A Suavidade do Vento*, a novel written by Tezza approximately ten years after *Trapo* (in 1990), the question of literary engagement is still at issue, although from the perspective of the writer's waning social role. In addition, while some critics have interpreted Tezza's writing and particularly his more openly metafictional works, of which *A Suavidade* is certainly one, as stemming from a commitment to the literary,[158] the narrative of *A Suavidade do Vento* shows instead

[156] Cristovão Tezza, *Trapo* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1988), 8.
[157] Some passing remarks on this work are found in Rosse Marye Bernardi, "A construção de um escritor" in *Cristovão Tezza*, ed. by Rosse Marye Bernardi and Carlos Alberto Faraco (Curitiba: Universidade Federal do Paraná, 1994), 15.
[158] See for instance Monica Rector, *Cristovão Tezza: o texto como pretexto* (paper presented at the Sixty-Sixth Annual SAMLA Convention, Savannah, Georgia, November 8, 1996).

(substantiating a major theme of *Trapo*) that such commitment can be concurrent with the entirely different act of abandonment or discarding. Furthermore, this novel illuminates Tezza's continued concern with social respectability, a problem that will find its most mature formulation in *O Filho Eterno*. In other words, *A Suavidade* provides a crucial interpretive link between the early Tezzian production and Tezza's latest creations.

The novel's main character is Matozo,[159] a Portuguese language lecturer clearly reminiscent of Professor Manuel. Tezza makes a number of specific connections between *Trapo* and this novel. In one short episode, for instance, Matozo stays in a lodging-house owned by Izolda, a character who appeared in the earlier novel. Both novels are set more or less at the same time, in the early 1970s. However, unlike Manuel, Matozo is already a writer at the start of the narrative, and, unlike Trapo, he has already accepted the depoliticization of literature. His writing is apparently utterly unconcerned with any political question ("Não quis dizer nada. Eu quis escrever. Não é a mesma coisa").[160] Instead, he employs his literary practice to reach something that approximates a state of spiritual emptiness, emphasized both by recurring quotes from Clarice Lispector—chosen from among the most "metaphysical" of her writings—and by fictional citations from "a Chinese sage," which perform an ironical counterpoint to the former.[161] Yet even if Matozo's writing, unlike Trapo's, remains at the antipodes of political engagement, this writing still manages to nearly destroy him. The publication of his first and only novel causes his immediate ostracization from the small provincial community in whose midst he was living (in rural Paraná, not far from Foz). He loses his job after the director of his

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http://www.cristovaotezza.com.br/critica/trabalhos_acd/f_artigos/p_textocomopretexto.htm (accessed on January 23, 2012).

[159] This name is spelled in three different ways, to emphasize the instability of Mattoso's identity, always at the mercy of other people's representation of him.

[160] Cristovão Tezza, *A Suavidade do Vento* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1991), 123.

[161] See for instance Cristovão Tezza, *A Suavidade do Vento* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1991), 18 and 20.

institution sees the magazine article where Matozo's book is advertised, so that he is left with no income. Faced with the threat of marginalization, Matozo has to make a choice, and as he recognizes that social exchange can only be predicated on the severance of his relationship with the literary, he eventually chooses to renounce his writerly ambitions.

If Matozo is, then, a distinct character in comparison to Manuel, and certainly to Trapo, there is still something that brings the three together. Indeed, as it was the case with the others, Matozo is defined by a profound if not quite apparent fissure. While on the one hand he appears utterly focused on literary writing as a practice abstracted from virtually anything else, he is, on the other, dominated by the almost contrary urge to put his writing in the service of his public persona—he employs it as a means of gaining a modicum of social respectability. When he is finally able to publish and publicize his novel he thus declares:

> —Eu pertenço à comunidade humana. Ninguém pode me tirar isso.
> Reconheceu, surpreendido, que até então estava andando de costas: um homem imaturo, incompleto, sem referências. Agora andaria de frente.[162]

The reactions of his immediate acquaintances to the news of the publication are, however, entirely divergent from Matozo's hopes, and soon force him to give up on his literary ambitions. Once they know of the book's circulation, his friends start ignoring him, and one after another, his social relationships disintegrate. Envy, contempt, and suspicion swiftly ostracize Matozo from his community, and force him to leave his town temporarily and travel to Curitiba. Despite the thriving of an interiority so developed as to be able to abstract itself into a book "saying nothing," Matozo remains the hostage of his immediate community. Not only is he unable to shape his environment through his writing, as an engaged author would aim to do, he is not even able to employ his literary production to sustain his own social individuality as it is reflected in other people's gazes. He realizes that there can be no writing, no matter how abstract, when there

[162] Cristovão Tezza, *A Suavidade do Vento* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1991), 159.

is no empathy on the part of the group to which one (attempts to) belong. Instead of the guiding relationship that the engaged writer would ideally establish with his community, here it is the community that keeps the writer in its thrall, forcing him ultimately to abandon his pursuit:

> Mãos no bolso, passos lentos, imaginou-se escrevendo *O pó e as trevas* só para mostrar ao mundo como a comunidade humana é sórdida, mesquinha, estúpida e irremissível. Mas no mesmo instante sentiu a vergonha: não é para isso que a literatura serve.
>
> —Aliás, a literatura não serve para nada.
>
> *Por enquanto, serviu para me destruir*.[163]

It is then from the particular perspective of the writer's social role that *A Suavidade do Vento* discusses a facet of the problem of literary engagement: in this narration engaged literature appears not just impossible but as a contradiction in terms, since literature is precisely what *hinders* any social engagement and instead triggers (forced) social *dis*engagement.

The only way for Matozo to regain the social role on which his life ultimately depends, even more so than on his literary practice, is to disavow his work. With this end in mind, he gets in touch with the magazine that had run a feature on his recently printed novel and asks the staff to publish a disclaimer stating that he is not in fact the author of the book, all copies of which he eventually destroys:

> Abriu as gavetas da escrivaninha, recolheu os originais de *A suavidade do vento*, rascunhos avulsos, cartas da editora—mas para o lixo aquilo era insuficiente. Pegou a panela maior, picou os papéis dentro, derramou álcool e acendeu o fósforo.

At the heart of *A Suavidade do Vento*, in other words, there is once more an act of discarding and renunciation: "Matozo, em outra vertigem curta, viveu o clarão de Clarice: *A desistência é uma revelação*."[164] In this novel, then, not unlike what happens in *Trapo*, the decision to throw away a literary artifact drastically qualifies the apparently opposite move, also performed by the work,

[163] Cristovão Tezza, *A Suavidade do Vento* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1991), 166. Italicized in the original text.
[164] Cristovão Tezza, *A Suavidade do Vento* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1991), 184. Italicized in the original text. A similar act of discarding takes place in the final scenes of Tezza's 1994 novel *Breve Espaço entre Cor e Sombra* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1998). While I won't be able to explore this work here in any detail, I believe it is relevant to a lengthier discussion of this issue.

that of *apprehending* the literary through a complex layering of metafictional levels. *A Suavidade do Vento* is almost obsessively concerned with capturing the defining characteristics of literature: not only does Matozo's relationship with his own writing take center stage in the narrative (so much so that the book written by Matozo bears the same title of the book we read), but the story starts out with an additional metafictional in which the "author" himself is literally represented as a character, while he literally takes all of the other characters (in a minivan!) to the place where the novel will be "staged"—and this verb is employed on purpose, as *A Suavidade* has a dramatic structure, the various chapters of which bear the dramatic titles of "atos" (acts). Yet all of this obsessive interest in the literary ends up, crucially, in an act of discarding, thus reiterating the coexistence of two apparently contradictory attitudes at the core of Tezza's reflections on literary art. Indeed, as we saw in our discussion of *Trapo*, post-engagement stems from the combination of these two apparently opposite moves.

These are not, however, the only contradictions purposefully developed by the novel. Before going on to discussing *O Filho Eterno*, where many of the issues I have been presenting come together, I would like to point to one more way in which *A Suavidade do Vento* reflects on the question of (post-)engagement. It cannot be considered coincidental that while *A Suavidade do Vento* stages the marginalization of the writer and his inability to relate to the social, it can also be read (against a grain already put into question by the text itself) as a piece of remarkable social critique, particularly in the way it portrays the society of developing Paraná. This work performs a scathing assessment of this specific environment and of Brazil's economic development, but one that simultaneously undermines its own engagedness by staging the impossibility of writing any socially relevant literature. As a result, in *A Suavidade do Vento* we find an emphatic staging of the drabness of provincial sociability, replete with repulsive types

such as the patrons of the town's two cafés, who consume their abundant free time with meaningless card games and empty gossip, or the petty administrators who run the local bank and the institution where Matozo teaches. In addition to these aspects, the novel focuses its literary sight on the political violence that obtains beneath this façade of a pointlessly modernizing province. This violent undercurrent suddenly comes to light when the local dentist is arrested:

> Na rua da praça, um pequeno movimento em torno de um jipe da polícia. Próximos, alguns volumes de gente, como quem assiste a um espetáculo sem muito interesse, dois aqui, três, ali. Matozo parou. O dentista, algemado entre dois homens, esperava que o colocassem no jipe. Antes de entrar olhou em volta; provavelmente só via silhuetas contra a lux. Não parecia assustados, nem exatamente tranqüilo: pálido. Havia um homem comprido ao lado de Marozo, fumando. Olhava para o espaço vazio onde antes estivera o jipe.
>
> —Esse aì fodeu-se
>
> Deu uma baforada neutra, olhou para o toco do cigarro entre os dedos e arremessou-o longe, vendo a curva da brasa. Atravessou a rua. Matozo sentiu uma rede contrair o corpo; o torcicolo descia a coluna e chegava ao nervo ciático. Venceu uma ânsia de vómito tardia e avançou para a escuridão e o silêncio maior da praça.[165]

After observing this apprehension, Matozo remembers that he owes the dentist some money and so resolves to pay it to the dentist's wife. Yet he ultimately forgets, and will not react in any other meaningful way to this instance of political repression. If Manuel is unable to accomplish any move endowed with radical political import, however, the novelistic gaze appears less neutral. The non-specified booming town of Paraná is represented in the novel as emblematic of the flawed modernization processes forced upon Brazilian society by the military dictatorship. If these processes are criticized in the book, they are not the objective of a directly engaged critique, but rather the site of a *post*-engaged attitude since, as we saw, in the modernizing land of Brazil the link between sociality and literature has become traumatically severed. However, despite this severance and thanks to the twists of its complex metanarrative, *A Suavidade do*

[165] Cristovão Tezza, *A Suavidade do Vento* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1991), 60.

Vento, not unlike *Trapo*, is able to make space for a persistent longing not simply for writing but for writing engagedly.

O Filho Eterno: Autofiction, Intertextuality, and Literariness

It is only once the two novels we have just discussed are critically recovered that we can adequately appreciate Tezza's most successful work *O Filho Eterno*, the first he penned that enjoyed a significant international circulation. In relation to *Trapo* and *A Suavidade do Vento*, Tezza's more recent novel reveals a new depth reaching far beyond the supposedly "main" aspect of the storyline, the narrative of a father's coming-to-terms with the presence in his life of a Down syndrome child. *O Filho Eterno* intertwines that storyline with another: the narrative of a writer-in-the-making. It is this apparently secondary theme, one which has played a minimal role in the book's reception, which, after a careful reading of the novel, and in view of previous works by Tezza, appears to represent the greater achievement of this work, as well as one of the crucial stages of Cristovão Tezza's multi-decade oeuvre. The theme of the writer's self-discovery recurs so often in its pages that Tezza can best be appreciated as an author writing primarily about the quest for a post-engaged literature.

Before going on to detailing the specific workings of this book, we need to pause at the question of autofictional writing, which has been the object of significant critical interventions by Tezza himself (though Tezza never employed this term). The concept of autofiction, first elaborated by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 to describe his work *Fils*,[166] hinges in this seminal formulation on the necessary condition of the identity between the name of the author and that of

[166] Philippe Gasparini, *Autofiction* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008), 15.

the protagonist.[167] As we saw in the section in which we discussed *Trapo*, Tezza consistently resisted writing novels in which *the author appeared as a character*. Neither *Trapo* nor *A Suavidade do Vento* nor, indeed, any other of his works except *O Filho eterno*, can be considered as "histoire*s* d'une vraie vie."[168] If in *Trapo* Tezza recreates two contrasting characters that result unmistakably from the recombination of biographical data (some of Trapo's poems, for instance, were originally written by Tezza as independent pieces) they cannot in any way be considered to stand even remotely for the factual persona of their author. Even though some details such as the profession of language lecturer and café life can be taken from "reality," much does not coincide with Manuel or Trapo, or, of course, with Matozo: instead, these characters ascend to the level of fiction through a profound elaboration which does away with the author's persona. It would be profoundly incorrect to consider Tezza an author of autofictions, or as participating in the trend of a "retorno do autor,"[169] even in light of *O Filho Eterno*, which remains a peculiar work in comparison to everything he wrote previously. On the contrary, in most of his novels he attempts to fashion partially autonomous subjectivities almost thoroughly independent from that of the author, to the extent even that some of his fictions might appear—although they are *not*, as I have tried to demonstrate—*polyphonic*. This attempt to construct relatively autonomous subjectivities was instrumental in shaping fictional environments that were "ideologically decentered," and therefore did not convey a single overarching ideology—a crucial compositional choice for an author concerned with the limits of engagement.

[167] See the contribution of Patrick Saveau, "L'autofiction à la Doubrovsky: Mise au Point" in *Autofiction(s): Colloque de Cerisy*, ed. by Claude Burgelin, Isabelle Grell and Roger-Yves Roche (Lyon : PUL, 2010), 310.
[168] Serge Doubrovsky, "Autobiographie/vérité/psychanalyse", in *Autobiographiques, de Corneille à Sartre* (Paris : PUF, 1988), 74, cited in Philippe Gasparini, *Autofiction* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008), 46.
[169] See Karl Erik Schøllhammer, *Ficção Brasileira Contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2009), 105-109

Something remarkably different, however, happens with *O Filho Eterno*. We have here a work which brings a number of facts belonging to the biography of the author into the form of a novel,[170] but does *not* recombine those facts into the creation of separate and autonomous subjectivities to the extent that it was done in previous works. Instead, they now *appear* to closely approximate the "reality" of the biographical life of Cristovão Tezza. Here, of course, the difficulties begin. First of all the book, published by Record, does not bear any editorial mark (apart from the title) to distinguish it from other novels by Tezza published by the same house, and it maintains, among other bibliographical details, the phrase "romance brasileiro." At the same time, the book's blurb appears to suggest that the story might be "authentic": "num livro corajoso, Cristovão Tezza expões as dificuldades, inúmeras, e as saborosas pequenas vitória de criar um filho com síndrome de Down."[171] As a result of this ambiguity, reinforced by the opening quote by Thomas Bernard ("Queremos dizer a verdade e, no entanto, não dizemos a verdade. Descrevemos algo buscando fidelidade à verdade e, no entanto, o descrito é outra coisa que não a verdade"[172]) the question what was the balance between fiction and reality in this book was put to Tezza on a number of occasions. It was a Portuguese publication which received what was, I believe, his most articulate answer on this subject:

> *O livro pode ser considerado uma autobiografia? Qual o limite entre a ficção e a realidade?* Não, não é uma autobiografia—é uma peça de ficção, um romance fortemente baseado em dados biográficos da minha vida. O tema da fronteira entre ficção e realidade é fascinante. A diferença não pode ser decidida apenas pela quantidade, digamos, de 'realidade factual' que uma narrativa contém, mas por princípio na intencionalidade autoral e a relação que o autor estabelece entre o facto, o texto e o leitor. Uma biografia ou uma autobiografia, o que, no caso, dá no mesmo como apropriação da linguagem, é um 'pacto de realidade' que está sobre todas as coisas. O género biográfico estabelece um compromisso inquebrável com a realidade factual, que vai até ao detalhe, não pode inventar nada, e deve confessar ao leitor, eventualmente, a ignorância factual deste ou daquele aspecto. Na ficção, o pacto é substancialmente distinto; a narração, por princípio, está livre do compromisso com a realidade; pode até usá-la, como, aliás, qualquer

[170] Many of these facts can be easily confirmed by the reader, as they include references to specific literary works Tezza previously wrote and which come here to represent as many stages of a wider narrative.
[171] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2007), blurb.
[172] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2007), 5.

