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Writing After Paradise and Before a Possible Dream: Brazil's Caio Fernando Abreu

Fernando Arenas

A escrita das obras *Os dragões não conhecem o paraíso* (1988) e *Onde andarás Dulce Veiga?* (1990) de Caio Fernando Abreu acontece à beira do abismo: um abismo de ordem pessoal, uma vez que o próprio autor é portador do vírus HIV (Caio Fernando morreu de AIDS em fevereiro de 1996), e um abismo colectivo (o Brasil), dada a profunda crise sócio-económica e política dos últimos anos, apesar da euforia e estabilidade aparentes que têm acompanhado os anos da era FHC. Verifica-se ao mesmo tempo na obra de Caio Fernando Abreu um sentido de perda, desamparo e descrença face às utopias políticas e sexuais que alimentaram o imaginário, não só brasileiro mas mundial, nas décadas de sessenta e setenta.

Com este trabalho pretendo reflectir sobre a interação do pessoal, nacional e global na ficção de Caio Fernando Abreu, privilegiando aqui como objecto de estudo, a ideia de nação veiculada pelo autor. Caio Fernando articula a nação como espaço liminar, marcado por subjetividades alternativas, e uma heterogeneidade de discursos e de lugares de tensa diferenciação cultural. A identidade cultural brasileira surge de maneira fluida, dinâmica e impura. É a partir desse espaço liminar proposto por Caio Fernando Abreu que o Brasil negocia o seu capital cultural com o mundo globalizado de hoje.

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The following reflections are as much on Brazil's contemporary writer Caio Fernando Abreu as they are on Caio Fernando's Brazil, as they symbiotically relate to each other, inextricably linked in each other's destiny. The fictional works *Os dragões não conhecem o paraíso* (1988) (*Dragons*, 1990) and *Onde andarás Dulce Veiga?* (1990) (*Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?*) are written urgently on the verge of the abyss—an individual abyss for the author himself, given his own personal circumstances of terminal illness, and a collective abyss, Brazil, with its socio-economic and political quagmire of the last fifteen years, still menacingly close, despite the euphoria over political and economic changes in the first years of the FHC era.

Caio Fernando Abreu's narratives come from the subjectivity of a bisexual man¹ in his mid-forties who has AIDS. He belongs to the generation that believed in various ideological and sexual utopias that have been dramatically shattered after major changes in the global and national arenas: on the one hand, the exhaustion of the sixties counterculture, which in the case of Brazil, had the particularity of being repressed by the authoritarian and ultra-nationalistic regime of the late sixties and early seventies,² and on the other hand, the very contemporary and ubiquitous threat of AIDS,³ which has dramatically altered the world's relationship to sex for many years to come.

The result is a generalized sense of loss, disorientation, and pessimism, acutely perceived by the author, which is not only the product of the contemporary global landscape, but also the product of a national historical trajectory that has seen many years of authoritarian rule (1964–1984), with all of its well-known political and economic consequences, and an ensuing decade of great insecurity and instability, wrought with frustrated collective dreams, persistently wide socio-economic inequities, and unlikely saviors. This particular dynamic is vividly illustrated by the untimely death in 1985 of charismatic Tancredo Neves (the first democratically elected president after the dictatorship); years of economic stagnation, hyperinflation, and crippling foreign debt; the meteoric rise and fall of Fernando Collor de Mello between 1989 and 1992, facing criminal

prosecution on corruption charges;⁴ impending ecological disaster in the Amazon (a problem which is not only Brazilian); a lingeringly wide socio-economic gap between haves and have-nots and a dramatic increase in urban violence which is a direct consequence of the great social inequality. All of these elements, which have dominated the Brazilian landscape in the past years (and continue to do so today), constitute the socio-political and cultural background to Caio Fernando Abreu's fiction.

