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NOTE (1978): The following pages were written between 1969 and 1970. It will be readily observed that their prognosis was incorrect, which hardly argues in their favour. Nevertheless, I believe that there is something to be gained from reading the rest of the material, until someone convinces me otherwise. Of course, one is always tempted to rewrite the passages that have been proved false by time and events. But why should one replace the errors of the past with the opinions of the present day when the latter are just as likely to be mistaken as the former? Given the choice, the mistakes made by a contemporary observer are always more interesting. Especially so in my case, since the social analysis that was being made was not intended as a scientific study as such, but as an attempt to capture and explain the collective experience of a generation with reference to a given historical moment. Rather, I was attempting to give a literary account of a contemporary situation, as much as I was capable of doing so at the time. So when I say now, the observations, mistakes and judgements of the period in question must be allowed to speak for themselves. The reader will see that things have changed, but not that much.

In 1964 the military seized power in Brazil in order to protect capital and the continent of Latin America from the threat of socialism. Goulart’s populist government, despite the huge mobilization of left-wing forces it had undertaken, was fearful of the class struggle and backed down at the prospect of civil war. As a result, the triumph of right-wing elements was able to take the usual route of an agreement amongst generals. This time the people, mobilized but unarmed and unorganized, could only look on passively as the change of government took place. It soon felt the consequences: interference and terrorization in the unions; terror in rural areas; a general reduction in wages; purges, especially in the lower ranks of the Armed Forces; a military investigation in the universities; churches were broken into; student organizations were dissolved; censorship prevailed; habeas corpus was suspended, etc.

However, to everyone’s surprise, the cultural presence of the left was not suppressed during this period, rather it has continued to flourish and grow to this day. The works produced by the left dominate the cultural scene, and in certain areas their quality is outstanding. Despite the existence of a right-wing dictatorship, the cultural hegemony of the left is virtually complete. This can be seen in the bookshops of São Paulo and Rio, which are full of Marxist literature; in incredibly festive and feverish theatrical premieres, threatened by the occasional police raid; in the activities of the student movement or the declarations of progressive priests. In other words, at the very altars of bourgeois culture, it is the left which dictates the tone. This anomaly – which is now being threatened by the extremely severe penalties that the dictatorship has decreed against those involved in socialist propaganda – is the most obvious characteristic of the Brazilian cultural scene between 1964 and 1969. As well as an indication of class struggle, it is evidence of a commitment.

Before looking at its effects, it is essential that the nature and context of this hegemony be determined. The dominance of the left appears to be concentrated in the groups which are directly involved in ideological production, such as students, artists, journalists, some sociologists and economists, the rational sectors of the clergy, architects, etc. – but it does not extend beyond these groups, nor can it, because of the police. Brazilian intellectuals are left-wing, but the materials they prepare for government commissions and for the representatives of capital on the one hand, and for national newspapers and radio and television stations on the other, are not. The only truly radical material produced by this group is for its own consumption – which is in itself a substantial market. This situation became crystallized in 1964, when, in general, socialist intellectuals were spared the imprisonment, unemployment and exile they had been expecting. The only ones who were tortured and given long prison sentences were those who had organized meetings with workers, farm-labourers, seamen and soldiers. Having broken the links between the cultural movement and the masses, the Castelo Branco government made no attempt to prevent the circulation
of doctrinal or artistic left-wing material, which flourished to an extra-
ordinary extent, albeit within a restricted area. With its ups and downs,
this ingenious solution lasted until 1968, when a new group, capable
of supplementing their ideology with practical strength, emerged: the
students, who were organized in a semi-clandestine manner. During the
previous four years, at the same time as they frequently complained about
their confinement and their impotence, left-wing intellectuals had been
studying, teaching, publishing, filming, discussing, etc., and without
realizing it had contributed towards the creation, within the petit-
bourgeoisie, of a massively anti-capitalist generation. The social importance
of this radical band of the population, and its readiness to become involved
in the class struggle, could be seen in, among other things, the actions of the
groups who took up arms in the cause of revolution. The regime's response,
in December 1968, was one of severe suppression. In 1964 it had been
possible for the right to 'preserve' cultural expression, since it had only been
necessary to eliminate all contacts with the working masses in cities and
rural areas; in 1968, when students and those who enjoyed the best films,
the best theatre, the best music and the best books had become a politically
dangerous group, it would become necessary for teachers, producers,
authors, musicians, books, publishers to be replaced or censored - in other
words, the active culture of the moment would have to be eliminated.
The government has already taken several steps in this direction, and who
knows how many more they will take. As far as the destruction of
universities is concerned, it can already boast significant achievements:
Brasilia, São Paulo and Rio, the three largest in the country.