> prosador usa. Praticamente todo texto de ficção trabalha com dados reais, mas não são eles que dão a medida do texto. Na biografia sim, são eles, os dados reais, que são a medida de qualidade principal. Já a ficção é um modo de olhar a vida e o mundo que não se confunde com o olhar científico, pragmático ou objectivo. Costumo dizer que a ficção é uma das formas de reconhecimento do mundo, e que tem o poder de englobar todas as outras—a científica, a filosófica, a religiosa, a documental—sem se confundir com nenhuma delas.[173]

Interestingly, the defining factor of the difference between a novel and an autobiography resides solely, in Tezza's opinion as he formulates it in this intervention, in the joined intentionalities of author and readers ("na intencionalidade autoral e a relação que o autor estabelece entre o facto, o texto e o leitor"): when both agree as to the existence of a *pacto de ficção*, as he thinks is the case with his own *O Filho Eterno*, then the book is a fiction; when we have a *compromisso com a realidade factual*, the book is an autobiography. Is Tezza then simply doing in *O Filho Eterno* what he has always been doing all along, just in a slightly different way? He clearly tends to think that the domains of fiction and autobiography are inherently separate. However the conclusion that there isn't really any intermediate ground—which Tezza had previously reached in a different text, a 2008 academic talk delivered at USP on "Literatura e Biografia," where he discussed this in regard to Dostoevsky's jail memoirs[174]—remains in my opinion untenable precisely in view of the reception of *O Filho Eterno*. In the case of this work, the nature of the "pacto" established between author and readers was called into question by the very editorial appearance of the book (comprising the blurb and other markings).

It is here, I believe, that Doubrovsky's category of autofiction becomes particularly useful, as it can give us the instruments needed to deal with the degree of ambiguity at play in intermediate texts. We could argue that *O Filho Eterno* establishes (as its reception attests) a different sort of pact, neither fictional nor factual, but one that functions instead around the

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[173] Cristovão Tezza, "Laços de família na literatura," interview with Malu Echeverria, *Diário de Notícias da Madeira*, February 8, 2009, 18-19.

[174] The position Tezza developed in this intervention was also elaborated upon by him in *Literatura e biografia*, a paper presented at the Eleventh International Conference of the ABRALIC, São Paulo, July 16, 2008.

ambiguity of whether this is a fiction or a "real" story. In Doubrovsky's formulation, the category of autofiction seems able to elaborate its intermediate-ness particularly well:

> Un curieux tourniquet s'instaure alors: fausse fiction, qui est histoire d'une vraie vie, le texte, de par le mouvement de son écriture, se déloge instantanément du registre patenté du réel. Ni autobiographie ni roman, donc, au sens strict, il fonctionne dans l'entre-deux, en un renvoi incessant, en un lieu impossible et insaisissable ailleurs que dans l'operation du texte.[175]

Such "lieu impossible" and "renvoi incessant" is located between *O Filho Eterno*'s double aspects of *fact* and *fiction*: the two terms constantly refer to each other. Thus, on the one hand in *O Filho Eterno* Tezza reflects on the narrative of his factual life as the father of a Down syndrome child, as well as on his life as a *writer* of fiction. For instance, he consistently mentions and discusses the writing of his novels so that references to his books are interspersed throughout the narrative, which lists the titles of most of Tezza's works as defining biographical elements. At the same time, *O Filho Eterno* is a text with a precise literary structure that employs devices which are closely related to those that characterize many of the novels Tezza had spent his life writing, as he specifies in the narration. Before detailing the primary one among these devices, namely the dichotomous organization of the storyline, I would like to point out something else: there is, as we saw, no way to deny the fact the *O Filho Eterno* stands out from the rest of Tezza's production by virtue of its autofictional approach; a number of cryptic autofictions, however, can be detected in previous works by Tezza. While *Trapo* is certanly *not* an instance of autofictional writing when considered in relation to its author, it could be read, somewhat paradoxically, as a *fictional* autofiction, as it appears, through the fictional pact, to be the story of the narrator's *life*. Professor Manuel, after all, reports the (fictional) *facts* of his biographical encounter with Trapo. As for *A Suavidade do Vento*, I noticed that its title coincides with that of Matozo's book: as a result, it triggers a *mise-en-abîme*, which leads to the

[175] Serge Doubrovsky, "Autobiographie/vérité/psychanalyse", in *Autobiographiques, de Corneille à Sartre* (Paris : PUF, 1988), 74, cited in Philippe Gasparini, *Autofiction* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008), 46.

identification of the narration, which recounts Matozo's *life*, with Matozo's narration. Once again, it would be a case of a *fictional* autofiction. Thus, *O Filho Eterno*'s autofiction, in Tezza's case, does not only open up a space around the two joined/clashing poles of the fact and the fiction of one specific book, but triggers a whole range of instabilities and *mises-en-abîme* which implicate his whole life/oeuvre.

Only once we recover the intermediate dimension of autofiction can we productively return to the major issues we have discussed in the previous sections—namely the legacy of Tezza's engaged beginnings, the dichotomous polyphony of most of his novels and the metafictional bent at the heart of his literary practice—and see how all of these domains are able to illuminate *O Filho Eterno*. This book will then appear not simply as the account—however successful and compelling—of the "real life" of the father of a child affected by down-syndrome, nor just as one more instance of post-engaged fiction, but rather as a painfully unresolved attempt at putting the *writer*'s house in order in its *two* aspects: the literary *and* the biographical, in their reciprocal entanglement. Tezza reaches this end by constructing and managing one more dichotomy, this time between a quest for nature on the one hand, and the aspirations toward a bourgeois form of life on the other, which he develops together with the duality dividing (and uniting) father and son. Instead of crafting autonomous fictional subjectivities and then pitching them one against the other, as he had done in many instances up to now, Tezza applies the dichotomy to his own domestic life, in the attempt to finally make sense of the polarities that have been structuring for so long his peculiar writerly biography. The result appears particularly momentous in view of Tezza's previous oeuvre: with *O Filho Eterno* Tezza acknowledges the significance of post-engagement as the issue that has been structuring *up to this point* his quest

for a viable literary expression, yet by the end of this work he appears to be arriving at the realization of the eventual erosion of this very structure of thinking.

In the course of this narrative Tezza has then constructed a double layering of dualities: on the one hand we have the ostensible dichotomy of the father and the son, most evidently divided by the line of the down syndrome, and on the other hand we have a second conceptual duality by which the figure of the father is internally torn apart, and which only by the end of the storyline, through his continuing relationship with his son, will he be able to peculiarly resolve. Significantly, the narrative is recounted (in the third person) from the perspective of the father *after* he has reached such resolution, so that the distance between the two selves enables the narrating voice to take a thoroughly disenchanted and detached assessment of the younger self: it is in the space that the narrative opens up between the two figures—the growing-up and the mature—that the reflection on post-engagement is carried out. The conceptual framework for this reflection is provided by the two poles of the father's interiority, which embody two fundamental aspects of the dilemma Brazilian writers have faced since the end of the dictatorship (it is certainly not just incidental that the "filho eterno," the other focus of the novel, was born around 1980, and that his life spans precisely the history of democratizing Brazil). These two poles make their appearance right in the opening pages of the book, yet only their sustained conceptualization will develop them into the fully fledged structures which will end up defining the autofictional space of *O Filho Eterno*. Cues to the first thematic pole remain indeed quite opaque at the beginning:

> Ele é um homem distraído.
>
> Sim, distraído, quem sabe? Alguém provisório, talvez; alguém que, aos 28 anos ainda não começou a viver. A rigor, exceto por um leque de ansiedades felizes, ele não tem nada, e não é ainda exatamente nada.[176]

[176] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 9.

Within these lines the theme of "normality" is born: the protagonist of *O Filho Eterno* will appear as progressively consumed by a drive to conform to the ideal of the middle class and only by the end of the narrative, once he is actually able to reach that long sought for respectability, will he overcome his attachment to this ideal (the passage just cited is also notable for the detail of the age of the father's age at the birth of his son: precisely the same as his son will be at the end of the novel). The theme constituting the second pole of the father's interiority emerges only a few pages later:

> Sozinho no corredor, dá outro gole de uísque e começa a ser tomado pela euforia do pai nascente. As coisas se encaixam. Um cromo publicitário, e ele ri do paradoxo: quase como se o simples fato de ter um filho significasse a definitiva imolação ao sistema, mas isso não é necessariamente mau, desde que estejamos 'inteiros,' sejamos 'autênticos,' 'verdadeiros'—ainda gostava dessas palavras altissonantes para uso próprio, a mitologia dos poderes da pureza natural contra os dragões do artifício.[177]

Despite his drive toward respectability, the character of the father appears here as dominated by a contrary ideal, namely "a mitologia dos poderes da pureza natural." In the course of the book the values of "nature" will come represent an eminently non-bourgeois radical ethical commitment, akin to that which we already saw sustaining Tezza's own engagé activity within the CCAP (as we'll discuss *infra*, the key concept of nature is an open reference to Wilson Galvão de Rio Apa.) But although the protagonist aspires on the one hand to fashion his art (and his life) according to the radical ideal of such a "return to nature," the pressures of bourgeois conformism, rife not only around him but also inside him, would compel him to situate his practice (both literary and biographical) at the intersection between the two—until, eventually, both conceptual poles will start to fade away.

The father appears at the outset as somebody having consciously chosen an alternate, non-bourgeois path of life, and yet he is unable to reconcile himself to the lack of respectability

[177] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 13.

which this choice entails, a lack that no satisfactory literary achievement initially redeems ("Eu não tenho competência para sobreviver, conclui. Não consegui nem um único trabalho regular na vida. Penso que sou escritor, mas ainda não escrevi nada."[178]) Within this outlook, the birth of his son functions as a powerful catalyst, accelerating the contradictions at the core of the writer's personality, since he now starts to feel the pressure to conform ("a angústia da normalidade") even more keenly:

> Não, nada mais será normal na sua vida até o fim dos tempos. Começa a viver pela primeira vez, na alma, a angústia da normalidade. Ele nunca foi exatamente um homem normal. Desde que o pai morreu, muitos anos antes, o seu padrão de normalidade se quebrou. Tudo o que ele fez desde então desviava-o de um padrão de normalidade—ao mesmo tempo, desejava ardentemente ser reconhecido e admirado pelos outros.[179]

The shame generated by the presence of the son ("A vergonha, a vergonha—ele dirá depois—é uma das mais poderosas máquinas de enquadramento social que existem. O faro para reconhecer a medida da normalidade, em cada gesto cotidiano."[180]) makes the father absurdly enjoy the first years of his son's age, as during that time his difference in relation to other children will be much less apparent than afterwards: "Por um bom tempo, até que a criança cresça, ele divaga, eles poderão passear com o filho sem ter de dar nenhuma explicação adicional."[181] The lack of normality of the son is clearly related, in the eyes of the father, to his own inability to belong to the middle class, as it becomes clear when he visits a clinic in Rio de Janeiro:

> A pobreza em torno: deficiência é coisa de pobres, molambentos, miseráveis, retirantes, necessitados, na face aquela exigência crispada de alguma justiça e ao mesmo tempo os olhos que se abaixam a tempo antes que a borduna arrebente-lhes a cabeça, mendigos rastejando nas esquinas, ecos de uma pobreza imortal.[182]

As a result, the father thrusts onto the son the burden of responsibility for his own lack of "normalidade":

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[178] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 37.
[179] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 40.
[180] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 44.
[181] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 58-59.
[182] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 81.

> Ele quase se entrega à autopiedade, desenhando um quadro em que ele, bom menino, ao finalmente normalizar sua vida (uma mulher, um salário, estudos regulares, um futuro, livros, enfim), recebe de Deus um filho errado, não para salvá-lo, mas para mantê-lo escravo, que é o seu lugar.[183]

The role of literature within this quest for respectability is certainly surprising: while he and his wife are trying to "stimulate" their child (through the use of particular devices) to performing more like a "normal" one, the father at the same time persists in his literary career *as a means of reaching normality*. Some of the very pieces of writing that we read as radically engaged (in this particular case *A cidade inventada*) appear within the narrative of *O Filho Eterno* as instrument employed toward the establishment of the writer's social identity, who is ultimately aiming to social ascent ("esse invencível desejo de marcar território, de dizer quem ele é, de afirmar que ele não é gado"):

> Da mesa a criança volta ao falso escorregador, para a lenta descida ao chão, o chão expugnado palmo a palmo, ele declama baixinho, pensando longe. Quando acabar a licença da mulher, quem será a terceira pessoa a participar do exercício de mesa da criança? Os pais não são o problema; os pais são a solução, eles diziam. Lembra da médica da clínica, a última palestra—ele levou oculto num envelope um exemplar de seu livro de contos, o primeiro que publicou, *A cidade inventada*, para presenteá-la, o que fez soterrado pela timidez, a letra torta na dedicatória canhestra—esse invencível desejo de marcar território, de dizer quem ele é, de afirmar que ele não é gado, de avisar que ele sabe mais do que esses botocudos que ficam boquejando aí, essa burralha toda, e ao mesmo tempo a sensação viva de seu fracasso, de um livro ruim, inacabado, imaturo e incompleto: viveu tanta coisa mas só escreveu abstrações e imitações de superfície, ele diria mais tarde sobre seus próprios contos. E agora esse filho, essa pedra silenciosa no meio do caminho. Ali está ele, tentando descer a rampa para alcançar um despertador que ainda não vê.[184]

With these same pieces of writing, however, the father was pursuing a different and contrasting ideal, namely a "natural" form of life.

In the narrative of *O Filho Eterno* the presence of the down-syndrome son doesn't just bring to the limit the father's obsession with respectability, but it also exacerbates the second pole of the father's subjectivity, represented by his drive toward a radical ethics, that is the "sonho rousseauniano," namely "afastar-se dessa merda de cidade, refugiar-se fora do sistema,

[183] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 93.
[184] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 111-112.

viver no mundo da lua, estabelecer as próprias regras, dar as costas à História."[185] This "Rousseauian dream" is certainly tightly related to Wilson Galvão de Rio Apa's ideological outlook (called in the novel "o guru"), as well as to the activity of the Centro Capela de Artes Populares—indeed, as we saw in a previous section, the aspiration toward a utopian relationship with nature (as opposed to the urban environment of the middle class) was central to this dramatic enterprise and to its political commitment. It is the presence of the son that soon destabilizes this other concern of the writer, as "o filho eterno" shows disturbing similarities to a "natural" form of life, first of all by being, not unlike Rio Apa's ideal human being, "outside of history:" "Não há mongolóides na história, relato nenhum—são seres ausentes."[186] This destabilizing approximation, coupled with the exacerbation of the father's opposite drive toward normality, has the result of compromising that rousseauian dream, showing all of the conceptual problems that riddled it from the start:

> Você está sozinho, exatamente de acordo com os seus planos. Mais ainda agora: o guru da infância não vai salvá-lo ou resgatá-lo; o mundo dele, aquela utopia rousseauniana, ficou para trás, e você não tem nada para pôr no lugar. Aquilo era falso como um jardim da Disneylândia. A natureza não tem alma alguma, e, deixados à solta, seremos todos pequenos e grandes monstros. Nada está escrito em lugar nenhum. O dia que amanhece é um fenômeno da astronomia, não da metafísica.[187]

The reference to the paradigmatic place where fantasies are normalized ("Disneylândia"), points to the continuing interdependence-cum-confrontation of the two foci represented by radicalism and middle-class conformism, whose clash is rendered all the more acute by the revealing power of the son's very presence:

> Continua com a vaga ideia do fantasma dele mesmo, de realimentar o sonho rousseauniano já com as pequenas vantagens de uma classe média ansiosa simulando contato com a natureza (vê o seu filho crescendo feliz no gramado verde de Walt Disney, o triciclo na garagem, os amiguinhos simpáticos e compreensivos—e não pequenos monstros em estado bruto, ele descobrirá pouco anos depois, quando uma criança de rua catando lixo, diante daquele menino estranho que,

[185] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 114.
[186] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 36.
[187] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 128.

> sorrindo, afastou-se dos pais e avançou com mão estendida para cumprimentá-lo, fugiu correndo de medo)—uma vida mais primitiva, um ideal mais comunitário, ele repete as frases feitas da publicidade, mergulhando já no cinema dos anos 1980, quando os marginais de dez anos antes começam a ganhar dinheiro e, como Deus criando o mundo depois de uma eternidade de silêncio, acham enfim que isso é muito bom. Tudo é falso, mas ele não sabe ainda, vivendo ao acado, como sempre; o único foco real de sua vida é escrever, já como um escapismo, um gesto de desespero para não viver; começa lentamente a ser corroído pela literatura, que tenta lhe dar o que ele não pode ter por essa via, que é um lugar no mundo; cada livro é um álibi, um atestado de substituição.[188]

The son, by appearing as a "pequeno monstro em estado bruto" renders vain any attempt at pursuing a "natural utopia," revealing how "false" it is. After reaching this realization, writing itself appears to the father only as a means of escaping ("un gesto de desespero para não viver") rather than as a means of commitment. His life is indeed in a complete state of disarray: rent by the two opposing drives of radicalism and respectability, he is not only hardly able to manage their conflict, but he gradually discovers that those very foci are empty and false at their core.