At another level, the writings of Caio Fernando Abreu assume a culturally hybrid location for Brazil in today's globalized world. The cultural referents of the nation (MPB, Afro-Brazilian religion, and Brazilian literature among others) interact with a multiplicity of referents from the outside (Hollywood, Anglo-American literature and music, in a variety of expressions—pop-rock-jazz-blues—and Fernando Pessoa, to cite just a few examples) through a dynamically synchronic process of cohabitation and appropriation where the cultural borders between the "foreign" and the "native" collapse. Various Latin American critics favor the notion of "appropriation"—among them, Bernardo Subercaseaux—who is quoted at length in George Yúdice's piece "Postmodernity and Transnational Capitalism" (*On Edge* 8). This model desires to go beyond Manichaean visions of native vs. foreign, rejecting any notion of a "pure, uncontaminated" Latin American culture, or the myths of cultural pluralism or essentialism with regard to Latin American identity. Appropriation entails an identity that is rather provisional, fluid, always in the process of becoming. Brazilian cultural identity in Caio Fernando Abreu's writings is anything but a fixed, essential entity, pure from foreign contamination. The author unabashedly assumes for Brazil a position of liminality as it "negotiates its cultural capital" (Yúdice 18) with(in) today's globalized system.

Caio Fernando Abreu's textual space is also populated by alternative subjectivities speaking in a variety of forms and registers that underscore the idea of the nation (in this case, the Brazilian nation) as a liminal signifying space marked by a heterogeneity of discourses and tense areas of cultural differences. As Homi Bhabha asserts, the nation "becomes a question of otherness of the people-as-one" ("DissemiNation" 150), where the difference *outside* against which the nation defines its subjectivity, becomes a difference from *within*. This constitutive internal difference marks the nation's finitude as a homogenizing entity. This dynamic becomes clearer through the symbolic force projected by Caio Fernando Abreu's "dragons."

Dragons constitute the metaphor-synthesis of the anthology *Os dragões não conhecem o paraíso*. Dragons are those subjects that inhabit the margins of social space, beings that contest the hegemonic values of a society steeped in falsehood and artificiality. They encompass—among others—adolescents, drag queens, and in general, a wide spectrum of (pluri)sexual beings that escape containment within dominant frameworks of sexuality. The term "dragon"—which is used in Caio Fernando's fiction for the purposes of designating alternative subjectivities along a wide and fluid spectrum of genders and sexualities—has certain parallels with the term "queer" which has been adopted by gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender political activism in the United States in recent years. The term "queer" has undergone a process of reappropriation and resignification, having become (at least provisionally) vacated of its pejorative connotations in English. In a totalizing, yet politically pragmatic gesture, "queer" incorporates (however problematically) distinct groups such as lesbians, gay males, bisexuals, transgendered people, transvestites, and even heterosexual sympathizers whose political positions align with the defiant marginality of the previously mentioned groups.

The political parallels between "dragons" and "queers" are quite obvious, but "dragons" also evoke a poetic-philosophical dimension within the signifying economy of Caio Fernando's fiction. Dragons belong to the realm of the mythological, as the creatures that in the time of the European navigators and explorers were believed to inhabit the

unknown interior of the barely “discovered” lands. These imaginary creatures promised *eldorados*, as much as they inspired the deepest fears. For Caio Fernando Abreu, dragons are indeed a source of fear in contemporary bourgeois society, but they certainly do not belong (as the title states) to the paradise offered by conventional bourgeois life. Rather, they are an archetypal projection of where human beings aspire to be, beyond a society dominated by false values. Their fire possesses a purifying force through which the subject can struggle for the possibility of forging authentic values and live them openly and constructively. The dragons not only populate the writings of Caio Fernando Abreu, but they also constitute Caio Fernando Abreu’s fictional attempt at affirming a decentered and tense cultural space, which by virtue of its location, is not only defiant, but inevitably vulnerable and fragile.

Caio Fernando Abreu’s cultural enterprise, and in particular, *Os dragões não conhecem o paraíso*, is built upon an axis of negation from which the author desires to open the possibility of a Zen-like return to origins so that the subject (that is, the subject predicated in Caio Fernando’s fiction) can engage in a transvaluation of values. Despite the cultural landscape of nihilistic desolation that prevails in postmodernity (of which Brazil is no exception) and that is so central to Caio Fernando’s fictional world, there is a nostalgic desire for the whole which is embodied in the idea of a return to origins. This is a clear example of the postmodern paradox that, on the one hand, describes a contemporary cultural moment beyond foundationalist thought, and on the other hand, verifies an endless need to retain certain of its expressions so that life can be more endurable and death more acceptable.