In order to understand the nature, the implantation and the ambiguities
of this hegemony, one needs to go back to its origins. Before 1964, the
socialism which had spread throughout Brazil was strong in its anti-
imperialism but weak in the propaganda and organization of the class
struggle. This was due, in part at least, to the strategy of the Communist
Party, which argued in favour of an alliance with the national bourgeoisie.
As a result, a toothless, parliamentary version of patriotic Marxism
emerged, an ideological complex which spoke of both combat and
conciliation. Such an approach fitted in well with the nationalist populism
that was dominant at the time, whose original labourist ideology was losing
ground. Conciliation prevailed within the workers' movement, with the
Communist Party exercising its influence among the unions in order to
keep the struggle limited to the question of wage claims. Combat was
reserved for the struggle against foreign capital, for foreign policy and
agrarian reform. The whole package was tailor-made for the populist
bourgeoisie, who were looking for socialist terminology in order to
intimidate right-wing landowners, and for nationalist feeling, authenticated
by the left, so they could implant noble sentiments in the workers. One
ought not, of course, to conclude that populism was created by the
Communist Party; rather it was populism which had consolidated a
tendency whose huge practical success within the Party would render it
invulnerable to the left, as we shall see. Once this union was consummated,
the division of the spoils immediately became problematic. Nowadays all of
this seems obvious. Nevertheless, it was a complex which occupied first
place in the minds of Brazilian theorists, whether in the face of psycho-
sociological theories on the 'national character', which were already
anachronistic at the time; or of the simplistic nationalism of modernization,
unaware of its own contradictions; or of Christian imitations of Marxism,
which interpreted imperialism and capital in terms of personal autonomy
and alienation; or, finally, in the face of rival Marxisms, banging tirelessly
away to the tune of classical Leninism, content to voice their habitual
abstract refusal of a populist commitment.

The strong point of this stance, which would eventually reach the masses
and deepen their political awareness of patriotism, lay in demonstrating
that imperialist domination and internal reaction were linked, that one
could not be changed without the other. Given the political climate of the
period, the repercussions of such a hypothesis were enormous. Anti-
imperialist literature was translated on a huge scale and newspaper columns
were filled with feverish articles. This was the age of Brasilino, a character
who, throughout an entire booklet, could not lift a finger without
encountering some aspect of imperialism. When he switched on the light in
the morning, the power was provided by Light & Power Inc. As he travelled
to work on a General Motors bus, he would be using Esso petrol. The
sausage at lunch were courtesy of Swift & Armour, etc. For the price
of one cruzeiro, Os Cadernos do Povo [The People's Notebooks], for their part,
would report at length on the manoeuvring that went on in the petroleum
market, on the relationship between latifundios and endemic diseases, on
questions of agrarian reform, besides discussing who should be regarded as
'the people' in Brazil, etc. The country was in a state of excitement, and its
options in the face of world history were the daily bread of those who read
the main newspapers. It was a period in which both the vocabulary and the
political logic of the left became acclimatized to everyday speech, which
was itself losing its provincial aspect. This gave rise to a certain degree of
abstraction and a specific rapidity in modern films and the theatre, in which world options arise every 20 seconds and for the slightest of reasons. The results are sometimes disastrous and sometimes extremely funny, but always there is the desire to consider particular questions in the light of their historical consequence, or a caricature of the same. When the lover in one theatrical work can say to his girlfriend, who is proving to be insufficiently Marxist in the face of their family complications: 'generalize, dammit!' - evidently, these are times in which popular enlightenment occupies the podium.