It is the acceptance of the cathartic potential of the son, and of his ability to explode the moral world within which the father has been living, that will provide the resolution of the novel. Through this recognition the father will reach the awareness of the falsity of his own life, as well as of the post-engaged sensibility which had been sustaining him for so long (whose characteristics we have been trying to trace through an intertextual discussion touching upon some of Tezza's major novels). In many ways then, *O Filho Eterno* can be considered the work concluding a multi-decade long artistic enterprise: it is the defining moment when the foci along which most of Tezza's works had so far developed finally appear exhausted[189]—indeed Tezza's

[188] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 144.

[189] Tezza's multi-decade reflection on the duality structured around the poles of normalized bourgeois life and radicalism may remind one of Antônio Cândido's well-known interpretive pattern of the "dupla fidelidade," which Cândido considered the hallmark of the historical development of Brazilian literature (see for instance, Antônio Cândido, *Literatura e Sociedade* (Rio de Janeiro: Ouro Sobre Azul, 2006), 126: "Na nossa cultura há uma ambiguidade fundamental: a de sermos um povo latino, de herança cultural européia, mas etnicamente mestiço, situado no trópico, influenciado por culturas primitivas, ameríndias e africanas. Esta ambiguidade deu sempre às afirmações particularistas um tom de constrangimento, que geralmente se resolvia pela idealização."). As we saw, this latter's radicalism was inspired by a quest for a very localized "nature" and therefore might appear, at least on some level, as a modern-day form of "indigenismo." Would then be possible to subsume Tezza's case into the

most recent long fiction, *Um Erro Sentimental* (published two years after *O Filho Eterno*) seems to be opening up some structurally new fictional avenues. It is not incidental, then, that in the closing pages of *O Filho Eterno* it is the practice of writing that, once again, comes to the forefront of the narrative, in one last comparison between the father and the son:

> O pai inveja o filho, capaz de equiparar 'artista plástico' com 'astronauta' ou 'jogador de futebol', e esquecer de um e de outro no minuto seguinte; nada mais fácil, parece, que preencher um papel social. O pai sempre se recusou a dizer, fazendo-se humilde, que 'escreve umas coisinhas,' o álibi de quem se desculpa, de quem quer entrar no salão mas não recebeu convite. Nunca foi esse o seu caso; sempre viveu debaixo de uma autonomia agressiva, beirando a sociopatia; e ao mesmo tempo por muitos anos teve vergonha de se afirmar, intransitivo, um 'escritor,' e a angústia maior vinha do fato de, durante década e meia, não ter nada para colocar no lugar quando lhe perguntavam o que fazia na vida; dizer 'eu escrevo' seria confessar uma intimidade absurda, equivalente à da vida sexual ou à dos problemas de família, entregar o que se sonha no escuro, a massa disforme dos desejos; partilhar o hálito ... durante todos esses anos sentiu o peso do ridículo de ser escritor, alguém que publica livros aos quais não há resposta, livros que ninguém lê ... É simplesmente um fato com o qual temos que lidar sozinhos, ele imaginava, escoteiro, anos a fio, camponês de si mesmo, girando no seu mundo de dez metros de diâmetro, até que se tornou professor, um trabalho, esse sim, que lhe pareceu realmente defensável, um trabalho que lhe valeu um suspiro de alívio, o álibi perfeito na vida—ele era, finalmente alguém, e alguém até de alguma importância. Uma bela figura diante do quadro-negro! Isto é, ganhava algum dinheiro com o suor do seu rosto, como queria o seu pai e o pai de seu pai até o início e o fim dos tempos. 'Mas onde ficou o seu Nietzsche de adolescente?' Às vezes o pai se pergunta, envelhecendo ao espelho. 'Na infância,' responde-se, sorrindo, os dentes afiados como sempre, e fora de prumo.[190]

It is at the point when the father has finally become "alguém" (that is, a person of firmly bourgeois status), that he also realized the hollowness of "o seu Nietzsche de adolescente," here representing the theme of engaged radicalism. Yet this long sought after respectability is acquired precisely at the moment it is also appearing as an empty fetish: after all, as a professor he is nothing more than "uma bela figura diante do quadro negro." As a result then, the most fundamental concerns—both literary and existential—which had been structuring the father's thinking and writing appear to have come to naught. This is not all: if the practice of literature is

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pattern of "dupla fidelidade"? While I cannot propose at present a definite answer to this issue, I want to emphasize that any discussion of this problem will need to take in consideration the fact that Tezza's radical hearkening toward nature was, despite any nativist flavour, clearly dependent on the flourishing of leftist thinking both in Europe and in other South-American and Central American countries (in this undeniable "dependence" Tezza was certainly no exception and reminds us of Almino's close ties with Parisian intellectuals in the Seventies).

[190] Cristovão Tezza, *O Filho Eterno* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2007), 213-214.

still assumed nevertheless (out of something resembling a disenchanted inertia) its status is now at its weakest, as it is revealed as lacking any defining purpose: the son (whose resemblance to the father is by now to the latter perfectly clear) is after all "capaz de equiparar 'artista plástico' com 'astronauta' ou 'jogador de futebol', e esquecer de um e de outro no minuto seguinte." Literature seems condemned to the absurdity of fungibility and to the violence of compulsive amnesia which characterizes not only the subjectivity of the down syndrome son, but also, more generally, the society of contemporary Brazil. It is a conclusion that indeed appears as very disturbing, particularly in view of the fact that it represents, as I've tried to show throughout the chapter, the result of a cumulative process of reflection upon the literary performed by Tezza over many novels and even more years—his whole fictional career, as we saw, has been marked by questions of the nature and significance of literary practice, in a research whose perhaps not so unlikely outcome is revealed by a book, *O Filho Eterno*, which has unfortunately become well known for completely different reasons.

The Persistence of "Brasilidade Revolucionária"

Must we conclude, then, that Tezza's writings are proof of the eventual superseding of that radical attitude Ridenti termed "brasilidade revolucionária," which he thinks today has ceded its place to a generic "individualidade pós-moderna"? "Brasilidade revolucionária," in the somewhat vague definition Ridenti has given, "envolveria o compartilhamento de idéias e sentimentos de que estava em andamento uma revolução, em cujo devir artistas e intelectuais teriam um papel expressivo, pela necessidade de conhecer o Brasil e de aproximar-se de seu povo."[191] Certainly such an engaged attitude cannot be considered any longer a hallmark of contemporary Brazilian literary production, that is taking place in a discursive environment

[191] Marcelo Ridenti, *Brasilidade Revolucionária* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2010), 10.

which seems quite distant from the charged ideological arena of the decades that marked the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule:

> Passados muitos anos, constata-se o esvaziamento da mobilização popular que marcou o período que vai do fim da década de 1970 até os anos 1980. Evidenciam-se os limites dos discursos ideológicos que a acompanharam, a celebrar a autonomia das bases, organizadas em movimentos populares, no novo sindacalismo e nas CEBs. Os movimentos cujas reivendicações eram negadas pela ditadura tenderam a ser reconhecidos como atores políticos e sociais legítimos com a democratização, e a ter parte de suas reivindicações atendidas. Em geral, os movimentos sociais perderam pujança; o novo sindacalismo mostrou-se parecido com o velho; a atuação dos setores católicos de esquerda enfrentaria um refluxo notável; o PT burocratizou-se e converteu-se num partido de ordem. O cenário político e econômico tampouco favoreceu propostas de organização popular, em sindicatos, partidos e movimentos. Talvez o refluxo seja provisório, mas ao que tudo indica o ciclo das bases 'a faz parte da história passada.[192]

If such a "refluxo" can hardly be denied, we need to understand that this is a *refluxo* that leaves an astounding amount of productive debris in its wake, as I hope to have made clear both with my discussion of João Almino's *O Livro das Emoções* and with these last few pages on Cristovão Tezza. The debris of engagement does not consume itself in a mere few years after the end of the dictatorship, but it reaches well into contemporary Brazil, to the extent that no assessment of today's Brazilian literary production in Brazil can be accurately carried out without giving the heritage of engagement sufficient thought.

Thus, once again, we are led to conclude that the array of apparently post-modern devices employed by Tezza in his novels, and particularly his propensity for metafiction, cannot be read in a historical vacuum. Those choices, while certainly aimed at destabilizing a radical attitude perceived as impossible to perform, are rooted in a relationship with a very local and specific discursive setting. Any talk of Tezza's postmodernism (or Almino's, for that matter), will need to be checked against the conditions in which their writing was created. This is why both of these writers could provide an answer to the riddle presented by Ridenti, who was not quite sure as to how "brasilidade revolucionária" had fared in recent years:

[192] Marcelo Ridenti, *Brasilidade Revolucionária* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2010), 164.

> A brasilidade revolucionária deve ter herdeiros, mas pode-se arriscar a hipótese—seria melhor dizer intuição, pois ela é difícil de comprovar, uma vez que ainda não há o devido distanciamento no tempo—de que o lugar principal é agora ocupado pela individualidade pós-moderna como estrutura de sentimento, esboçada naqueles mesmos anos 1960, caracterizada pela valorização exacerbada do "eu," pela crença no fim das visões do mundo totalizantes, dado o caráter completamente fragmentado e ilógico da realidade, pela sobreposição eclética de estilos e referências artisticas e culturais de todos os tempos, pela valorização dos meios de comunicação de massa e do mercado, pela inviabilidade de qualquer utopia. O profissional competente e competitivo no mercado, concentrado na carreira, veio substituir o antigo modelo de artista/intelectual indignado, dilacerado pela contradições da sociedade capiralista periférica e subdesenvolvida.[193]

The crucial term here is "substituição." There has not been any "substitution" of a post-modern sensibility for a previous engaged one in the case of Tezza or Almino. Both went through a long process of rethinking of engagement and its ideological and literary legacy, which has resulted in a body of writing that deals with the reasons and the implications of radicalism's impossibility. Such *post*-engaged writing took place, particularly in the case of Tezza, over an extended period of time (around thirty years) which saw the constant reformulation of a system of literary thinking that, however changed, can be described as consistently post-engaged. Only very recently, with his novel *O Filho Eterno,* do we detect that a breakthrough has taken place that has led him to significantly destabilize his post-engaged conceptual universe. This destabilization, however, can only be appreciated in light of whatever came previously. It is confirmation of the extraordinary staying power of the conceptual and literary poles which had until then dominated his writing and his biography.

[193] Marcelo Ridenti, *Brasilidade Revolucionária* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2010), 111.

CHAPTER III

"FREEING OF THE IMAGINATION" OR THE REDISCOVERY OF A PERSISTENCE? ON BARBARA ADAIR'S SITUATED EXPERIMENTALISM

> We have not got the time to embellish this urgent message with unnecessary and cumbersome ornaments [...]. We will indulge in these luxuries [...] when we are free people.
> Oswald Mtshali[194]

> Remember that I am a writer; I have a taste for the secret. If there is no secret there will be no book. More than that, I fear characters who are transparent, who have no room for a secret—characters that demand that their whole life be marched out in the public square. No internal space left for the reader is a sign of the totalitarianism of freedom. Everything available for everybody. Lies and silence are the only subversion.
> Barbara Adair[195]

For many decades, the South African fictional tradition was marked by the prevailing need to formulate politically committed messages aimed at the apartheid regime. While this tradition was just one among many in the African continent that have emphasized anti-authoritarian engagement, radical stances remained especially strong in South Africa compared to the rest of Africa, and this was particularly true in the sixties and seventies. Undoubtedly, this was partly due to the survival of the racist regime at a time when the process of decolonization was occuring in other parts of the continent, a fact that steadily reinforced a conception of literature as primarily concerned with political denunciation. During the eighties, however, a number of black and white authors began to redefine the prevailing views of what fictional literature should strive to achieve. This trend, partially mapped a few years ago by David

[194] Oswald Mtshali in Louise Bethlehem, "The Pleasures of the Political: Apartheid and Postapartheid South African Fiction," in *Teaching the African Novel*, ed. by Gaurav Desai (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 224.
[195] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 53.

Attwell, gained momentum with the approach of the regime's demise, and led, in turn, to a surge of critical thinking about the literary possibilities that political change might open for authors of fiction. Njabulo Ndebele and Graham Pechey in the eighties and André Brink in the nineties tried to imagine new and not-merely-engaged ways in which literature could develop during and after such a momentous political reversal.

Within this historical narrative, Barbara Adair's writing appears to represent one of the peaks of experimentalism. Raised during the last years of apartheid, she started publishing fiction only once the country had transitioned to a democratic government. Her art seems far removed from the original imperative of political commitment, as her craft focuses on creating meta-literary stories which appear mainly intent on pondering their own coming into existence. The few testimonies to Adair's works' limited reception, indeed, emphasize the "postmodern" characteristics of her fiction which are perceived as opposed to political engagement, and underline its lack of commitment:

> Adair's work isn't gritty realism, instead it challenges the reader. It has little to do with that fashionable word 'relevance', which, as poet Sean O'Brien recently pointed out in the *Guardian*, is "often brandished to mitigate ignorance and justify the failure of curiosity". Adair's work is experimental and demanding. It does away with rules and expectations. It rips, plunders and remoulds like the best underground hiphop. It snarls at political correctness, morality and the "wow finish".[196]

Even Adair's own perception of her art appears to align with the interpretation of her works as unremittingly postmodern: "Very post-modern. 'Absoluuutely,' she exults. [...] 'I don't do local. Everyone does local. Let's get out of it, let's do something different.'" Sometimes, however, things are not what they appear to be, not even to their author.

Adair's postmodernism—as it informs her second novel *End*, published in 2007—cannot be understood with a simple passing reference to what it is trying to overcome, namely political

[196] Fred de Vries, "End: Barbara Adair & the Wow Factor" in Empire, July 2008, http://www.barbara-adair.co.za/2009/08/end-barbara-adair-the-wow-factor-fred-de-vries-empire/ (accessed on October 13, 2012).

engagement. The problem of engagement governs Adair's work to such an impressive extent that some of its main characteristics are comprehensible only by taking into account a set of very particular issues which were raised in the course of the South African critical debate around political commitment during the final years of the apartheid regime (more accurately in the Eighties, precisely the time when her fiction *End* is set). More specifically, Barbara Adair's latest work addresses some of the main problems discussed by one of the most prominent South African critics of engagement, Njabulo Ndebele, and especially the issue of the spectacular nature of (South) African political and social history, as well as the need to write a literature that be not merely spectacular. In *End* Adair responds to some of Ndebele's calls for a not-merely-engaged fiction in a very peculiar way: Adair's book stages some of the concepts on which Ndebele constructed his aesthetics, while at the same time bringing them to their limit and divesting them of any progressive political import. In this way, Adair strips Ndebele's calls of their underlying modernity and turns them into catalysts of a postmodern engagement, an engagement which ultimately thrives on a *longing* to engage that cannot go beyond a defense of openness and contingency. Adair's novel achieves such postmodern commitment by focusing on at least four specific issues: the question of the spectacular, the autonomy of the text, the problem of ordinariness, and the issue of ending(s), which I will treat in the course of this chapter after I establish the place of Adair's fiction within the wider trends of South African literature.

In the process of rethinking the nature and limits of engagement, Adair is able to focus on some of the spaces that were silenced by the repressive environment of apartheid, which in this specific case include a number of gender dynamics that can be considered *queer*. Adair seems to transition into a different sphere—a commitment to gender politics—as her longing for an impossible political engagement confirms the latter's unattainability. With *End*, Adair has

written what is in many ways the paradigmatic fictional work on the problem of dealing with the legacy of engagement in contemporary South Africa. Her book can be productively read not only as a reflection on the shortcomings of engagement as a mode of literary art, but even more significantly as a take on the limits of any attempt to overcome it.

Realism, Experimentalism, and Race in South Africa

"I don't do local," says Adair, apparently assuming that any kind of postmodern writing would need to be considered paradigmatically un-South African. This reflects a relatively popular view, which holds that the more locally marked contributions to the literature of South Africa belong to the sub-genre of realist writing.[197] Yet Adair's non-realist fictions are at the same time situated at the end of a *local* tradition of experimentalism which, however historically marginal, can be considered quite longstanding today, even though it has only gained momentum in recent years and seldom reaches the peaks of intertextuality and metaliterariness that characterize Adair's texts. Nevertheless, experimentalism in South Africa has often positioned itself against what was perceived as its opposing (and far more attractive) pole of fictional practice—an oppositional attitude brought forth by Adair's own reaction in the cited interview. Adair's writing represents a peculiar peak in the history of this *querelle*, as in her literary path toward postmodernism she was able not only to employ a number of experimental techniques seldom seen before in her country, but, more importantly, to fully integrate into her prose a reflection precisely on what she was trying to "overcome." In order to move on, as it were, she managed to give an afterlife to what she wanted to leave behind, thus rethinking the binarism that had obtained for so long before her—a binarism which in itself did not lack racial overtones.