The short-story “Linda, uma história horrível” (or “Beauty”⁵) is a symbolic opening to the anthology *Os dragões não conhecem o paraíso*. It is in fact a homecoming, the actual return to a place of origins. The narrator visits his mother and upon arrival he faces a house in decline. In fact, the house is a mirror image of the narrator, a man in his forties who has AIDS, and his mother, more than twenty five years older than he. They both display traces of illness, of time. The habitual tense silences, more than signaling a communication gap, elliptically suggest the deep closeness of mother and son in their different and yet similar existential states. There is an evident generational and sexual gap between mother and son, of which both are tacitly acknowledging and yet mutually supportive. Terminal illness in youth (in the case of the narrator) and impending death at old age (in the case of the mother) indeleibly unite them. Their family ties are more than blood related, they are forged out of human solidarity, out of a shared solitude.

Passo da Guanxuma, the locale to which the narrator returns, constitutes an anti-mythical place of origins, an allegorical representation of contemporary Brazil. Despite the impeachment of Fernando Collor de Mello for corruption in 1992, the twice-elected Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and the partial success of the otherwise problematic neo-liberal monetary plan (*plano real*), the Brazil that ails has not withered away. The headline: “País mergulha no caos, na doença, na miséria” (15), so prominent in this short story and so urgent in the Brazil of the 1980s, still echoes on the horizon.

In “Linda, uma história horrível”, mother, son, pet dog, house and country are all subsumed in decadence. The KS lesions on the protagonist’s chest mirror the vanishing purple of the living-room carpet and the spots of the near blind and aging dog. But despite the horizon of ruins, of abjection, there remains a touch of hope, a touch of love that survives out of the links of solidarity between beings—in this case, family members. There lies the touch of beauty in an otherwise “horrible” story:

Um por um, foi abrindo os botões. Acendeu a luz do abajur, para que a sala ficasse mais clara quando, sem camisa, começou a acariciar as manchas púrpura, da cor antiga do tapete na escada—agora, que cor? —, espalhadas embaixo dos pelos do peito. Na ponta dos dedos, tocou

o pescoço. Do lado direito, inclinando a cabeça, como se apalpassem uma semente no escuro. Depois foi abrindo os joelhos até o chão. Deus, pensou, antes de estender a outra mão para tocar no pêlo da cadela quase cega, cheia de manchas rosadas. Iguais às do tapete gasto da escada, iguais às da pele do seu peito, embaixo dos pêlos. Crespos, escuros, macios.

—Linda—sussurrou. —Linda, você é tão linda, Linda (*Os Dragões* 22)

The short story “Dama da noite” (or “Queen of the Night”) is the product of an era besieged by panic over the body, fear of sex and AIDS. It is an Almodovaresque monologue in very colloquial speech performed by a forty year old woman—or perhaps drag queen—who lives as a vampire in and for the underworld of the big city nights. The camp sensibility exhibited in the monologue performed by the actual *dama da noite* or *queen of the night* creates gender ambiguity, which is heightened even further by the word choice in the English translation, *queen*. The monologue here, as a performative act, relativizes gender categories and points to their constructedness. The character speaking may as well be a female prostitute, a male transvestite and prostitute, or a woman posing as a male transvestite and prostitute. It is a question of packaging, a mask or a figure of simulation—as the character “herself” asserts at the end of the story. But, regardless of the “real” content within the package, the *dama* or *queen* is a nocturnal being, living precariously at the margins of bourgeois society.