But let's get back to the main point. If the Communist Party could be commended for increasing people's awareness of the link between imperialism and internal reaction, the way in which this connexion was particularized was the major failing of their strategy and would lead to the disastrous events of 1964. The Party was far more anti-imperialist than it was anti-capitalist and, within the ruling classes, distinguished between a retrograde, pro-American agrarian sector and a national and progressive industrial sector, allying itself with the latter against the former. Undoubtedly, this opposition did exist, but not to the extent that was claimed, and it would never be as great as the opposition between the land-owning class, en bloc, and the danger of communism. And while the Communist Party believed in its alliances, transforming them into a vast ideological and doctrinal movement, they were never believed in by the bourgeoisie. Consequently, on the eve of civil war it was ill-prepared for the conflict. This mistake has been at the centre of Brazilian cultural life since 1950, and has enjoyed a lasting success in practical terms. Herein lies the difficulty. And no left-wing critic has been able to destroy the myth, since the past appeared to speak in its favour. Goulart was predictably establishing closer and closer links with the Communist Party, whose influence and popularity were on the increase. But the only thing that could not have been anticipated in any practical way, since any precautions taken in this area would have upset the 'favourable' disposition of the president, was the military dénouement. In the circumstances, it was entirely logical that the Communist Party should have reached the threshold of revolution trusting in the military intentions of the President of the Republic. In other words, its mistake was founded on some very convincing appearances.

At the time, the expression and application of this mistaken view of things constituted the raw material of left-wing criticism and apologetics. In brief, the argument was as follows: the main ally of imperialism, and therefore the major enemy of the left, were the archaic aspects of Brazilian society. These consisted basically of the latifundio system, against which the people, i.e. all those interested in the progress of the country, should rebel. On an economic and political level, therefore, an explosive but fundamentally bourgeois problematic arose concerning modernization and democratization. To be more precise, it had to do with the expansion of the internal market by means of agrarian reform, within the framework of an independent foreign policy. On an ideological level, we were introduced to an apologetic and sentimentalizable notion of 'the people', which embraced (and without distinction) the working masses, the lumpenproletariat, the intelligentsia, the financial barons and the army. The metaphor of this salad can be seen in the huge parties of the time, recorded by Glauber Rocha in Terra em Transe, [Land in Anguish] where the wives of capitalists, samba, capitalists themselves, diplomats of socialist countries, army progressives, left-wing Catholics and priests, Party intellectuals, torrential poets and other patriotic folk would rub shoulders, some in formal dress, others in blue jeans. In other words, having laid to one side all thought of the class struggle and the confiscation of capital, Marxism was left with no more than a rosy hue which worked in the interest of some sectors (the industrial bourgeoisie? the state bureaucracy?) of the ruling classes. And indeed, it was in this form that it became part, to a greater or lesser degree, of the ideological arsenal of Vargas, Kubitschek, Quadros and Goulart. Thus, the populist deformation of Marxism in Brazil was inextricably linked with power (particularly so during the Goulart administration, when it became the confessed ideology of important government figures), multiplying the quid pro quos and establishing itself to the extent where it became the very ideological atmosphere of the nation. Its problems were reflected in various ways by sociologists, theologians, historians, in the cinema, theatre, in popular music and architecture, etc. However, this implantation also had its commercial aspect - an important feature when one considers its subsequent survival - since the material produced by the left became big business and in a very few years transformed the face of publishing and the arts in Brazil.

However, although during this phase socialist ideology was actually helping to resolve the problems of capitalism, each moment of impasse brought about a gradual turning of the tide. The masses would riot in order to exert pressure on the landowning members of Congress who, fearfully, would react by approving measures for bourgeois modernization, with particular emphasis on agrarian reform. But Congress as a whole would not correspond, and the right, unlike the extremely moderate populists of the
left, raised the spectre of socialization. Gradually, then, due to the very scale of official popular campaigns, and to their failure, there arose the growing conviction that it would not be possible to implement the necessary reforms in Brazil within the confines of capitalism and, therefore, of populism. Though somewhat diluted, this conclusion had the same vast ambit as government propaganda itself. It was adopted by government committees, teams of experts, students and the avant-garde of the working class, who immediately, in the face of the military coup of 1964, questioned not so much Marxism itself as the application that had been made of it by the Communist Party.