[197] See Louise Bethlehem, "The Pleasures of the Political: Apartheid and Postapartheid South African Fiction," in *Teaching the African Novel*, ed. by Gaurav Desai (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 225.

In undertaking to navigate such binary terms, Adair was not alone, but she benefited from some notable forerunners without whom her writings would not exist.

Louise Bethlehem has given what is probably the most concise description of the nexus linking realist aesthetics to anti-authoritarian politics in apartheid South Africa:

> we might say that the trope of truth, the commitment to the 'honest record' that underpins the South African writer's ethical investment in the politicization of literature, is sustained by pervasive recourse to the trope as truth—by an instrumentalist or stenographic attitude to meaning production that yearns for a prose that might, in Mphahlele's terms 'go straight to the visible target.'[198]

Bethlehem's words describe engaged realism, the first pole around which the literary field in South Africa has long been structured and her definition is composed of two interlocked *volets*. The idea of an "ethical investment" in literature as a form of discourse devoted to political strife is coupled with a commitment to "truth" in the sense of "literalism" (in Bethlehem's words) or "mimetic realism" (in Attwell's expression).[199] In South Africa mimetic representation has, indeed, been repeatedly considered as almost spontaneously endowed with the capacity to generate political renewal. The staying power of this moralistic conception was validated as recently as the nineties, when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission incorporated a recognition of the inherent value of testimony into its main tenets, although at that point such a revelation of truth was in the interest of national reconciliation rather than of political strife.[200] In another proof of mimesis' great ethical and political *cachet*, there is evidence that during the

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[198] See Louise Bethlehem, "The Pleasures of the Political: Apartheid and Postapartheid South African Fiction," in *Teaching the African Novel*, ed. by Gaurav Desai (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 229.

[199] See Louise Bethlehem, "The Pleasures of the Political: Apartheid and Postapartheid South African Fiction," in *Teaching the African Novel*, ed. by Gaurav Desai (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 222-245; and David Attwell, "The Experimental Turn in Black South African Fiction," in *South Africa in the Global Imaginary*, ed. by Leon de Kock, Louise Bethlehem, and Sonia Laden (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press; Leiden: Koninklije Brill NV, 2004), 154-179.

[200] "The emphasis on revelation that was the moral signature of the TRC is clearly aligned with some of the major presuppositions of the oppositional literary culture that preceded the TRC." Louise Bethlehem, "The Pleasures of the Political: Apartheid and Postapartheid South African Fiction," in *Teaching the African Novel*, ed. by Gaurav Desai (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 237.

apartheid years it was able to offer an attractive pole for authors who, despite sharing anti-authoritarian views, held a variety of disparate political agendas, including the liberalism of Gordimer, on the one hand, and the radicalism of the Drum writers, on the other.[201] The primacy of realism as a means of anti-authoritarian resistance has, however, frequently inclined authors toward mimesis' least mediated modes of representation, when it becomes a "mere transcription of [...] experiences of humiliation, harassment, displacement and sheer violence."[202]

The enduring cultural primacy of mimetic fiction in South Africa must be more than partially responsible for Adair's view of her own writing as something that departs from what is done *locally*: her metafictional narratives do seem, in fact, to have very little in common with the prevailing mimetic mode. Yet departures from this mode have not been few, even though they have often been subjected to sustained criticism. One of the most notable cases is that of Coetzee, whose works South African readers repeatedly accused of being too distant from current political affairs achieve a real radical potential.[203] Such a confrontational view—regarding experimentalism as relatively disengaged and therefore opposed to engaged realism—was to some extent embraced by Coetzee himself, who advocated formal autonomy for the novel in a remarkable intervention by saying that "in times of intense ideological pressure like the present, when the space in which the novel and history normally coexist like two cows on the same pasture, each minding its own business, is squeezed almost to nothing, the novel, it seems

[201] "'Representational realism' unites the otherwise divergent agendas of liberalism, revisionism and radicalism in South African literary studies." Louise Bethlehem, *Skin Tight: Apartheid Literary Culture and Its Aftermath* (Pretoria and Leiden: University of South Africa Press and Koninklijke Brill NV, 2006), 11.
[202] Malvern van Wyk Smith in Louise Bethlehem, "The Pleasures of the Political: Apartheid and Postapartheid South African Fiction," in *Teaching the African Novel*, ed. by Gaurav Desai (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 229.
[203] David Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 170.

to me, has only two options, supplementarity or rivalry."[204] Writers did not see much middle ground between these two options: history, and thus politics, on the one hand, and a view of the literary as a rival to history, on the other. They were expected to embrace either one or the other, despite the fact that sometimes their work, like Coetzee's, was effectively trying to bridge the two. The second option, however, has shown much less attractive power historically than has engaged mimesis, as André Brink has remarked:

> viewed from the opposite end, the very urgencies of a struggle against apartheid encouraged the imposition of other silences [...] and produced a sense of priority which made it very difficult for writers—even for writers who refused to be explicitly harnessed to any 'cause'—to write about certain very ordinary human situations (like a love relationship without political connotations) without inviting accusations of fiddling while Rome burns.[205]

Part of the problem, according to Brink, was that postmodernism had "become suspect, especially in the wake of astute theorists like Fredric Jameson," who criticized this mode for its inability to meaningfully engage "with historicity and morality."[206] Adair's writing subverts this divide.

If the South African literary field was long characterized by these two marked foci—engaged realism and experimental postmodernism—such dichotomous configuration has been reinforced by the perception of a parallel binary, this time a racial one. White authors were thought to be somewhat more inclined toward experimentation, thanks to their greater literary education and their greater dependence on the Western tradition, whereas authors of African descent were confined within a more mimetic conception of literary production. Somewhat

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[204] Louise Bethlehem, "The Pleasures of the Political: Apartheid and Postapartheid South African Fiction," in *Teaching the African Novel*, ed. by Gaurav Desai (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 235)

[205] André Brink, "Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faced by South African Literature," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, ed. by Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15.

[206] André Brink, "Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faced by South African Literature," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, ed. by Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 18.

paradoxically, Lewis Nkosi and Njabulo Ndeble, two African writers, were among those especially responsible for shaping this view of South African literature. Both were deeply dissatisfied by the perceived aesthetic inferiority of African literature to the supposedly more sophisticated instances of white-authored fiction. Ndeble, especially, commented at length on the excessive political urgency that affected black writing as compared to white. He argued that this made it extremely difficult for the former to overcome the limits of the documentaristic portrayal of oppression,[207] and he once affirmed that "it can be said that in general, the writing of fiction and poetry in South Africa has been influenced by an ethos that defined the written word as politics. Consequently, African writers have tended to approach their task with a severely limited view of the possibilities of the written word."[208] Yet "the tendency to polarise white and black in terms of their relationship with experimental traditions [...] runs deep," involving white authors as well, and "entering the self-construction of as prominent an *oeuvre* as Gordimer's."[209]

David Attwell, to his credit, showed in a recent contribution how this perception of a racial-cum-aesthetic divide needs to be challenged. There is, in fact, evidence that a number of experimentalist pieces of fiction are to be found within the corpus of black fiction, particularly when one looks at the inventive ways in which a supposed mimetic orthodoxy was reformulated by authors like Njabulo Ndebele or, more recently, by Wicomb and Mda.[210] These are not the only writers whose works might offer instances of productive experimentation; other cases—going backward in time—include Lewis Nkosi's psychologism in *Mating Birds* and Mphahlele's

[207] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 11 ff.
[208] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 93-94.
[209] "[Nadine Gordimer] distinguishes between her own self-chosen immersion in the novelistic tradition, and the kinds of demand that are appropriately made of black writers. The latter, she says, who have responded not so much to an orthodoxy but to a genuine impulse, reached a point where they decided 'to discard the lantern of artistic truth that reveals human worth through human ambiguity." David Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 170.
[210] David Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 172.

autobiography, as well as the fiction of Serote and Sipho Sepamla, whose "programmatic refusal to create a structure in which there is some centre of intelligence" was noted by Coetzee himself.[211] The reason for the lack of critical sensitivity for this sort of literary experiment was probably the reluctance to seriously investigate the wide spectrum of possibility that "realism" could afford black writers. Instead, though the label "realist" certainly provided a focus around which writerly styles had coalesced, at the same time it obfuscated their differences and the varied paths authors took. As David Attwell reminds us, "what we are trying to understand" in the case of Black South African writing "is an experimentalism that is both socially connected and aesthetically reflexive, a practice that, in Nkosi's terms, is both 'task' and 'mask,' one that enables the critique that we might associate with realism but that also announces the epistemological invigoration and subject-construction that we might associate with the modernist movement."[212]

Whereas Attwell was instrumental in triggering a reconfiguration of the critical field which destabilized the racial aspect of a literary dichotomy, Adair has been responsible for an even deeper contamination in her recent novel *End*. By establishing a dialogue with Njabulo Ndebele, one of the most notable authors of black South African fiction whose (mildly) experimental realism remains imbued with an engaged conception of the literary, not only does Adair destabilize the racial labeling of her fiction as her book, an apparent instance of "white" fiction, is replete with references to Ndebele's work, thus eliciting a different categorization, but she also undertakes her own reconsideration of the experimental/engaged divide.

[211] David Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 172-174.
[212] David Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 179.

End* and its main intertext: *Casablanca

It is a rather daunting task to describe *End* in an intelligible way. It is a book that sets out to baffle, starting with its cover, which includes the title *End* within an extended quote taken from the first lines of the first chapter. The three letters "*end*" are highlighted within the following printed sentence: "Can Freddie tell you a story, a fiction; words that mean nothing or everything dep*end*ing upon how you want to perceive them? And will it have a wow finish?" So does "end" have to do with the finish, or with the perception? And who is Freddie? And why does it need a "wow finish"? Things get even more complicated once we realize that the final line is a quote from the 1942 Hollywood film *Casablanca*: it's Rick, famously played by Humphrey Bogart, who repeats this question during the film in two of his conversations with Ilsa (played by Ingmar Bergman). The *prologue* to the novel complicates these first "perceptions" by reproducing the introduction to the film with some modifications, so as to make us realize that the novel should be read with the film in mind.

Given its wide popularity, I will recall only a few of the elements of the film *Casablanca* here, all of them crucial for an understanding *End*. First of all, it is a war movie, set at the end of 1941 in Morocco (then administered by the collaborationist government of Vichy France) and released in November 1942, only a few weeks after the allied invasion of French North Africa had begun (Casablanca itself was taken at the beginning of the month). Its storyline has two main thrusts, one political and the other sentimental. Rick is an American expatriate who now manages a café in Casablanca and looks exclusively after his economic interests, even though in the past he has actively supported Communist resistance in Spain against the Fascist-sponsored Franco government, and the anti-colonial struggle in Ethiopia against the invading Italians. He had arrived in Casablanca a year earlier from Paris, which he had left when the German army

gained control of the city. In Paris he had met Ilsa, with whom he had had an unhappy sentimental liaison. Ilsa promised to get married to him, then later suddenly disappeared. In Casablanca, Rick is busy forgetting his past, which proves unsuccessful when Ilsa eventually walks into his bar together with her husband, Laszlo, who is a Czech political refugee actively engaged in underground activities against the Nazis. Her entrance triggers Rick's memory of their past together in Paris. Ilsa and Laszlo intend to reach the US so that Laszlo can continue his political activities against Germany, and they both need a passport which the local French authorities are adamant in refusing to Lazslo. Rick, however, holds two *laissez-passer* which they could use to exit the country. Once Ilsa realizes this, she tries to snatch them from Rick, only to confess a moment later that he still loves him and wishes to leave Casablanca with him. We then learn that her liaison with Rick had taken place at a time when her husband, Laszlo, then interned in a German concentration camp, was falsely rumored to be dead. Rick appears to want to leave Morocco with her, and the two agree to depart together. At the last minute, Rick forces Laszlo to use the document and leave with Ilsa, who then flies away with her husband to a future of anti-Nazi political organizing in the United States. Rick has instead decided to stay behind and join the Free French army fighting against Vichy and the Germans: he has returned to being a politically engaged man.

Since this is only a sketch of a complex movie, I'll take the liberty over the following pages to recall additional details of the film where they are helpful in understanding *End*. But why *Casablanca*? What are the implications of the choice of this film as the main and overt intertextual reference of the novel? An answer can be based on two initial elements that we need to take into consideration before going on to presenting the content of Adair's book. Firstly, in Adair's prologue to *End,* the word "Africa" is, of course, substituted for "Europe": "With the

coming of the wars ["the Second World War" in *Casablanca*'s original script], many eyes in imprisoned Africa [Europe] turned hopefully, or desperately, towards the freedom of America [of the Americas], the freedom to live and the freedom not to die."[213] Right from the prologue, we realize that if *Casablanca* was commenting on the dilemma of engagement in the struggle for European freedom, *End* will be thinking about a similar problematic in relation to recent African history. To do this, it will have recourse to an experimental literary form rather than the realist one we would expect in a book that deals with engagement. There is a second main element that needs to be considered when we begin to review the implications of the *Casablanca-End* connection, and it is reveled not at the beginning but in the final pages of the book, when under "Acknowledgements" Adair lists the few quotes she employed in the novel, detailing their origin. The only quote that openly references *Casablanca* comes from an essay devoted to the film by Umberto Eco (included in *Travels in Hyperreality*), and it is so central to Adair's treatment of *Casablanca* that it should be reported here: "Two clichés in a story can make you laugh, a hundred clichés, they will move you [...] extreme banality allows you to catch a glimpse of the sublime [...]"[214] Political engagement on the one hand, and the problem of inventiveness in narration on the other, are two of the major themes explored by Adair in her book, and account for some of the main twists she gives *Casablanca*'s plot in fashioning her own story.

End opens by identifying the narrator and turning her into a character with the name of Freddie, who will be present in all of the scenes of the book. In many of these scenes, her interactions with the other characters foreground narrative function and lay bare its mechanics, especially its "*clichés*," which represent the most recurrent theme in Freddie's conversations

[213] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), Prologue.
[214] Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper Reality*, trans. by William Weaver (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 209. This quote can be found in a slightly different form in a different essay by Eco: "Casablanca or, The Clichés are Having a Ball," in *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 260-264.

with her characters. The first scene takes place at Maputo Railway Station, where the protagonist "s/he" appears: the novel identifies "s/he" employing only pronouns, and his/her gender changes at every chapter, switching back and forth from male to female. At the station "s/he" says goodbye to "X," the man with whom "s/he" has had a relationship in Maputo. X is returning to Johannesburg, though he lets him/her believe that he is going back to England. This is the first parallel to the film, as the scene is built around a reminiscence of the station scene in *Casablanca*, yet with many fundamental differences which do not limit themselves to the change of setting. In the film, Rick does not say goodbye to Ilsa at the station, nor is this its first scene. It is already clear, then, that Adair will not be constrained by the film's script in her own text, but will opt instead to activate selective references as the need arises, and with such flexibility that the association between characters in the novel and the film is remarkably fluid. For instance, one character in the novel, "X," is associated with Ilsa, yet also manifests traits that belong to Lazslo.

The story begins with two characters plus the narrator Freddie: s/he, who we'll later realize is a journalist who, although the text reveals that she is not South African,[215] is reporting from Maputo on the civil strife in Mozambique for a South-African newspaper, and "X," a married man from South Africa. As in *Casablanca,* we have a plot constructed around the political and the sentimental, and a plot which, more importantly, elicits in the reader the expectation of an interaction between these two dimensions by setting itself up through a reference to *Casablanca*. Another character is added later to these three, one of whom narrates, so as to complete a love triangle, once again redolent of *Casablanca*'s plot. "X" is married to "Y," a drug-addicted and drug-dealing woman who has gradually become alienated from the

[215] She has never been in a whites-only bar and has never used the local currency, the Rand. Not incidentally, in *Casablanca* Rick is not from Morocco and is of a different nationality than Ilsa and Laszlo.

relationship, consumed as she is by the routine of her addiction. All of these characters are white except for Freddie, whose race is never specified, as well as middle-class (X and Y are living in an upscale Johannesburg suburb).