In “Dama da noite” the protagonist addresses an assumed male interlocutor who is twenty years younger. This cross-generational axis upon which this particular narrative and various others by Caio Fernando are constructed (the stories “Linda, uma história horrível”, “O rapaz mais triste do mundo”—in the collection *Os dragões não conhecem o paraíso*—and the novel *Onde andaré Dulce Veiga?*) is of utmost importance since it deploys a number of key thematic concerns for Caio Fernando Abreu that oscillate between the individual and the collective, the political and the ontological. This interfacing of generations brings together those who came into adulthood in the late sixties and those who did so in the late eighties. The former group represents the generation that believed in the possibility of major political and cultural transformations, and who had—in the specific case of Brazil in the late sixties—a clearly delineated enemy to fight against. On the other hand, the eighties generation came into adulthood with AIDS as an inescapable and constantly menacing horizon. Furthermore, this generation not only saw the global crashing of the utopias for which the sixties counter-culture lived, but in the particular case of Brazil, it found itself submerged in political and socio-economic despair. These cultural, political and epidemiological circumstances are compounded by the fear of aging, together with the idea of growing old amidst absolute solitude.

One of the central metaphors of the short story “Dama da noite” is the ferris wheel (or in Portuguese, *a roda-gigante*). The queen of the night makes reference to the wheel time and again. The wheel represents a life of security, where many of the disillusioned of the sixties have found solace and where the new generations of the middle and upper classes are forging an existence of yuppified values. The queen of the night circulates outside this wheel, away from the security of conventional life: “Você não conhece esse gosto que é o gosto que faz com que a gente fique fora da roda que roda e roda e que se foda rodando sem parar, porque o rodar dela é o rodar de quem consegue fingir que não viu o que viu” (95).

Queen of the night represents a passionate affirmation of individual values that stand in opposition to hegemonic cultural structures; she encompasses those beings (drug users, transvestites, prostitutes, beings of all sexualities, vampire inhabitants of the night—all in all dragon-queers) that rebel against the notion of a homogeneous and

monolithic culture. The rebellious marginality of the dragons vis-à-vis the wheel of socio-economic security and cultural conventionality, however, is precarious. By virtue of being excluded, the subject at the margins is placed in a fragile location, at the mercy of political, economical, juridical, and epidemiological forces over which s/he has little or no control.

Queen of the night defies in a paradoxical way the highly problematic stability of traditional heterosexual society, as she sets in motion the cultural anxieties that derive from historically dominant discourses around sex and sexuality, that today more than ever, in the age of AIDS, are conflated with discourses of disease. There has been a proliferation of discourses that has varied from culture to culture, placing blame on or casting off as irrelevant or dispensable an abjected other that in the history of AIDS has been disproportionately affected by it: homosexuals, bisexuals, intravenous drug users, Africans, Haitians, among others. In spite of this, the disease remains a menacing horizon for everyone. *Queen of the night* and all that she symbolizes is threatened as much as she is a threat:

Eu sou a dama da noite que vai te contaminar com seu perfume venenoso e mortal. Eu sou a flor carnívora e noturna que vai te entontecer e te arrastar para o fundo do seu jardim pestilento. Eu sou a dama maldita que, sem nenhuma piedade, vai te poluir com todos os líquidos, contaminar teu sangue com todos os vírus. Cuidado comigo, eu sou a dama que mata, boy. (95)

Dama da noite, on the other hand, is not only about rebellion, she is also about searching. If the utopias of various ideological forms and colors that were so prominent in the cultural landscape of the sixties and seventies have faded, there is one utopia that stubbornly remains, albeit tenuously: love. In fact, for Caio Fernando Abreu, the utopias of love and God are inevitable, lest the human subject submerge itself in a horrendous pit of absolute solitude. As much as Caio Fernando is aware of the weakening of foundationalist thought in contemporary society, he also recognizes that certain of its expressions—as contingent and provisional as they may be—are still a strategic necessity for our survival as human beings. And so through the nihilistic haze that looms in the short story “Dama da noite”, as throughout most of Caio Fernando’s fiction, there is a faint glimmer of hope: the hope of collecting fresh and juicy strawberries amidst the contemporary civilizational dump, to evoke the central metaphor in his best known work, *Morangos mofados* (or *Moldy Strawberries*), published in 1982. The strawberries represent the dreams, the utopias of love—all in all—hope. This hope, though, is never unaccompanied by fear, a fear that *queen of the night* experiences as a vulnerable child who is left alone and abandoned: “Fora da roda, montada na minha loucura. Parada pateta ridícula porra-louca solitária venenosa. Pós-tudo, sabe como? Darkérrima, moderníssima, puro simulacro. Dá minha jaqueta, boy, que faz um puta frio lá fora e quando chega essa hora da noite eu me desencanto. Viro outra vez aquilo que sou todo dia, fechada sozinha perdida no meu quarto, longe da roda e de tudo: uma criança assustada” (98).