This scenario also helps explain something of the character and social position of a part of Brazilian Marxism. In a country which is dependent but committed to its own development, where capitalization is weak and the government is entrepreneurial, all ambitious initiatives are made via some kind of contact with the State. This mediation provides the vanguard of the various sectors of initiative with a national (and paternalistic) perspective, and their theoreticians would discover that their relationship with the state already contained fundamental difficulties, in the form of limits imposed upon it by imperialist pressure and, soon, by the framework of capitalism itself. This applies to cultural activity as a whole (education included) which lacks resources; it applies to public administration as well as to key areas in the private sector; and, to be a little more specific, it even applied to individual Brazilian capitalists and to army officers. Thus, the main feature of Marxist criticism was a nationalism that was, then, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist minus the contact with the problems of the masses that one might have expected. It was a Marxism which specialized in discussing the theoretical fog, despite the fact that the Party also provided the climate for it.

However, as intellectuals did not control their own resources, the theory could not fully be translated into their professional activity, no matter how crucial or influential it was to the shaping of their critical consciousness. As a result, small groups of indispensable and dissatisfied professionals emerged, linked in their professional capacity to capital or the government, but politically sensitive to the approaching revolution - this was due to technical reasons, having to do with difficulties in the growth of production; reasons, in other words, whose translation into political terms is not immediate, or is a matter of chance, and thus not easy to grasp in its movements. In short, a new nationalist league had been formed, consisting entirely of youthful, militant and up-to-date elements - barons and generals were now excluded - who would constitute the public in the early years of the dictatorship. This was the soil in which the criticism of the compromises of the past would yield its fruit. And its vitality was such that - even with the sight of government tanks trundling periodically along the streets - there was no shortage of complaints against the cultural terrorism of the left.

This, in brief outline, was the mechanism by which a dubious socialist programme was able to dominate the scene. However, since an ideology can never be completely autonomous, its aims and cultural results ought not to be considered as identical in all aspects to its function. Contact with new international tendencies and with the radicalization of populism, resulting finally in several months of pre-revolutionary activity, would engender new outlooks and definitions which could not be traced back to the original ideological movement, and were, indeed, incompatible with it. Given our earlier analysis, this is a useful observation: it was only to the extent to which it broke with the system of compromise in which it had become enmeshed, and which was nevertheless a source of impetus, that the work produced by the left could be regarded as anything more than pure ideology. This occurred in several ways. For example, the demagogic emotions of an 'independent foreign policy' (Janio Quadros giving a decoration to Che Guevara) or of Goulart's campaigns led to an interest in the study of Marx and imperialism in the universities. Thus it was from university teachers - those ancient dinosaurs - that the earliest, most convincing and most comprehensive accounts of the unfeasibility of reformism, and of its deceptive nature, could be heard. Another indirect consequence was that academic study paradoxically breathed back into the writings of Marx and Lenin the life that had been denied them by the Communist Party's monopoly; so much so that on leaving their lecture-halls, student militants would defend the strict principles of Marxism in the face of the compromises of the leadership. To be brief, just as os grupos de 11 and peasant leagues managed to escape the populist machinery, though they belonged to the environment for which the latter had been created, there were times when culture, in the form of isolated works or even collective experiments, was able to scatter the Communist Party's theoretical fog, despite the fact that the Party also provided the climate which gave it a ready-made audience and immediate acclaim. Finally, for a more complex example of the disparity between reformist practice and its cultural results, we will consider the Movement for Popular Culture in Pernambuco (beautifully evoked in Antonio Callado's 1967 novel, Quarp). The Movement began in 1959, when Miguel Arraes was prefect and was...
running for the governorship of the State. His immediate aim was an electoral one: to educate the masses, who would surely vote for him if they could (in Brazil, those who cannot read or write, i.e. 50 per cent of the population, are not allowed to vote). He also tried to encourage the setting up of all kinds of community groups for people to take an interest in real matters such as their city, district and even their local folklore, which would compensate for the misery and marginality of the masses; it would be a means of protecting them from the ravages of electoral demagogues. Inspired by the tenets of Christianity and reformism, the central idea behind the programme was the 'improvement of mankind'. However, in its effects on culture and its established forms, the Movement for Popular Culture was of much greater significance.