In the novel characters are consistently confronted with the starkest socio-economic and political questions. S/he is a journalist who relates the Mozambican civil war to a South African audience, and X and Y live in close contact with the racial tensions of Johannesburg, with Y having to move within some of the most dangerous neighborhoods of the city, including Berea and Hillbrow, one of the few racially mixed areas of the city in the eighties. Yet it is their personal life that appears to be their dominant concern, and it is their attempts at defining it in the face of the pressures of political reality that are explored by the story-line. After their short affair in Mozambique, s/he and X see each other in a Johannesburg café: the place is modeled upon Rick's café in *Casablanca* and is complete with a gang of white supremacists (mimicking *Casablanca*'s Nazi party) who brawl with African nationalists, as well as with a pianist who reminds s/he of Sam and of "As Time Goes By."[216] X, not unlike Isla in *Casablanca,* then finds himself torn between his relationship with s/he (a character mostly associated with *Casablanca*'s Rick) and drug-addicted Y (a very unlikely Lazslo, who needs to be "free" and "*fight* for freedom" through her drug-addiction[217]). Soon after they meet, Y needs to be saved from a dealer in Hillbrow she is unable to pay,[218] while later on she plans to pick up drugs at the café where previously s/he and X had seen each other. The drugs are to be handed over by a "weasel-man," a reference to the *Casablanca* character who first retrieved the *laissez-passer*,[219] yet the police storm the place and the task becomes impossible (once again, this reminds us of the

[216] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 90.
[217] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 141-142.
[218] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 116 ff.
[219] In the film he had appeared in one of the earliest scenes. See Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 134.

French officers' eruption into Rick's café). Y is already being traced by the police, and the officer assigned to the case was formerly employed in Alexandra, where he had participated in crimes against the African population. This officer represents another inroad political reality makes into *End's* sentimental/existential plot. It is soon clear that Y (Lazslo) needs to leave South Africa if she wants to escape arrest, and it is s/he (once again like Rick) who has an airplane ticket for the next flight to Maputo. Inevitably, X (in one more reference that brings us back to Ilsa) asks s/he to give the ticket to Y, but once they are at the airport what happens is quite different from what the film has led us to expect. The police finally catch Y and X walks away. S/he gets on the plane back to Maputo, whereas *Casablanca*'s Rick had remained behind. As a surreal epilogue to the story, the last few pages relate an imaginary goodwill visit to Maputo by Princess Diana, which ends with her murder.

Towards a Post-Engaged Postmodernism: Adair, Ndebele, and the Question of the Spectacular

Central as the plot is to the book, it nevertheless cannot fully convey the depth of Adair's work, which is particularly striking in the myriad conversations between the narrator Freddie and the other characters of the novel, especially "s/he." The postmodern dimension of the book is brought forth in these exchanges, more so even than in the intertextually structured plot. There are, however, more obvious ways in which Adair is postmodern and some that are less so: I will focus first on those that I think are more apparent to the casual reader, and then show afterwards that Adair's prose effects an even more interesting although less perspicuous operation. This feat is to be considered not just postmodern but also post-engaged as she reworks and brings to the limit Njabulo Ndebele's theory of the engaged novel.

The first element to which I would like to point is Adair's decision to transform the narrator into a character that does not only participate in the narrative but whose presence also becomes the subject of a number of essayistic passages where it is fully reflected upon, as in this instance at the end of the first chapter:

> Freddie was silent. He said nothing. They both just walked and looked. The silence gave Freddie time to think, about him, and X, and death and history. What about society, she thought. All novels have some social element to them. Probably because people don't live in Walden Pond, they live in a social world. And so they devise some internal drama for themselves. I must devise an internal drama.[220]

Freddie's presence clearly destabilizes the reading experience, emphasizing the constructedness of the narrative and the contingency of the narrator's choices, many of which are revealed in all of their striking lack of necessity.[221] This theme, of course, is relished by a number of theorists of the postmodern, starting with Lyotard.[222] *End*'s fiction thus appears as a "fictional fiction": a fiction, that is, where the reader is always confronted by the impossibility of assuming, even temporarily, that what she reads is real. The result is that the text operates entirely outside of the realist mode—a mode that is, not incidentally, relished by engaged literature. Unlike in much politically engaged writing, in *End* not even memories (and therefore history) belong to the domain of the real:

> 'It never did happen,' said Freddie. 'I just wanted it to happen so I wrote it down. And anyway, so what if you've told the story to yourself over and over again. What are memories? If they happened, they did. If they didn't happen, well, so what—you can pretend they did. You can remember the words that you use to describe the place. You can remember the words that you use to make up the story.[223]

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[220] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 8.
[221] "Sitting down to write the next chapter, Freddie remember that she had once read a magazine piece that described an exhibition of body parts. She could not remember where the exhibition was, or where she had seen the article, but the description stayed in her mind. She ... thought to include it in the chapter, the juxtaposition of views." Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 9.
[222] On this aspect of postmodernism, see Niall Lucy, *Postmodern Literary Theory* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 68-72; Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979), 7-9.
[223] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 71.

Such reflections on the constructed nature of narratives are so pervasive in *End* that they go beyond a consideration of the novel's text to implicate the production of different kinds of representations that seem less textual, such as in the scene when "s/he" and Freddie ride a taxi to Maputo's airport:

> The taxi jerked to a stop. She looked up to see a row of dark figures silhouetted against the fires of the city—an automatic rifle, bayonet at the one end, outlined against the smoke like an erotic sculpture. In some pristine London gallery this image would have won an award. The caption might say something like, 'an expression of post modernism.' She looked at Freddie, but could only see the whites of her eyes as she stared into the distance. There was no fear in her expression, as Freddie knew that this was not real. But how could she know this? She was in the taxi; she could not anticipate what would happen next.[224]

A similar attention to the mediated nature of reality is brought forth at many other points, most notably in chapter III, when the novel relates how the article that "s/he" is writing for her/his Johannesburg newspaper is actually concocted out of a reused old story, tailored in a way that will meet the expectations of the South African audience. The supposed historical reality conveyed by "reportages" is forged and thus not less fictional than any fiction. The fact that history is fictional, however, does not make it any less serious:

> 'Roles must be played in life,' she said 'and in a war these roles are stark. Villages and towns must be burnt or bombed, bridges must be blown up. We must all continue to play the game. The defeat is apparent here, but it must be made manifest by more dead bodies. There must be mourning by those who love the dead. And what is your duty? Your duty is to tell of the war to others so that they can be shocked or self-righteous, patriotic or filled with angst. Otherwise there would be no point in having the war at all.[225]

Literature, by creating precisely the roles upon which "history" functions, appears to acquire a typically postmodern precedence against this latter category. It is representation that prevails upon fact, even though the impact of representation has tangible, bodily implications.

Other relatively obvious ways in which this novel may be considered postmodern reside in the way it is structured through references to other media—primarily film—whose presence

[224] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 74.
[225] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 17.

complicates the novel's take on the constructedness of its own narrative: "'Don't worry,' said Freddie. 'It's okay. It's all part of an adventure, an adventure that you will never experience again, unless of course you watch the movie.'"[226] That the novel is compelled to find its referent in a different text (a visual one) rather than external reality brings about a redoubling of the processes of textualization of the real, in such a way that it is the ironic references themselves that assume a central role (far more so than "reality" does) in setting up the epistemic universe of the novel. This awareness of the constructedness of perceptions is emphasized even more by the treatment of gender, which changes "at the whim" of the narrator in the case of the main character. "[T]he I, the he, the she, the changeable-at-a-whim character"[227] reveals the contingent nature of an apparently "given" reality. Instead, through her compositional choices, Adair reinterprets gender as a textual category not unlike others explored in the novel. An ulterior significance of this feature of the text will only emerge after we establish the post-engaged credentials of Adair's novel. The sinister melancholia which imbues the book's atmosphere makes it appear somewhat akin to other notable postmodern contributions, and sometimes borders on the apocalyptic tone that can be found at the heart of many other books labeled postmodern, especially in the sections devoted to Mozambique and Hillbrow: I will limit myself to recalling here just the previously interpreted *O Livro das Emoções*, by João Almino, as this work is not only rightfully considered postmodern, as I argued, but is also infused by a tone not unlike that of Adair's book.

Yet any analysis of *End*'s postmodernity that would limit itself to these characteristics would by no means fully convey the peculiar nature of the operation carried out by Adair. This operation crucially entails dealing with the legacy of political engagement, I will argue, by

[226] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 77.
[227] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 9.

confronting the poetics of Njabulo Ndebele, one of the most important engaged writers of the period of transition out of apartheid, the *interregnum*. In Adair's book, Ndebele's engaged heritage undergoes a "postmodern turn" which, rather than doing away with the theoretical foundations of his contributions, instead achieves a post-engaged stance in which the "overcoming" of engagement, not unlike a Vattimian *Verwindung*, continues to include the latter in a twisted and unexpected way. Only by taking into consideration Ndebele's legacy will we be able to fully make sense of *End*'s main features, including its treatment of *Casablanca*, a presence in the book that highlights its preoccupation with the theme of engagement. Adair and Ndebele, despite having lived in different periods (Ndebele was born around twenty years before Adair), are both concerned with the problem of the limitations of the literary paradigm of engaged realism. We have seen how Adair was keen to differentiate herself from what was done "locally." In our brief historical survey of South African literature, we also saw how, despite a growing trend toward experimentalism, the literary pole represented by engaged realist writing remained remarkably persistent over time in offering within the literary field a focus for the interests of both readers and writers. Yet its shortcomings were numerous, and were highlighted by Ndebele in the famous critiques he collected in his book of essays *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*.[228] Both Ndebele and Adair share similar critiques against this literary mode, but resolve them in ways that belong to different spheres. In the case of Ndebele, we remain in a domain of thought concerned with positive ideology, putting forth a particular political view (liberal democratic) for the country's development out of the *interregnum*. In the case of Adair, we abandon any positive political ideology and thus enter the domain of Vattimian postmodernity (more extensively defined in my introduction). Yet at the same time, Adair retains

[228] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006).

a longing for engagement, manifesting an attitude that I describe as post-engaged. The result of this process is a divestment of conceptual attention from societal politics and its refocus on the body. It fashions a peculiar kind of gender/bodily engagement.

Ndebele's critical contributions are located at a momentous historical juncture. Most of his essays on literature and engagement were written in the 1980s, when it was becoming apparent that the white supremacist regime was headed for its demise. The years 1985 through 1987, when the brunt of the foreign sanctions became obviously unbearable, were a particularly significant turning point.[229] It is these years, also called the *interregnum*, that provide the backdrop for *End*'s narrative, and this is not merely coincidental, for Adair remains concerned with some of the questions that Ndebele was then formulating. He was at the time one of the most active critics reflecting on the question of how literature should change in view of the current, as well as the foreseen, evolution of the South African socio-political environment. That a change was necessary in Ndebele's opinion was not to be doubted. The shortcomings of the realist engaged paradigm, which he considered to be the prevailing *status quo* of black South African fiction, were, in his mind, very clear. They represented a pressing and unavoidable problem: "it can be said that in general, the writing of fiction and poetry in South Africa has been influenced by an ethos that defined the written word as politics. Consequently, African writers have tended to approach their task with a severely limited view of the possibilities of the written word."[230] Such a "limited view" critically impacted the creative process, which focused on the wrong aim, the "seizure of power" rather than "a radically contemplative state of mind in which the objects of contemplation are that range of social conditions which are the major ingredients

[229] See Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 152 ff.
[230] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 93-94.

of social consciousness".[231] The result of this excess of engagement was an art of "anticipated surfaces"[232] that was plagued by a number of problems, including disproportionate spectacularization, lack of autonomy, and defective characterization. In the following pages, I will expound Ndebele's views on each of these aspects, and couple each of these sections to an analysis of selected passages from *End*. Adair, on the one hand, responds to Ndebele's considerations so as to construct her novel around them, while on the other hand she brings Ndebele's positions to the limit—that is, she shifts their conceptual import from a perspective that is still engaged to a thoroughly post-modern one.

Ndebele believed that apartheid art, and fiction in particular, was plagued by a "numbing sensationalism"[233] due to its propensity to "point to the spectacle."[234] He attributed a very specific and peculiar meaning to this latter term, which remains key to understanding both his assessment of black African fiction and the poetics that stem from his appraisal. Adair introduces slightly different terminology, but she appears to be concerned with a very similar problematic. In Ndebele's opinion, the problem of South African engaged realism, mostly concurring with black African fiction, is that it mirrors apartheid society too closely, whose primary characteristic was precisely that of being "mind-boggingly spectacular":

> the monstrous war machine developed over the years; the random massive pass raids; mass shooting and killings; mass economic exploitation the ultimate symbol of which is the mining industry; the mass removals of people; the spate of draconian laws passed with the spectacle of parliamentary promulgations; the luxurious life-style of whites: servants, all-encompassing privilege, swimming-pools, and high commodity consumption; the sprawling monotony of

[231] "Most paradoxically, for the writer, the *immediate* problem, just at the point at which he sits down to write his novel, is not the seizure of power. Far from it. His immediate aim is a radically contemplative state of mind in which the objects of contemplation are that range of social conditions which are the major ingredients of social consciousness." Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 67-68.
[232] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 19.
[233] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 16.
[234] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 38.

> architecture in African locations, which are the very picture of poverty and oppression. The symbols are all over: the quintessence of obscene social exhibitionism. ... It could be said ... that the most outstanding feature of South African oppression is its brazen, exhibitionist openness.[235]

Ndebele's "spectacularity" has, then, a number of specific features. It is characterized by an "exhibitionist openness" which makes it all-too-easy to perceive, with the result that any event or aspect of apartheid society becomes haunted by the "symbol" of itself. It tends, in other words, to appear as the perfect incarnation of the idea or concept that would normally remain somewhat removed from reality during the act of perception. Poverty or luxury as they exist in South Africa appear almost as their own emblems, so closely do their specific instantiations resemble our conceptual expectations of what they should be. There can be no doubt, in either case, that the one stands only for itself. It is this sort of "spectacularity," in Ndebele's view that is replicated by engaged realism:

> everything in La Guma's story points to spectacle: the complete exteriority of everything: the dramatic contrasts all over the story, the lack of specificity of place and character so that we have spectacular ritual instantly turned into symbol, with instant meaning (no interpretation here is necessary: seeing is meaning), and the intensifying device of hyphenated adjectives.[236]

If South African society makes its own conceptualization too easy, then literature, when it limits itself to this sort of mimicry of reality, necessarily incurs a lack of depth. We thus come across "instant meaning" with no apparent need for interpretation. We are, in other words, locked in what we could also describe as the *cliché*—which is the term Adair has chosen, via Eco, to deal with a very similar problem. This literature of the *cliché,* or the spectacular, has a whole set of characteristics, including negative modifiers such as "unartistic, crude, and too political."[237] More specifically,

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[235] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 31-32.
[236] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 38.
[237] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 39.

> it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority; it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the detail; it provokes identification through recognition and feeling rather than through observation and analytical thought; it calls for emotion rather than conviction; it establishes a vast sense of presence without offering intimate knowledge; it confirms without necessarily offering a challenge. It is the literature of the powerless identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness. Nothing beyond this can be expected of it.[238]

All of these characteristics become the *cible* of Adair's own operation. *End*'s narrative dismantles the processes of "identification through feeling" as well as the "sense of presence" highlighted by Ndebele. The "challenge" we are faced with in *End* destabilizes the paradigm of engaged realism, which Adair considered to represent the "local" mode of writing *par excellence*. However, while she seems to heed Ndebele's teachings, she also shifts them onto a wholly different level.

The fundamental difference between Ndebele's and Adair's positions on engaged realism resides in their respective ideological standpoints. Even while critiquing the shortcomings of that mode of fiction, Ndebele never questions the political paradigm that governs it. Engaged realist writers did not do wrong, in his opinion, in the political aim of their project, which was to challenge authoritarianism through art. Instead, they were at fault in the means they chose to pursue their agenda. The form of literature they practiced, by choosing to document the "spectacular" life under apartheid, inevitably continued to exist as part of the reality it sought to condemn. In turn, it represented a mere "sloganeering" that was ultimately unable to suggest new ways of thinking outside a narrow, confrontational perspective.[239] Anti-apartheid literature, in other words, remained in too many ways apartheid literature *tout court*, a form of art incapable of

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[238] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 41-42.