The search that ultimately moves “Dama da noite” becomes crucial in Caio Fernando’s *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?* (1990) (*Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?*). In fact, the ontological and cultural concerns—individual and collective, national and global—that are the main impulse behind the short stories collected in *Dragons*, really explode in the novel *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?*

Onde andará Dulce Veiga? is centered around the figure of a mythical Brazilian singer, Dulce Veiga,⁶ who achieves cult status in the late 1960s, and who one day, at the height of her career, mysteriously vanishes. The protagonist, an anonymous male reporter for one of São Paulo’s dailies, is assigned the task of researching her past and possibly tracing her steps. Set against the backdrop of an apocalyptic São Paulo, the novel takes place

in a city that is falling to pieces, terminally ill. In fact, the idea of contamination permeates the narrative not only in a figurative sense, for some of the characters themselves, starting with the protagonist, have AIDS.

The reporter, a man in his forties whose name is never known, must meet with Dulce Veiga's daughter Márcia, a rock singer, who is the only one who may know of Dulce's whereabouts. In his search for Dulce Veiga, the reporter circulates swiftly through Rio and the Amazon region, but his nomadic meanderings take place mainly in the city of São Paulo, the Brazilian megalopolis, which functions in the narrative as a microcosm of the nation. This is the urban site where the vast array of cultural, socio-economic, and political differences that make up the Brazilian nation converge and collide most dramatically. Some relevant examples that stand out in the novel are the large numbers of *nordestinos*—the result of massive internal migration—who now constitute the subaltern economic reserve for the megalopolis; Japanese-Brazilians, one example of the many diasporic populations from overseas that are now an indissociable part of São Paulo; and gays, lesbians and bisexuals,⁷ who clearly defy geographical, racial, ethnic or class identity borderlines.

When the protagonist of Caio Fernando's novel finally meets the daughter of the long lost cult figure, he ventures into an alternative world *à la* *Almodóvar* of multi-cultural, post-punk, junkie, lesbian-feminist rock singers. It is a strident example of transnational cultural dissemination (Bhabha 170); a world of apocalyptic sounds where Carmen Miranda meets MTV, where the sixties counterculture meets its own pastiche. Here once again, Caio Fernando Abreu stages the meeting of the two generations that generally populate his narratives, but this time, unlike the short story "Dama da noite", the exiled one from the sixties (in this case, the reporter) has a faint voice, as he is overwhelmed by a postmodern luminescence that explodes out of the figures of the rock singers. The "Vaginas Dentatas", the name of the rock group, not only stands in for the young middle-class generations of contemporary São Paulo, but for the Brazil that is dramatized in Caio Fernando's fictional world. This is a Brazil located at an ebullient cultural semi-periphery,⁸ at the same time, inevitably absorbed by an English-speaking, corporate-dominated cultural multi-center that irradiates to the four corners of the globe. But, whatever happened to Dulce Veiga?

Dulce Veiga's disappearance occurs when she is about to become a major star, at the same time when Brazil's dictatorial regime becomes particularly brutal (1968—the year in which the *Ato Institucional n° 5* was put into law, severely limiting constitutional rights). Dulce Veiga leaves behind her child, as well as her lover, a leftist activist, who in fact suffers the psychological and physical consequences of right-wing repression. Dulce "exiles" herself in the Amazonian hinterland and embarks on a life with a new age community which she eventually abandons. She will remain for two decades out of sight of the Brazilian public, yet very present in the minds and hearts of all those who followed her in the late sixties. Her songs, her allure incarnate those values so dear to the sixties generation that now has been left ideologically orphaned.