Let us begin by looking at the Paulo Freire method for teaching adults to read and write, which was developed at this juncture. This extremely successful method does not conceive of reading as an abstract technique, but as a force in the game of social domination. Consequently, it attempts to couple the peasant's access to the written word with an awareness of his/her political situation. The teachers, who were students, would go to rural communities and, using the living experience of the inhabitants as a starting-point, would emphasize certain topics and key-words - 'generating words', in Freire's terminology - which would be used both for discussion and to encourage literacy. Instead of undergoing the humiliation of having to learn, at thirty years of age, that the cat sat on the mat, rural workers were able to make a simultaneous entry into the world of letters and that of trades unions, the constitution, agrarian reform, i.e. of their own historical interests. In such a situation, the teacher is no longer a bourgeois professional who merely passes on what he has learnt; nor is reading a procedure which merely enables one to get a new job; nor are words, much less the pupils, merely words and pupils. Each of these elements is transformed in the method - within which one can feel the momentum of a contemporary revolution: it conceives the notion that poverty and its foundation, illiteracy, are neither accidental nor residual, but rather play an integral part in the routine movements of capital's domination. In this way, the political triumph of learning to write broke free of the original framework of study, transfer of knowledge and consolidation of the prevailing order for which it had been designed. The same is true of the theatre. On one occasion, the Arreaes government decided to extend farming credit, so that in two months the number of small farmers who were able to benefit jumped from only 1,000 to 40,000. Theatrical groups would first of all approach the peasants for information and then attempt to dramatize the problems of innovation. In such cases, who was the author? Who the student? Does artistic beauty still adorn the ruling classes? Where does it come from? The themes, materials, possibilities and the very structure of cultural production were changing, together with its audience.

During this brief period, in which the police and the legal system did not act merely in the interests of property (and particularly so in Pernambuco), discussions on how to produce culture that was truly democratic sprang up at every turn, living in a state of happy incompatibility with the forms and prestige of bourgeois culture. It is difficult to determine with any precision the complex complicity and complementarity that often exists between police repression and the accepted forms of art and culture. These were times of splendid irreverence. In Rio de Janeiro the CPCs (Centres for Popular Culture) would improvise political theatre at factory gates and in trades and student union meetings; and in the slums they were beginning to make films and records. The pre-revolutionary winds were decompartmentalizing the national consciousness and filling the newspapers with talk of agrarian reform, rural disturbances, the workers' movement, the nationalization of American farms, etc. The country had become unrecognizably intelligent. Political journalism, hand in hand with satirical humour, was making great strides in the big cities. There were even a number of parliamentary deputies who made some interesting speeches. In short, intellectual production was beginning to reorient its relationship with the masses. Then came the coup, and with it the repression and silence of the first few weeks. The generals' artistic tastes were somewhat more traditional. In São Paulo, for example, at an admittedly later date, the Commander of the Second Army - who became famous for the statement that he would eat up the left for lunch before they could have him for dinner - hosted a much talked about literary evening, in which he recited sonnets penned by his father and, giving in to the insistence of those present, eventually read out some of his own work. The Movement for Popular Culture in Recife was immediately brought to an end, and its headquarters transformed into the inevitable Social Security Office. The liveliest and most interesting period of modern Brazilian history had become a thing of the past.