[239] "Ultimately, South African culture, in the hands of whites, the dominant force, is incapable of nurturing a civilisation based on the perfection of the individual in order to permit maximum social creativity. Consequently, we have a society of posturing and sloganeering; one that frowns upon subtlety of thought and feeling, and never permits the sobering power of contemplation, of close analysis, and the mature acceptance of failure, weakness and limitation. It is totally heroic." Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 42.

creating a new knowledge paradigm that existed beyond the power structures put in place by the regime:

> The greatest challenge of the South African revolution is in the search for ways of thinking, ways of perception, that will help to break down the closed epistemological structures of South African oppression. Structures which can severely compromise resistance by dominating thinking itself. The challenge is to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception that have characterised apartheid society. For writers this means freeing the creating process itself from those very laws. It means extending the writer's perception of what can be written about, and the means and methods of writing.[240]

The key word of this passage, "perception," reminds us of the emphasis Adair put on "perceiving" in the title page of *End*.[241] It is the excessive containment of perception within the limits of the *cliché* that saps engaged fiction. The result is nothing less than a failure of civilization, even though the black people who authored engaged realism were clearly only marginally responsible for it. "[U]ltimately, South African culture, in the hands of whites, the dominant force, is incapable of nurturing a civilisation based on the perfection of the individual in order to permit maximum social creativity."[242] The focus of this interpretation is the reader: it is she who must be changed by the experience of reading into a subject who will be able to thrive in a non-authoritarian society. This is precisely what it is not happening with engaged realism. Ndebele's concern, then, is to find a better tool for intellectual readerly liberation, a prerequisite, in his humanistic poetics, for political liberation. What needs to be achieved is a liberation of

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[240] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 63. Paradoxically, in Ndebele's thought engaged realism participated to such an extent in the mind-set of apartheid that it appeared compromised by the structures of oppression: "The mode of perception, by failing to transcend its own limitations, can become part of the oppression it sought to understand and undermine. It does not do so intentionally, of course: it simply becomes trapped. Such entrapment may even lead to the development of a dangerous predisposition to reform rather than to radical change. Indeed, the entrapment of resistance in an unreflective rhetoric of protest could easily be one of the sources of reactionary politics even among the oppressed." Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 59-60.

[241] "Can Freddie tell you a story, a fiction; words that mean nothing or everything depending on how you want to perceive them? And will it have a wow finish?" Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), cover page.

[242] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 42.

perception. The "ordinary" should be "recovered" to this end; namely, that which was missing from the fictional *palette* of protest writing:

> These three stories remind us that the ordinary daily lives of people should be the direct focus of political interest because they constitute the *very content* of the struggle, for the struggle involves people not abstractions. If it is a new society we seek to bring about in South Africa than that newness will be based on a direct concern with the way people actually live. That means a range of complex ethical issues involving man-man, man-woman, woman-woman, man-nature, man-society relationships.[243]

Ndebele's standpoint might appear counterintuitive: in order to fashion an effectively subversive literature, the writer needs to see beyond the moment of protest and into post-apartheid times, when a confrontational stance is not enough to sustain a functioning democratic society. According to this perspective, literary tools such as imagination,[244] psychological investigation,[245] technique,[246] and even irony, are endowed with new political power: "the artist [...] although desiring action, often with as much passion as the propagandist, can never be entirely free from the rules of irony. Irony is the literary manifestation of the principle of contradiction."[247] Without allowing for such dimensions of human perspective, the individual suited for a democratic society would never come into being: "the aim is to extend the range of personal and social experience as far as possible in order to contribute to bringing about a highly conscious, sensitive new person in a new society."[248] Bethlehem herself has agreed with these

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[243] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 52.
[244] "There must be a freeing of imagination in which what constitutes the field of relevance is extended considerably." Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 68.
[245] "The artist should help the reader condemn a stooge while understanding something of his motivations. That way the reader learns something about the psychology of the co-opted." Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 69.
[246] "Technique, then, is inseparable from the exploration of human perception." Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 71.
[247] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 66.
[248] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 71.

conclusions, affirming in a recent consideration of Ndebele's thought that his "intention *was* not to depoliticize literary practice so much as to encourage a reorientation of the interrogation of power."[249] Ndebele's poetics still, then, propound an ideological line of thought in the hope of achieving a certain idea of the future, in this case a democratic South Africa. Adair's writings, on the other hand, relinquish this positive drive, lending Ndebele's position a post-modern dimension, where positive ideologies no longer have any place.

That Adair is concerned with something very similar to Ndebele's critiques is apparent at the very beginning of *End*'s narrative, where she discusses readerly expectations. She is perfectly aware that the "local" reader, that is the reader of engaged realism, is after a kind of novelistic text strikingly different from the one she is putting forth. As the narrator Freddie says:

> Readers like a man with personal integrity, morality, intelligence. They want to be able to identify with the hero, they want an identity, they want to be saved from the obscurity of having a choice. You can't just think about love or sex, whatever it is. Think about the man after whom this street is named—Patrice Lumumba. His violent death, his desperate escape across the Congo to Stanleyville, the jubilant celebratory bonfires along the way, which made it so much easier for his pursuers to follow him, his final revolting martyrdom.[250]

Identity, emphasized in this passage, is, according to Ndebele, at the core of the spectacular. The spectacle is characterized by its capacity to trigger instant identification—so that when we perceive a certain "reality" we have no doubt that it actually corresponds to our way of perceiving it. Conveying the spectacle is the ultimate dream of realism, a realism that brings a distinctive politics with it, a moralizing way of considering "reality" with the result of an immediate readerly response of either love or hatred. This sort of moralizing characterization is precisely what Adair's novel refuses to offer. The nature of this refusal is, however, extremely sophisticated and carefully calibrated. It appears to be aligned with Ndebele's theory of the

[249] Louise Bethlehem, "The Pleasures of the Political: Apartheid and Postapartheid South African Fiction," in *Teaching the African Novel*, ed. by Gaurav Desai (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 233.
[250] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 5.

novel, yet it elaborates on it by twisting it ironically. This ironic twist is the sense of her post-engagedness. One way of destabilizing Ndebele's position is, first of all, by underlying how it might not be "reality" that generates a spectacle, upon which engaged realist writing would later be modeled, but instead the act of representation that renders "reality" spectacular. This is achieved in *End* by looking at the inner workings of journalistic reporting:

> That call yesterday (from the editor): 'What the hell are you doing up there? It's bloody expensive to keep a foreign correspondent... and the readers want all the gore, they want front-page stuff. Get some blood for us.' More of the same invective. 'No I don't care. I don't give a fuck what the bloody blacks do to each other. But the public wants you to sound as if you care, and I want to sell the fucking newspaper.'[251]

If this is the commonplace ("clichéd") reaction of the printed media to an instance of civil strife in a post-colonial country (Mozambique), then it is very possible that underneath the layer of spectacular performance provided by mediatic representation a whole host of different stories may remain concealed and await "rediscovery." These stories should then *not* be discussing overblown heroes. They should not be outright tragedies, even though it is those themes that appeal to the reader:

> 'I knew what would happen,' was all Freddie said. 'I knew that nothing would happen. You were not put here to become a heroine. This is not a tragedy. There is a real and bigger tragedy out there that cannot touch either you or me. And so I was not afraid. And anyway, it's only my words and I have written enough about heroes. Well, I hope that I have written enough about them to keep the novel on the bookstore shelves—at least for a while; maybe even a book club or two.[252]

In *End,* heroism becomes ironically distorted into nothing less than "the heroic powder," which performs a kind of heroism that certainly leaves behind any notion of a positive ideology: "No more heroes, Freddie thought. I've described enough of them Enough of Che, or was it Castro that I wrote about. Enough of Lumumba. Y depends upon the powder and that is heroic enough

[251] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 25.
[252] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 77.

for this story."[253] Yet Adair subverts Ndebele's still-engaged theory of the novel in ways that are even more striking and substantial, and that involve the intertextual references to *Casablanca*.

As we recalled in a previous section, there are two main conceptual reasons behind the selection of *Casablanca* as the principal intertext of Adair's novel: (1) this is a propaganda movie intending to call for engagement (against the Nazis), and engagement is the main theme running through the book, as well as (2) a film whose cult reception (via Eco) has emphasized the multiple *clichés* out of which it is constructed. These two aspects are fused in the film, so that the experience of watching *Casablanca* resembles that of witnessing the overblown nature of apartheid society:

> when the film is shown in American universities, the boys and girls greet each scene and canonical line of dialogue ("Round up the usual suspects," "Was that cannon fire, or is it my heart pounding?"—or even every time that Bogey says "kid") with ovations usually reserved for football games. And I have seen the youthful audience in an Italian art cinema react in the same way. What then is the fascination of *Casablanca*?[254]

The film provides the same experience of instantaneous identification that Ndebele claims characterized the perception of South African social realities as well as the experience of reading the engaged fiction that protested against such realities. Thus, it is not surprising that *Casablanca* is "low on psychological credibility, and with little continuity in its dramatic effects,"[255] which is once again similar to South African engaged realism. In fact, according to Eco, *Casablanca* is not just lavish in its use of *clichés*—the elements that give us that experience of instant recognition—it actually "uses them all"[256]: we have the "Exotic" (Morocco and its Arab music), then "France" and "America"; these places are stages for a number of "Passages" toward the

[253] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 63.
[254] Umberto Eco, *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 260.
[255] Umberto Eco, *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 260.
[256] Umberto Eco, *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 260.

"Promised Land," before reaching which one has to go through a "Wait"; the "Magic Key" required to unlock it is the visa, and it is "around the winning of this Key that passions are unleashed."[257] However, only the "pure" can reach the "Promised Land" (namely Ilsa, Lazslo and the Bulgarian couple). The others are either forgotten or "achieve purity through sacrifice"[258] (including Rick and the French police captain). This sacrifice is his participation in the resistance, which conjures nothing short of the *cliché* of the "Holy War." Not incidentally, the myth of the sacrifice "runs through the whole film" in an "orgy of sacrificial archetypes."[259] But this is not all: we still have the *cliché* of the "Unhappy Love," as well as that of the strife between "Civilization" and "Barbarism" (played out in the struggle between the Allies and the "Nazi beast"), as well as the "Love Triangle," the "Betrayed Husband," and the "Victorious Lover." But what about the "Odyssean Return," the "Lovelorn Ascetic," and the "Redeemed Drunkard"?[260] Apparently all of these tropes find a place in this film, where "there is a sense of dizziness, a stroke of brilliance" in the way so many *clichés* are successfully entangled together.[261]

Thus, if Adair reacts against the "spectacularization" and the "sloganeering" denounced by Ndebele as the hallmarks of engaged realism, she does so by resorting to an intertext that is characterized by overblown features which represent a host of "archetypes" as well as the representation of nothing less than one of the most well-known instances of engaged film. By referring to *Casablanca,* Adair ironically twists Ndebele's positions on the spectacular so that

[257] Umberto Eco, *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 260.
[258] Umberto Eco, *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 260.
[259] Umberto Eco, *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 260.
[260] Umberto Eco, *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 260.
[261] Umberto Eco, *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 260.

she merely appears to heed his calls for a fiction that reaches beyond the limits of engaged realism:

> Freddie turned over a page in the picture book. 'Look.' She pointed at the picture—an old black-and-white photograph of Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart. Just imagine; you could be in a movie and then you would know exactly who you are. In a movie there is no secret.[262]

In a novel, however, there *should* be secrets, yet in *End* Adair chooses not just to reflect upon but to include a film utterly composed precisely of *clichés*, with the predictable result that she reverts into what Ndebele called "sloganeering": "Oh fuck, I can't seem to write anything that is not a cliché, Freddie mused."[263] In fact, in *End* Freddie is constantly haunted by the clichéd, not only by the key figures of engaged strife, namely "heroes", but also by the commonplace "context" of "social production":

> I must also justify this internal drama; give it some validity, something that makes readers think they are not just indulging in an individual stage show. I must create a context, a public social production: genocide, racism, poverty. It's endless, Freddie thought, the way the same themes can be written about over and over again. And what did the reader think of all this, these clichés? Were there enough of them to make the story moving, or were they simply laughable, she wondered. Well, she didn't really care; after all, she would only be here for the length of this novel. Only the readers would continue to exist in their own worlds, worlds that they created to pass their own time.[264]

The inclusion in the text of that which Adair simultaneously tries to "overcome" is the fundamental characteristic of her post-engagement. In performing this operation, she departs from Ndebele's still-engaged critique of the limits of engaged realism and instead toys with the main points of his poetics so as to establish a looping movement ("it's endless") between the fundamental traits of engaged fiction and their postmodern *Verwindung*. In the process, the ideological dimension of engagement is lost. In the ironic world of *End*—whose irony is certainly not the one Ndebele was calling forth—any reflection on the question of the spectacular fails to lead to any vision of a different South Africa. After all, Freddie doesn't "really care"

[262] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 53.
[263] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 86.
[264] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 8.

about what she is doing. Outright care, anger—the expressions of a committed attitude—have no place in the universe of her narration, where "anger changes nothing." Instead, the narrator's stance is defined by a looping dynamic between carelessness and care:

> Freddie looked at them. 'Don't be angry,' Freddie whispered to her. 'Don't be angry. If you are angry it means that you care. I am never angry because I don't care enough, and anger changes nothing. Although now you are making me care about you, so I had better start another story. And anyway you are meant to look resigned—that's what Bogard was, resigned and drunk.[265]

In this endless moving between the persistence of engagement and its "overcoming," whatever Freddie says remains marked by a post-modern contingency: "What now, after all this melodrama? What can I try now? Anything, I suppose, Freddie thought. After all, in this business, who can fail? They're just words. Or is it real?"[266] No image of a new socio-political order can be built from these mere "words," both caring and careless, nor can it result, as Ndebele wished, from the interactions between the narration and its readers: *End*'s characters are, too, just "words on paper,"[267] and the encounter between them and their audience will only lead to juxtaposition, as "readers will continue to exist in their own worlds."[268] In Adair, Ndebele's politics are only a memory, however strong.

In *End,* the spectacular becomes an occasion to construct post-engagedness in another way. The narrator reflects on *Casablanca* and this text effects a peculiar process of staging through which the (cult) recognition of the filmic references are both triggered and destabilized. Freddie's musings render the film recognizable to the reader, as she constantly reminds us of the details of the intertext and of how closely they shadow the novel's storyline:

> It was not raining in Maputo. And he did not wear a hat. 'This reminds me of that scene in the movie *Casablanca*,' he said to X.
>
> 'What scene?' X asked. 'I remember seeing it, but it was so long ago.'

[265] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 102.
[266] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 18.
[267] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 18. The aspect of characterization will be treated further in a dedicated section.
[268] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 8.

> 'It's that scene on the station platform in Paris. It's raining and Rick is waiting for Ilsa. They are leaving Paris to escape the Nazis, but she does not arrive...[269]

Adair places this passage at the beginning of the narrative, but *End* is replete with similar moments in which the novel is dramatically juxtaposed to the film. This emphasizes the proximity between the two and elicits a perception of identity—a perception not unlike that which is found at the core of Ndebelian "spectacularity":

> She turned and moved towards where the other journalists were. 'I want a whiskey,' she said to Freddie. A whiskey to dull the pain that had moved from the top of her thighs and into her stomach. And all around the war raged on.
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> 'Play it Sam, for old time's sake, play *As Time Goes By*,' Freddie said quietly to her. 'It's time for the song.'

If Adair seems to stage the spectacular, deliberately constructing moments when it is triggered, in near contradiction she also appears to break up that perception of identity, thus retaining some elements of the engaged heritage while at the same time going "beyond" them. This happens when the narrator recalls *Casablanca* to generate misgivings rather than immediate certainties regarding the relationship that obtains between the film and the book: "In the light he was in a spotlight, on a stage, a set for a movie. He did not know which movie it was. She was silent. So was he."[270] *End* hearkens back to an engaged attitude, then, not only through reference to a clichéd film. Neither does the novel retain engagement and its legacy through the background presence of *Casablanca*'s storyline alone, leading from disengagement (personified by Rick at the café) to engagement (Rick at the airport). This persistence is effected in a much more subtle way, which employs the intertextual references as a way of deliberately staging Ndebele's "spectacular" precisely at the moment of its "overcoming." This amounts, once again, to a post-modern *Verwindung*: since Freddie's destabilization of the relationship between the novel and the film effectively negates the possibility of attributing a stable significance to either, it leaves

[269] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 1-2
[270] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 107.

us in the uncertain territory of intertextual mirroring, a fundamental aspect of Adair's postmodernism. "'Don't worry,' said Freddie. 'It's okay. It's all part of an adventure, an adventure that you will never experience again, unless of course you watch the movie.' But she was so distracted and so anxious that she did not even bother to ask what movie it was that Freddie referred to."[271] What Freddie implies in this passage—i.e., that the novel repeats the film—is clearly inaccurate and misleading, as is attested by the repeated differences between the two, many of which had been highlighted by Freddie herself (as we previously saw, the association between the novel's and the film's character remains fluid). On the other hand, the fact that the s/he character appears to ignore the identity of the film Freddie is referring to, when both of them had many a time beforehand referred explicitly to *Casablanca*, effectively renders the relationship linking film and novel utterly indeterminate. It thus loses, in the process, any positive ideological import that the engaged film might have brought with it into the novel.