The reporter wanders through the labyrinthine decadence of São Paulo, the sun-bathed, violence-ridden madness of Rio, and on to Brazil's final frontier, Amazônia, where he finally meets Dulce Veiga. This encounter shatters the mythical façade that has been projected upon her for years—a façade that has become tragically real in the person of Dulce's lover, who is now insane and addicted to heroine, after having been severely beaten down during the repressive years of Brazil's dictatorship and having been totally abandoned by Dulce Veiga. He now lives in a perpetual state of delirium, dressed in Dulce Veiga drag, in a pathetic impersonation of her songs and now faded allure. When the reporter encounters this grotesque impersonation of Dulce, he sees his own self reflected in the absolute other. It is the reflection of his own solitude and fears, his unfulfilled dreams—emotional, ideological, professional—and those of his whole generation .

There are two other contemporary Brazilian novels that share many of the concerns found in Caio Fernando's *Onde andará Dulce Veiga*, *Estorvo* (or *Turbulence*) by Chico Buarque (1991) and *Harmada* by João Gilberto Noll (1993). All three narratives are written by authors of the same generation that came into adulthood in the sixties (Chico Buarque in fact played a pivotal role in the Brazilian counterculture as an immensely popular singer and composer). All three authors are deeply committed to Brazil's destiny as a society, but reveal an acute disenchantment vis-à-vis Brazil's intractable socio-economic problems, as well as a shared feeling of loss of the utopian dimension, so fertile and strong in the sixties.

The three novels in question are all nomadic in structure and in the subjectivity of their protagonists. These novels also dramatize a search for origins at a time of great dispersal and disillusionment. João Gilberto Noll's *Harmada* is dominated by an unresolved tension between errancy and the search for roots which fully involves the narrator-protagonist. This unresolved tension is heightened by a sense of indefiniteness and provisionality regarding truths, actions and facts that prevails throughout the novel. This is also the dominant note in Chico Buarque's *Estorvo*, in which the protagonist and the novel itself spin in circles which offer no exit from the existential drama of the narrator-protagonist or from the socio-economic quagmire in which Brazil finds itself. In contrast to these two novels, Caio Fernando Abreu displays in *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?* a greater degree of faith in the possibility of arriving at a lasting truth as illustrated by the novel's detectivesque structure, which unavoidably sets in motion an epistemological operation that is ultimately aimed at finding a truth or a place of origins. In *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?* this truth or place of origins is metonymically located within the figure of Dulce Veiga herself.

The "real" Dulce Veiga lives in a remote village in the idealized Amazon region. It is significant that Dulce should be inhabiting the Amazon, at the margins of Brazil's own marginality, the antithesis of the urban decomposition so oppressively evident in Caio Fernando Abreu's novel, and the centerpiece of today's fragile global ecological puzzle. The Amazon encompasses here, as it has encompassed for many others in the past, an ultimate frontier, a repository of ever so elusive utopias, a possible new paradigm of development for being of self and of nation. Dulce Veiga is now happy, removed from the world, close to her song, perhaps in search of still one more thing. The reporter learns from her a possible peace and sense of purpose within his own horizon of incompleteness and finitude. However, the reporter is not to remain in this improbable promised land; his search is back in the urban hell that inescapably awaits him: his destiny, his truth are within him.

Caio Fernando Abreu's works *Os dragões não conhecem o paraíso* and *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?* speak from an anguished subjectivity at the edge of life, painfully struggling to achieve a sense of inner balance in a time of faded individual and collective hopes. Caio Fernando's narratives also speak powerfully of defiant yet fragile subjectivities on the margins of a semi-peripheral nation at its own historical and civilizational crossroads, striving to become in a globalized world where hardly any nation's destiny is within its own hands.

NOTES

¹ As Fernando Arenas points out in "Estar entre o lixo e a esperança: *Morangos mofados* de Caio Fernando Abreu" (1992), sexuality is presented as a highly unstable site of signification in Caio Fernando's fictional world, where fixed notions of hetero or homosexuality are constantly put into question. Caio Fernando rather privileges a notion of fluid bisexuality. This is exemplified by the lives of various characters and/or narrators of "Dama da noite" and *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?*.