In the wake of the repression of 1964, another geological stratum began to dominate the Brazilian scene. 'Ancient hearts, hidden corners in the hinterland, who would have thought ...?' Even before the coup, the right, by making good use of capital and of advertising techniques, had managed
to activate politically the archaic sentiments of the petty-bourgeoisie. Beautiful examples of rural and urban stupidity could be seen on the streets in the shape of ‘Family Marches with God and for Freedom’, with petitions being organized against divorce, agrarian reform and the communization of the clergy; alternatively, those who stayed at home could pray their ‘Family Beads’, a sort of warlike rosary designed to encourage the generals. God could not help but take note of such public and private appeals and duly descended upon the Communists like a ton of bricks. Immediately after the coup, public support for the military increased while the workers’ and peasant movements were silenced by repression. The investigations made by the police and the army into subversive activities prompted the re-emergence of such curious old phrases as: Does the philosophy teacher believe in God? Do you know all the words to the national anthem? How practising free love? What if my name is on the list of those who are going to be next against the wall? As an ardent ex-liberal neatly put it: ‘The Virgin at the microphone, referring to her as an ‘adorable creature’. The Minister for Education was the same man who, only a few years previously, had purged Paraná University library as its Rector; on that occasion he had ordered the immoral pages in the novels of Eça de Queiroz to be torn out: ‘...the nucleus of the nation is the family, Brazil is a proud country, our Christian traditions, phrases which no longer reflect any reality whatever, although they are a kind of password for people of kindred feelings, and are, for those who use them, a guarantee of their politico-ideological ‘correctness’. In its way, the counter-revolution repeated what a good part of the most highly regarded Brazilian poetry of this century had done: it breathed life back into the funeral cortege of those that capitalism had passed by. Poor poets, who saw their beloved elders in processions, brandishing cudgels and dripping with obscurantism! However, although it was victorious, this alliance of the defeated was unable to impose itself, and was put on one side straight away by the necessities of the times and by the technocratic policies of the new government. (It did, however, have its moment of artistic glory, as a subject of mirth.) Its unique style of reasoning has been immortalized in the three volumes of the Febeapā – the abbreviation for Festival of Asininity that’s Devastating the Country [Festival de Asininity que Assola o País] – an anthology compiled by Stanislaw Ponte-Preta. And in an indirect way, the spectacle of such social anachronism, of the daily phantasmagoria that it presented, provided the material for the tropicalist movement – a complex Brazilian variant of pop, with which a growing number of avant-garde musicians, writers, theatre and film directors, and painters identify themselves. Later, I shall try to describe it. This alliance had its second chance just now, in 1969, this time in the wake of the military régime’s struggles (backed by repressive force) to construct an ideology with which to oppose incipient revolutionary war.

However, let’s return to 1964. The government which had just carried out the coup, unlike the petty bourgeoisie and the rural middle class, which

agrarion reform, imperialism, the minimum wage or votes for illiterates, and so had more or less corresponded, not to the experience of the average citizen, but to the organized experience of the unions, industrial and rural, of bosses’ and student associations, of the mobilized petty bourgeoisie, etc. However confused and muddled it was, it concerned real issues, and it proceeded according to terms which the development of the nation as a whole prompted as time went on, to the principal contenders. After 1964, it’s a different picture. The old, ritual formulae which preceded populism and with which the most antiquated and marginalized sectors of the bourgeoisie disguise their lack of contact with what’s going on in the world come back: the nucleus of the nation is the family, Brazil is a proud country, our Christian traditions, phrases which no longer reflect any reality whatever, although they are a kind of password for people of kindred feelings, and are, for those who use them, a guarantee of their politico-ideological ‘correctness’. In its way, the counter-revolution repeated what a good part of the most highly regarded Brazilian poetry of this century had done: it breathed life back into the funeral cortege of those that capitalism had passed by. Poor poets, who saw their beloved elders in processions, brandishing cudgels and dripping with obscurantism! However, although it was victorious, this alliance of the defeated was unable to impose itself, and was put on one side straight away by the necessities of the times and by the technocratic policies of the new government. (It did, however, have its moment of artistic glory, as a subject of mirth.) Its unique style of reasoning has been immortalized in the three volumes of the Febeapā – the abbreviation for Festival of Asininity that’s Devastating the Country [Festival de Asininity que Assola o País] – an anthology compiled by Stanislaw Ponte-Preta. And in an indirect way, the spectacle of such social anachronism, of the daily phantasmagoria that it presented, provided the material for the tropicalist movement – a complex Brazilian variant of pop, with which a growing number of avant-garde musicians, writers, theatre and film directors, and painters identify themselves. Later, I shall try to describe it. This alliance had its second chance just now, in 1969, this time in the wake of the military régime’s struggles (backed by repressive force) to construct an ideology with which to oppose incipient revolutionary war.