Being Post-Engaged: Characterization, Autonomy, Longing

Adair employs those aspects of Ndebele's poetics which stem from the question of the spectacular as foci around which she formulates her post-engaged attitude. Once again, she constructs her text upon Ndebele's interpretation of the shortcomings of engaged realism, so as to give an ironic twist to the central points of his theory. Crucial amongst these is the issue of characterization. If the socio-political landscape of late apartheid was characterized by an "overblownness" which turned it into the "emblem" of itself, making its conceptual appraisal nearly impossible in the process, engaged fiction was at fault not only when it acquiesced in mimicking such spectacular events, but also when it depicted characters in their midst that were themselves overblown, such as all-good revolutionary heroes or negative types that were

[271] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 77.

unremittingly evil. Ndebele writes against the attitude that populates the spectacular stage of apartheid, as well as of the anti-apartheid struggle, with types that lack all "complexity" and "unaccountability" in their behaviors.[272] He calls for a fictional art capable of understanding the reasons for people and their choices, whatever these be, with the ultimate aim of better honing the epistemological instruments of resistance. Since, according to Ndebele, resistance should not be a simple confrontational posture but rather a movement, both political and epistemic, towards a new society built upon a new kind of learning—a learning which involves, among other things, a knowledge of human psychology through characterization. (Good) fiction should provide precisely that:

> It is clear ... that it is humanly unrealistic to show a revolutionary hero, for example, who has no inner doubts. All great revolutionaries from Lenin, through Nkrumah, to Ché Guevara, among other, have had to grapple with inner fears, anxieties, and doubts. A reader confronted with such heroism, experiences himself as potentially capable of it too, if only he could learn to find a way of dealing with his fears.[273]

The love triangle staged in *End* responds to this plea, as the narrator admittedly tries to construct characters that are quite unlike apartheid heroes, and who are instead mostly concerned with their own private dimensions: "No more heroes, Freddie thought. I've described enough of them. Enough of Che, or was it Castro that I wrote about. Enough of Lumumba. Y depends upon her powder and that's heroic enough for this story."[274] They are supposed to represent relatively

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[272] "More light can be thrown on this issue if one considers the problem of the villain in a story. This is particularly pertinent to the problem of portraying functionaries of the oppressive system in South Africa: the 'mayors,' 'presidents' of 'independent states,' policemen, informers, etc. It is useful, in the quest for a transforming social understanding, for a writer always to portray such characters as finished products: unaccountably vicious, cruel, malicious, fawning and greedy? Obviously not. And here, the maturity of the writer is called for, since he is called upon to be fair-minded even to those he socially abhors. The point is that attempting to understand the villain in all his complexity does not necessarily imply a political acceptance of him. On the contrary it may intensify political opposition even more. [...] We cannot wish away genuine evil; but genuine art makes us understand it. Only then can we purposefully deal with it." Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 23-24.

[273] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 23.

[274] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 63. See also on p. 77: "'I knew what would happen,' was all Freddie said. 'I knew that nothing would happen. You were not put here to become a heroine. This is not a

common and unremarkable people, all the more so when viewed against the backdrop of apartheid politics or the civil war in Mozambique, which function as the spectacular settings of an otherwise "ordinary" story.

However, in searching for the ordinary and trying to escape the heroic, *End*'s narrator often (willingly) falls into a different kind of cliché, the sentimental:

> 'Love,' Freddie mused, 'that human construct. Love for a person, love for a country, love for a cause. Unrequited love, requited love that is dull enough to make a person search for another love, hope for love, the journey to find love and glory. After all, who said it? "What is the point of war without love?" The love themes can go on and on. I wonder if there's a novel in which this theme is not present? She turned on him. 'You can love X. I'll let you love him, just for the moment, just for now.'[275]

If *Casablanca* brought into *End* the *clichés* of the "Holy War," "The Promised Land," "Civilization," and "Barbarism"—as many "sloganeering" ways of depicting the anti-authoritarian struggle—it also introduced a number of "archetypes" that concern the more private sphere of the individual into the text. These include the "Lovelorn Ascetic" (Rick), the "Love Triangle," the "Unhappy Love," the "Betrayed Husband," and the "Victorious Lover"—all figures that are, to different extents, present in Adair's text, as we saw in the synopsis I gave. Thus Y is desired by both X and the s/he character, while the betrayed X impersonates a middle-class professional obsessed with propriety and healthy habits and confronted by a drug-addicted wife. The result is that, despite their "ordinariness," her characters retain many "extraordinary" elements (in the sense of "overblown," truer than life, clichéd), so that they ultimately appear too banal to succeed in the search for the alternate subjectivity called for by Ndebele. Nevertheless, they might unexpectedly approach nothing less than the "sublime:"

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tragedy. There is a real and bigger tragedy out there that cannot touch either you or me. And so I was not afraid. And anyway, it's only my words and I have written enough about heroes. Well, I hope that I have written enough about them to keep the novel on the bookstore shelves—at least for a while; maybe even a book club or two." Furthermore, see p. 44, where the s/he character tells Freddie how s/he is more concerned "as to whether I will be able to find a bus to take me to Xai Xai" (where s/he will meet "X") than of public matters such as "culture, family, religion and community."

[275] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 6.

> 'I want readers to think that this inner turmoil is meaningful, but somehow incomplete. Perhaps they will compare it to what is going on outside this bungalow and think that what is happening there is so terrible, unspeakable. It is a terrible beauty, and your emotions, well they should be beautiful, but they will seem so pedestrian, banal. Is it all just a cliché?' can I, Freddie wondered, put in so many clichés? Her fingers moved, as if to delete the paragraph. Then they stopped, hovering in the air above the keyboard. Oh well, two clichés in a story can make you laugh, a hundred clichés, she laughed, they will move you. Sometimes, Freddie thought, extreme banality allows you to catch a glimpse of the sublime, the glorious incoherence of the sublime, the glorious incoherence of the prosaic.[276]

What stands out in this passage is the possibility that "extreme banality" may actually become its reverse, something that I believe happens in *End*, precisely because post-engagedness is at play. Adair establishes once again in her treatment of her characters, by elaborating on the theme of the clichéd, a looping movement that can be read as the attempt to both overcome the limits of engaged realism (by attempting to leave the "heroic" behind) and to uphold them (by reverting into the sentimental cliché). This is apparent in many passages, and particularly so in this significant description of the entangled characterization of Freddie's narration:

> Fuck, now I have the archetypal lone hero on my hands who doesn't want to be the lone hero. What other lone heroes can I use as a model to describe him? Did they all want to be heroes? Did they want to be heroes at all? Or do all of us, the reading public, make ordinary people doing ordinary things into heroes—commodities? She thought for a minute. Oh well, what does it matter? Che's bloodied and tortured body lying on the Bolivian planks in the barracks, alone in a postcard. Rick, where I'm going you can't follow. What I've got to do you can't by any part of. I'm not good at being noble, but... which ones didn't fulfil the cliché, or did they all fulfil it? [277]

The purpose of the book is to define the entanglement of clichéd heroes and their critique, which in the narrative becomes a movement of overcoming and persistence that achieves a rethinking of the characters of engagement. It does so by removing them from the realm of ideological commitment and moving them into the "sublime" of the post-modern and its uncertainty.

At the same time, the peculiar way in which characters are formed brings with it something that Ndebele would rather have avoided. In *End,* characters are conveyed not as stable subjectivities, but instead as in the process of being constructed through the choices of the

[276] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 12.
[277] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 3-4.

narrator Freddie, who is present herself as a character in the narration, and who constantly intervenes through her interactions with the characters she is creating. In doing so, however, Freddie rarely shows a great degree of conviction: her choices appear arbitrary or at most provisional, even when she bases them on the intertextual references to *Casablanca*.[278] As a result, the subjectivity of the characters appears continuously compromised by the encroachment of an external force that not only destroys all verisimilitude, but highlights the contingency of their emotions:

> If you were not so drunk you would not have this gushing of emotion. It is gushing down like the fucking Victoria Falls. Emotions are such a waste of time, especially emotion for X. Well, not just for X, for anything. Freddie continued to think alone. Emotions never seem to take anyone anywhere. I wonder why people have them. All they do is sustain an illusion. More emotion, more illusion, more illusion, more illusion, more emotion, more illusion, and so it goes on. Useless.[279]

Such vulnerability makes them unable to offer the reader a basis upon which to develop her/his "subjective capacity"[280]: the subjective constructs represented by s/he, "X," or "Y" appear too volatile and gratuitous (while at the same time they remain clichéd, in a contradiction characteristic of Adair's sensibility). Instead, the textual instability of the narration completely absorbs their clichéd significance, so that what they have in common with the world of readers is not a concern for the straightforwardly ideological, but rather a series of post-modern processes of textualization ("What is a person in a story if not a character; a character, like all of us?"[281]). From the perspective of such characters, the political seems to lose all meaning. ("'Is that the kind of thing you think I should say?'" the s/he character asks Freddie. "'Moral integrity.

[278] For a striking instance of the contingency of narration see Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 123: "[The policeman] yawned again and thought about the time before he was posted to this station, the time that he spent in Alexandra Township. 'Tell me about it,' said Freddie. 'Why not? I have to fill up the pages somehow, so I may as well get your story.'"
[279] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 98.
[280] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 52.
[281] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 13-14.

Intelligent and analytical, that's what you want, don't you?' she replied. 'But I can't, really I can't. You say it. Be the omniscient narrator or something.'"[282]) Thus, these subjectivities remain definitely unable to offer the reader an epistemological ground upon which to erect the new society Ndebele hoped would emerge from the literature of the "ordinary."[283]

Another major question Ndebele tackles in his attempt to imagine a literature unfettered by the rhetoric of the "spectacular" concerns the "coherence" of the work of art. Engaged realism, he argues, gives precedence to its subject matter ("the specificity of setting, the familiarity of character, recognizable events"[284]) over the "demands of the artistic medium." Among such demands, coherence is, in Ndebele's view, "a decisive principle for [artistic] autonomy," and a prerequisite for literary depth:

> Clearly then, according to this attitude [the attitude of commitment], artistic merit or relevance is determined less by a work's internal coherence ... than by the work's displaying a high level of explicit political pre-occupation which may not necessarily be critically aware of the demands of the artistic medium chosen. ... If the average South African writer has chosen this kind of preoccupation, what effect has it had on his or her writing? One major effect is that the writing's probing into the South African experience has been largely superficial.[285]

Once "internal coherence" is broken up by "political preoccupation," art loses its "autonomy." Novelistic writing, according to Ndebele, is built upon a "confusing paradox" whereby it is compelled to make references to society, from which it derives its "validity" while also seeking "artistic autonomy."[286] Writers who emphasize the former *volet* of the paradox, thus forsaking

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[282] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 16.
[283] "The new literature can contribute to the development of this subjective capacity of the people to be committed, but only on the basis of as complete a knowledge of themselves and the objective situation as possible. The growth of consciousness is a necessary ingredient of this subjective capacity." Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 52.
[284] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 14.
[285] Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 14.
[286] "The central problem here appears to lie in the often confusing paradox that art is an autonomous entity which, at the same time, derives its objective validity from and within society. This latter condition would then, by definition, appear to deny artistic autonomy. Something there is, therefore, in art that determines its autonomy; and something

autonomy, are those who work in the mode of engaged realism. Instead, authors should retain the autonomy of art but still somehow employ it to deepen the reader's perception of South Africa's predicament. As we can see, there is a further paradox, or at least a tension, beneath Ndebele's own position, as he struggles to leave behind the drawbacks of engaged realism while attempting to retain its ideological basis. Adair builds upon this instability by giving special attention to the questions of both coherence and autonomy. She does so, however, in a characteristically ironic and self-undermining way. Through the voice of Freddie, the character who impersonates the author/narrator while at the same time disclaiming such impersonation precisely by being *just* a character, Adair stages a questioning of the rationale that governs the artistic choices of her text: what is a novel? What should its components be? How should the characters behave? Instances of reflection about the nature of the "literary" are indeed so numerous in *End* (we have already recalled some of them) that the text can be considered a *sui generis* essay on the nature of fiction.[287] Through these internal debates "coherence" emerges as a major concern of the narrative, as Freddie often agonizes over the narrative choices she has to make. Yet she remains unconvinced most of the time, hesitant and uncertain as to the responses she embarks upon. How she directs the storyline at any given time is represented as unpremeditated and utterly contingent:

> 'Well,' said Freddie to her, 'you actually don't know who will go. I may decide that you remain here with X. You can live happily ever after as they say in the fairy stories. I may decide that you return to Regina and the eyeless room in Maputo. I have not yet made up my mind who will stay and who will get onto that plane. Maybe it will be X. Maybe it will be Y. Maybe it will be you.

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there is that appears necessarily to undercut that autonomy. Writers might therefore fall into two camps: according to whether they emphasize what makes for artistic autonomy, on the one hand; or, on the other hand, according to whether they emphasize the undercutting elements. It is the latter camp that is often easily defined as 'engaged' or 'committed' or 'relevant.'" Njabulo S. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 14.

[287] Not by chance does the book open with the question: "Can Freddie tell you a story, a fiction; words that mean nothing or everything depending upon how you want to perceive them?" Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 1.

> But there is only one air ticket to the Promised Land. Only one ticket, which will take whoever it is out of this war and place them in another one.' Freddie continued to pack the suitcase.[288]

Coherence remains ultimately unattainable as a result of these numerous questionings, yet it is also somewhat reinforced precisely while it is called into question, as these metanarrative reflections in *End* represent a fundamental principle of textual organization, one which has nothing to do with the "reality" depicted, but is entirely internal to the text. Moreover, the paradoxical nature of Adair's management of this issue is apparent when we consider the role of the intertextual references to *Casablanca*, which allow a regard-cum-disregard for coherence as well as for autonomy. Through the film Adair is able to shape a purely textual fictional world (based on references to other works rather than to "reality"), but those references compromise the autonomy of *End* and make it dependent on an intertextual dialogue, which in turn is employed to reinforce *End*'s coherence. Thus Adair seems to nod to Ndebele's calls for an increased emphasis on the domain of the aesthetic, but at the same time she twists this attitude into a critique that undermines two of the major aspects upon which, according to the critic, the aesthetic is predicated. Consequently, these characteristics, as they are embodied in *End*, appear unable to offer the reader any basis for retaining any stable significance, let alone a firm ideological stance, as Ndebele (somewhat inchoately) continued to wish they did. This move is completely in step with other traits of Adair's text and, similarly to her treatment of the spectacular and of characterization, represents another way to raise Ndebele's approach from a dimension that in Vattimian terms was still modern to a fully postmodern one, where no positive ideology is upheld and where art is free to perform its own inconsistency and irrelevance.

As a final point, we must return to the very beginning. The book's title, "End," highlights from the very start a central preoccupation—almost a desire—of the whole work: "will it have a

[288] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 147-148.

wow finish?"[289] The narrator poses this question in the first chapter. As we demonstrated by presenting *End*'s fraught relationship to its intertext, so many uncertainties are built into its narrative that it remains impossible to reach any sense of "ending" or closure through it, even though this issue is emphatically raised as early as the book's cover. Even less likely would it be to find any "wow finish" (incidentally, another citation from *Casablanca*). In *End* there is no sense of immediate recognition and identity, no unproblematic grasping of spectacular *clichés*. The work instead develops a complex reflection whose aim is to complicate our perception of these concepts in such a way that the paradigm of engaged realism is "overcome" while remaining always present in the background. The very idea of "ending" may in fact stand for the teleological drive which used to motivate engaged writing, and which *End* is unable to accept. Such a drive does not, however, completely disappear from the book but remains vaguely persistent, present nowhere and everywhere at the same time, so that the work can be seen as an effort to negate it *while* also including it in the weave of its fabric. In other words, in this post-engaged novel engagement is constantly thought about and almost desired, yet at the same time denied and dismissed,in a longing for "the illusion that it all meant something":

> Atrocity stories are always the same. The same words are used. The Brady Bunch—mmm—do these stories evoke a feeling of outrage? It is all just the same, but I suppose that poor boy was still gripped by the illusion that it all meant something. In fact he probably believed he died for a cause. His mother and father, if they are still alive, will also think this. He will become a martyr.[290]

It is in this strikingly personal way that Adair reaches her own version of the "agnosticism" Pechey considered to be the hallmark of post-apartheid fiction.[291] She thus brings her work to renounce the "totalitarianism of freedom"[292] that a commitment to an ideological line, be it even

[289] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 1.
[290] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 126.
[291] Graham Pechey, "The Post-Apartheid Sublime," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, ed. by Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 63.
[292] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 53.

liberal or radical, would necessarily have engendered. Unable to "commit" to an ordinary political line, she instead chooses to construct a post-metaphysical and post-engaged textual universe.

The return of the "ordinary": giving voice to what was repressed by apartheid, or by *Casablanca*?