² As a result of increased civil resistance against the military junta on the part of workers and students in 1968, the infamous *Ato Institucional nº 5* was put into effect. The ensuing result was a 'declaration of war' by the military against the opposition (either the armed opposition or its non-armed expressions). This entailed numerous disappearances of political opponents, strict censorship against intellectuals, artists and students, university purges, and the flight into exile of important sectors of the Brazilian intelligentsia.

³ Statistically by 1986, Brazil was only second to the United States in the number of AIDS cases reported outside of Africa. In 1995, Brazil had the second highest incidence of AIDS cases worldwide ("Activists take on AIDS" 197). However, experts believe that official statistics in Brazil for various reasons (relative lack of resources to combat the disease and limited education about AIDS in the general public) have tended to underestimate the real incidence of the HIV virus among the Brazilian population (*Aids: A terceira epidemia*, 56). Furthermore, the sociological categories utilized to explain the epidemiological characteristics of AIDS in North America and Europe are not really applicable to Brazil given the great instability regarding sexual identities, where there is in fact a great bifurcation between sexual acts and sexual identities (*Aids: A terceira epidemia* 73; *Bodies, Pleasures and Passions* 98-102). At the same time, in Brazil homosexual and heterosexual anal intercourse is more widespread (unprotected anal sex is proven to be one of the primary means of transmission of the HIV virus) making it possible for the rate of transmission to be even greater than reported until now (*Aids: A terceira epidemia* 74). In fact, in the city of São Paulo, the infection rate among women expanded 2800% between 1985 and 1995. Figures released by the respected Hospital das Clínicas of the University of São Paulo indicate that the infection rate in the city in mid-1995 was 1 man to 1 woman (*Folha de São Paulo*, Oct 9, 1995).

⁴ In December 1994, the Brazilian Federal Supreme Court acquitted Fernando Collor de Mello as it found the prosecution unable to prove its corruption charges against the former president.

⁵ The translated version of the short-story "Beauty" has been included in *The Penguin Book of International Gay Writing*, edited by Mark Mitchell (1995).

⁶ In an interview given shortly before Caio Fernando's death in *O Estado de São Paulo* ("Inventário irremediável"), the author points out that the figure of Dulce Veiga was inspired by a character of the same name in the novel *A estrela sobe* (1949) by Marques Rebelo. This character was later on portrayed by Odete Lara in film director Bruno Barreto's adaptation of Rebelo's novel.

⁷ Richard Parker (1991) has amply described the coexistence of various paradigms within Brazilian sexual culture whereby contemporary imported models would coexist with more traditional notions of sexuality and gender.

The notion of a "gay community" modeled after what is found in North America, various parts of Europe, Australia, etc, and coterminous to a political movement has found echo in elite segments of the larger urban areas of Brazil, at the same time as more traditional notions persist in rural and working class segments of the population where sexual acts do not translate into political consciousness and where sexual identity is structured around a vertical axis of active/passive and male/female. In the latter case, from a "gay perspective" the subject would be considered bisexual, but *he* would consider himself to be performing the "male" role regardless of the gender of the sexual object of choice. This is a model not exclusive to Brazil, as it is still widespread in Latin American and Mediterranean cultures (Almaguer 257; Schmitt 6), and was also common in the United States earlier this century, particularly in rural areas and among working classes (D'Emilio 471). With time, as the "imported models" from the metropolises gain greater acceptance and legitimation and become more dominant in countries such as Brazil, the more traditional paradigms may fade out.

⁸ As of the eighties, Brazil has become a net world exporter of television programs and advertising (ranked seventh world-wide), and popular music (ranked sixth). This dynamic is most evident in Portugal and in Lusophone Africa, and to a lesser degree in the rest of Latin America. Brazilian popular music is also widely available in North American and other European markets, at the same time as dubbed Brazilian soap operas can be seen in Italian, French and Spanish television, among others. As Renato Ortiz asserts, Brazil has shifted from the “defense of the national-popular to the export of the international-popular” (*A moderna tradição brasileira* 182-206).

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