Adair's politics are the elusive product of *End*'s literary reflections. They seem to straddle the uncertain conceptual space between engagement and post-modernity and hardly appear as a defined entity. Certainly, as we saw, in *End* she does not entertain any view as to the future shape South African society should take; instead, she appears to move into a different territory, made possible by renouncing the exercise of the political in the conventional arena of ideological thinking. This renunciation amounts at the same time to a discovery, as a whole new arena opens up for Adair, one that seems, once again, to be responding to some of the concerns first put forth by Ndebele. By constructing a literary universe that is not (entirely) located within the "overblown" nature of apartheid life, Adair is able to "rediscover" a dimension that was far from having been investigated by South African engaged realism, namely that of the (gendered) body. It is around body and gender that Adair, after she exhausts the ideological drive that was behind Ndebele's poetics, tries to build a new non-ideological politics, where the struggle for societal power appears to turn into the search of a novel relationship with the self. It is in this direction that *End* shifts Ndebele's search for the "ordinary," exiting the realm of psychological life to enter instead into that of a remarkably peculiar "bodily" subjectivity. In the process, one aspect that had been silenced by *End*'s intertext is interestingly illuminated, namely the latent homosexual attraction that underlies (part of) *Casablanca*'s love triangle.

Once again, the narrator of *End* is aware of the originality of this approach relative to the South African literary environment: "Freddie read the paragraph again, just to keep the images in her mind. She liked them; it is not often that menstruation is described in a story."[293] Overshadowed as it was by "the urgencies" of the "struggle,"[294] the gendered body could not receive adequate treatment within the paradigm of engaged realism, and instead remained constrained within the oppositional patterning of apartheid culture. André Brink remarked on this phenomenon in the late nineties: "the binaries persisted in the tendency to reduce the world to predictable patterns of us and them, black and white, good and bad, male and female."[295] The initial and more obvious method Adair employs to destroy the gender binary is to introduce into her novel a relationship handled as marginal in the sentimental world of the anti-apartheid struggle, namely homoeroticism. It is thus with a homoerotic encounter that the book opens, between the s/he character (at this time a "he") and X. In the first scene X is leaving Mozambique by train, in a reinstantiation of the station scene in *Casablanca*, although, as we should expect by now from Adair, this occurs with important modifications (while in the film Rick vainly awaits Isla, in *End* the two characters part from one another before the train leaves). In introducing the homoerotic theme at the beginning of the novel, Adair not only gives voice to a silenced dimension of the apartheid universe, but also to a silenced aspect of the film, as Eco intelligently remarked in his essay on *Casablanca*:

> In the archetypal love-triangle there is a Betrayed Husband and a Victorious Lover. Here instead both men are betrayed and suffer a loss, but, in this defeat (and over and above it) an additional element plays a part, so subtly that one is hardly aware of it. It is that, quite subliminally, a hint of male or Socratic love is established. Rick admires Victor, Victor is ambiguously attracted to Rick,

[293] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 13.
[294] André Brink, "Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faced by South African Literature," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, ed. by Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15.
[295] See André Brink, "Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faced by South African Literature," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, ed. by Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 16; see also 23-24.

> and it almost seems at a certain point as if each of the two were playing out the duel of sacrifice in order to please the other.[296]

The foregrounding of a theme that remained so overshadowed in the film points one last time at the remarkable gap between *End*'s literary world and *Casablanca*'s visual narrative. The film's storyline, conceived and set during a time of war, leads its characters from a lack of engagement to an engaged stance, or, in the case of Laszlo, to a position where engagement can be performed with success, while Adair's book moves from a consideration of the limitations of engagement (via Ndebele) to the staging of less than "spectacular" heroes who are able to explore alternative ways of performing gender—starting from an alternative conception of sentimental relationships to even more striking aspects of the "body." Homoeroticism, from this perspective, becomes one of the hallmarks of a time that follows that of the struggle: the time of the *interregnum*, precisely the period during which the novel, but not the film, is set.

Furthermore, the gender of the main character "s/he" shifts between chapters from the feminine to the masculine and back and defies any definite identification. This alternation has contrasting characteristics. It bears the hallmarks not just of un-reality but also of gratuitousness, as it appears to hinge entirely on the capricious choices of the narrator Freddie, who, as we remarked earlier, remains quite unpredictable.[297] Yet such transformation is carried out by putting so much emphasis on the bodily traits which the "s/he" character acquires that these are made almost tangible to the reader, contradicting the initial impression of contingency. The result is a peculiar sort of un-mimetic realism, where "reality" seems to exist only in conjunction

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[296] Umberto Eco, "Casablanca or, The Clichés are Having a Ball," in *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 262-263.

[297] One of *End*'s reviewers remarked on Freddie's traits in relation to the treatment of sexuality: "[Freddie's] gender-free name sets her firmly in the waters of the ambivalent sexuality she treads as she manipulates her characters and mucks about in their intimate lives, imagines her way into their homoerotic sexuality." Maureen Isaacson, "Tricksy Experimentation Offers a Bold, Original Read," *The Sunday Independent*, January 20, 2008, http://www.barbara-adair.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/copy-of-20090821122055_00001-end-independent.jpg (accessed on October 14, 2012).

with the most elemental characteristics of biological sexuality, whose existence is both all-dominant and incidental:

> She bent over to pick up her notebook and suddenly felt a familiar pain in her stomach that reached from the end of her lungs right down into the top of her thighs. Her period—it must be, it was the right time.[298]

Behind the choice of showing not just how gender roles are unstable, but also of destabilizing the very biological features of the body, lie reasons that trace back to the characteristics of post-engagedness investigated in the previous pages. It is precisely because Adair intends to see through the sense of "identity," historically triggered by the spectacular nature of South African society, she is drawn to reconceive what may be regarded as the ultimate source of a perception of sameness—our appraisal of the body. This freedom from sameness, however, does not seem to point toward any sort of ideological horizon. No socio-political framework, clearly, could provide for it, as it can only exist in the fictional world realized by the new kind of literature Adair practices—as well creates—with her novel.

While the narrator indulges in detailed descriptions of the sexualized body, she rethinks what had been not a repressed aspect, but rather a major interest of engaged realist fiction, which she now deliberately turns into a secondary one. In fact, while the traits defining biological difference are consistently highlighted in *End*, they completely overshadow race, another bodily dimension that used to be extremely prominent in South African literary writing. Freddie seldom dwells on racial aspects of the body such as the skin color or the facial features, not even in the scenes that would be expected to be more racially determined. For instance, this occurs when she recounts a Mozambique policeman killing a young African boy, she only applies "blackness" to blood,[299] and when the main characters are described. While they are certainly all white, there is

[298] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 12.
[299] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 7.

almost no emphasis on this feature; Y is instead merely described as having "yellow" hair[300] rather than blond (a term more often associated with whiteness), while X's hair is "black." There are very few exceptions to this relative lack of attention to racial features, such as when a sexual act between a white policeman and a black maid is mentioned,[301] or when, in chapter fourteen, the novel relates another white policeman's past who had been involved in killing an African youth.[302] This is one more method Adair employs in traversing the racial divide that she perceives as structuring the South African literary field, a divide that she takes on by choosing to construct her novel as a response to the writings of prominent critic of African descent, Ndebele.

Once that structure breaks down, once there is no longer a white enemy to fight and the uncertain world of post-apartheid has set in, it becomes impossible to continue to tread the relatively safe territory of Ndebele's still-engaged perspective. In this different dimension, literature cannot provide the means for the construction of the subjectivity of the citizens of a republic finally deprived of oppression and injustice. This teleological horizon has broken down in Adair's pages. What we are left with is, instead, an unsettled and unsettling politics of the body, a dimension in which the power of the individual seems concentrated on rethinking the sexualized features of one's bodily existence. These politics, precisely because of their inherent indefinition, become possible only through the written word of fiction. It is only in the freedom of a postmodern narrative such as *End* that the "totalitarianism" of the "freedom" of liberalism

[300] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 69.
[301] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 106.
[302] Even then, the term "black" is reported by the narrator as an utterance by the character himself: "The tank lurched forward. It was heavy and the road that it travelled on was covered in holes. [...] He peered through the porthole. It was so small that he could only seen a small gray patch in front of him. But they were there, all of them. Their black-and-white school uniforms stood out of the moving rain. Their hair was wet and, because it was short and dark and very curly, it was not plastered down. The drops just sat on top of it. They balanced in a curled tightrope and they shone. Blacks, he thought, there are so many blacks." Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 123-4.

can be broken through to effect a deeper "subversion."[303] At this point, the complexities of an enlightened subjectivity—such as the one summoned by Ndebele—are substituted for by a particular sort of bodily sentimentalism, where the most intense moments of the subject's life are a function of the relationship with the sexualized body:

> He had really just wanted to go inside the bar and find the glass that X had held. He wanted to put it to his lips and drink from it. He wanted to bite the glass so that fragments splintered into his tongue and broke the skin. He wanted to mix his blood with X's saliva. He wanted to bleed some more.[304]

This doesn't mean, however, that *End*'s adventure of the body is able to lead us to any narrative climax. As we saw, the book's narrative is studded by *clichés* that the narrator underlines only to undermine them. Because of this, we should seek alternate ways of looking for the "wow finish" *End*'s title page inquires about by quoting a line Rick first said in *Casablanca*.[305] Such a climax may be represented by the attainment of a specific kind of postmodern "sublime," where the very precariousness and limitedness of the text's special achievements—namely the fictionalized rethinking of the body—are perceived as an extraordinary deliverance from the constraints of an ideological attitude to politics and writing. As I hope to have demonstrated with this chapter, this postmodern position in *End* far from merely reflects a global mindset, but remains utterly rooted in a well-defined socio-cultural and literary *milieu*. Despite its wider appeal, it can only be understood as a specific reaction to the latter, and, more precisely, as a post-engaged response.

[303] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 53.
[304] Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 107.
[305] "Can Freddie tell you a story, a fiction; words that mean nothing or everything depending upon how you want to perceive them? And will it have a wow finish?" Barbara Adair, *End* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), title page.

CONCLUSION

More than fifty years after the military governments transformed Brazil by way of an authoritarian modernization, it has become almost commonplace to say that not just Brazilian modernity, but *any* kind of modernity needs to be contextualized and understood in its specific, situated, and genealogically-determined characteristics. Similarly, my study has aimed at conceiving of postmodernism as in no way a merely global practice. As I have delineated in the body of this dissertation, the literary itineraries of the three writers studied remain profoundly linked to very local issues, concerns, and theorizations, even while their respective countries share a number of social, cultural, and economic features. It is fair to say that as much as we should reason in terms of alternative modernities, we should also think of alternative post-modernities, at least in the literary sphere.

In the works explored in this dissertation, mostly written over the last decade, a post-ideological attitude—itself a crucial marker of postmodernism—has been coupled with a reformulation of the role of the engaged writer. The need to convey a political message was central to the practice of fictional writing during the decades of authoritarianism in both Brazil and South Africa, to the extent that it determined a number of specific features of both countries's literary fields. It is this legacy, specific to each country and yet comparable, that the writers I have studied decided to recollect and reformulate. Thus, if João Almino's *O Livro das Emoções* is the seat of a complex discussion of postmodern time, this stems from a highly localized reflection both on Brasilia's urban modernity and on the engaged heritage of the Brazilian intellectual, which, in turn, hearkens back to the long-extinct Latin-American *letrado*. When Almino's main character, Cadu, undertakes a fight against a corrupt politician through his aesthetic practice, he refers to a historical legacy of anti-authoritarian discourse, itself linked to a

conception of the writer as a (revolutionary) ideologue. Such a position is reactivated only through a sense of longing, as Cadu's own practice remains imbued with a peculiarly postmodern "overcoming" of ideologies. Not unlike Almino, Tezza's intellectual formation took place during the late sixties and seventies, when anti-authoritarian radicalism dominated the leftist political field. Without taking into account this conceptual pole, which recurs throughout Tezza's writings as a consistent concern in a form indebted to Rio Apa's teachings, it would be impossible to understand even the most experimental of his works, which are often constructed around a duality between a longing for the radical values of anti-dictatorial opposition and a necessity to conform to a bourgeois standard. Barbara Adair's recent novel *End* establishes its own reconfiguration of "post-engagedness" by triggering a conversation with one of the most prominent South African critics of literary engagement as well as post-apartheid, Njabulo Ndebele. The result is a work which repeatedly subjects a number of highly localized concerns to a postmodern turn.

The contingency of the local emerges not only in relation to the writers studied, but also to the critical domain, where the comparative approach has helped identify specific interpretations developed in each national setting around related modes of writing. At the same time, however, these interpretations have proven occasionaly employable in reading authors who do not belong to the literary system within which they were developed: if post-engagement combines to local to the transnational, this stimulating intermingling—with, of course, all the necessary distinguos—might be sometimes become productive in the critical domain as well. Thus Brazilian critical approaches have occasionally illuminated South African post-engaged fiction, and vice versa, triggering some critical cross-pollinations, as when Njabulo Ndebele's thought on the shortcomings of engaged writing has become relevant to a discussion of João

Almino's work and sheds light on Almino's concern with "ordinariness" as opposed to what I defined as "engaged realism." Even more significantly, the critical body of work that reflects on post-apartheid (especially by André Brink, Ndebele himself, Graham Pechey, and others), with its emphasis on the new creative space opened up by the end of anti-authoritarian writing, has been instrumental in shaping the very concept of post-engagement as an attitude toward the literary which, while reenacting the reasons of its decreasing relevance, continues to envision both the possibility of creative expression and a role for the writer, however reduced. On the other hand, Brazilian discussions of modernity as a non-totalitarian narrative have been helpful in illuminating the uncertainties of modernity in South Africa's own instance of uneven modernization. Finally, the reading of Adair's works has helped me put emphasis on a development that stems from a post-engaged sensibility—namely, a new attention to the body as a locus for a (post)politics, an aspect present, although to a much lesser extent, in Cristovão Tezza's own reflections on bodily disability and "nature."

I should add that my work has deliberately intended to foster the study of writers who are either awaiting a surge of critical interest (in the case of Adair) or are slowly finding their place within the literary corpus of their respective countries, despite the many claims to attention their works present. In breaking this critical ground, I have been trying to reclaim for criticism a function slightly different from that of a solely academic enterprise. Instead, I have attempted to return to the role of the critic as mediator between the literary text and its general readership, which is a function that the increasing specialization of professional critics has tended to diminish in favor of a technical conception of their practice as addressed to an exclusively academic readership. As a result of such a process of "technicization," general readers have lost the possibility of referring to sophisticated analyses while determining their personal choices and

interpretations. My answer, admittedly tentative and provisional, has resorted wherever possible to a style deprived of opaque terminology, and, more importantly, has practiced a set of close readings as the backbone of this study. While the reflections presented in the introduction have provided the conceptual framework of the thesis, the significance of my interventions lies primarily, I believe, in the several readings such a framework has made possible rather than in an exclusively theoretical dimension. The latter I considered validated only inasmuch as it made it possible to pursue effective and persuasive analyses of the texts at hand.

Through these analyses, I have attempted to show the vitality of the mode of writing I described as "post-engaged," in which the backward gaze toward the engaged past, often imbued with a melancholia that results from the apparently unbridgeable gulf between a modern heritage and a post-modern time, does not become just a trigger for self-deprecation or lead to a merely nostalgic art, but is instead activated as a creative principle. In the writers I have studied, recollecting the practice of literary engagement becomes a spur for reconfiguring the present in new ways, so that their awareness of the "overcoming" of modernity (in the Vattimian sense of *Verwindung*) is not compromised but rather stimulated by the persistence of modernity as the two elements react to each other and cause a flowering of literary achievements. Thus, the actions of Almino's character Cadu convey a peculiar aesthetics of politics precisely because he transforms engagement through his longing, In Adair's fiction, on the other hand, a novel intellectual space is opened up when references to previous engaged writing become a way of revealing a new dimension of the human—that of a bodily politics, which Adair only begins to sketch in this work. In Tezza's works, furthermore, the memory of engagement has become a structural principle around which he constructed a whole literary universe. Here, postmodern anxieties about the lack of relevance of the literary come together with a reflection on the

limitations of middle-class culture as opposed to the loss of engaged radicalism. Post-engagement, in other words, is a peculiar kind of literary *topos*: a locus of the mind offers an opportunity for acknowledging the dwindling socio-political role of literature while establishing for it an afterlife, however "weakened," by crossing two sets of apparently distinct issues and concerns.

Like any other form of writing, a dissertation necessarily has its own limitations, and it is clear that this work could be furthered in a number of ways. Much could be gained, I believe, by enlarging the selection of the authors considered so that some of the most important precursors of post-engagement are included, not just in the introductory section but also in the analytical body of the thesis. I am thinking in particular of Silvano Santiago and Clarice Lispector for Brazil, as well as of J. M. Coetzee for South Africa. Furthermore, a longer and larger study should attempt to map more precisely the impact class-affiliation has on this mode of writing. It could then become possible to give even more depth to the hypothesis presented in the introduction that post-engagement might be an expression of relatively privileged environments. Such an attitude to the craft of fiction would then probably emerge as an even longer phenomenon (having its roots in work done in the midst of the authoritarian repression) and also as a more specific one. What I believe will remain established is its major significance in understanding the literary production of the last few decades.

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