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agrarion reform, imperialism, the minimum wage or votes for illiterates, and so had more or less corresponded, not to the experience of the average citizen, but to the organized experience of the unions, industrial and rural, of bosses’ and student associations, of the mobilized petty bourgeoisie, etc. However confused and muddled it was, it concerned real issues, and it proceeded according to terms which the development of the nation as a whole prompted as time went on, to the principal contenders. After 1964, it’s a different picture. The old, ritual formulae which preceded populism and with which the most antiquated and marginalized sectors of the bourgeoisie disguise their lack of contact with what’s going on in the world come back: the nucleus of the nation is the family, Brazil is a proud country, our Christian traditions, phrases which no longer reflect any reality whatever, although they are a kind of password for people of kindred feelings, and are, for those who use them, a guarantee of their politico-ideological ‘correctness’. In its way, the counter-revolution repeated what a good part of the most highly regarded Brazilian poetry of this century had done: it breathed life back into the funeral cortege of those that capitalism had passed by. Poor poets, who saw their beloved elders in processions, brandishing cudgels and dripping with obscurantism! However, although it was victorious, this alliance of the defeated was unable to impose itself, and was put on one side straight away by the necessities of the times and by the technocratic policies of the new government. (It did, however, have its moment of artistic glory, as a subject of mirth.) Its unique style of reasoning has been immortalized in the three volumes of the Febeapā – the abbreviation for Festival of Asininity that’s Devastating the Country [Festival de Asininity que Assola o País] – an anthology compiled by Stanislaw Ponte-Preta. And in an indirect way, the spectacle of such social anachronism, of the daily phantasmagoria that it presented, provided the material for the tropicalist movement – a complex Brazilian variant of pop, with which a growing number of avant-garde musicians, writers, theatre and film directors, and painters identify themselves. Later, I shall try to describe it. This alliance had its second chance just now, in 1969, this time in the wake of the military régime’s struggles (backed by repressive force) to construct an ideology with which to oppose incipient revolutionary war.

However, let’s return to 1964. The government which had just carried out the coup, unlike the petty bourgeoisie and the rural middle class, which
it had mobilized but which it was not going to represent, was not backward. It was pro-American and anti-popular, but modern. It was carrying out military and economic integration with the United States, and a concentration and rationalization of capital. In this sense, the clock had not been turned back, and the apologists of rural and suburban private property were not in power. What interest can a technocrat, by definition a cosmopolitan, have in the feelings which fuel the outback? It's much more interesting for him to see what his fellows in London, New York and Paris are seeing - Hair, Marat-Sade, Albee and even Brecht. In just the same way, while they were marching in the streets against communism, dressed in skirts and blouses and without their high-heels, society ladies had no intention of forgoing their more elaborate ensembles. The bourgeoisie had handed over the Presidency of the Republic and lucrative posts in the administration to the military, but had kept international standards of taste. At this time, however, the cultural avant-garde of the West has only one topic, the social rotteness of capitalism. In their turn, the military hardly brought their ideological endeavours into the public domain - something which will be much more decisive in the stage which is beginning now - for, since they had brute force at their command they could do without popular support. In this vacuum, it was natural that the market together with the authority of the experts, would win out, and they returned the initiative to those who had had it in the previous government. Cultural life got moving again, with the same people as before, in a different national situation. Through campaigns against torture, American greed, military investigations and the stupidity of the censors, the Brazilian intelligentsia came together and triumphed morally and intellectually over the government, with great effect in terms of propaganda.

Only at the end of 1968 did the situation change again, when the existence of a state of revolutionary war in Brazil was officially recognized. To stop it spreading to the masses, police repression became really tough, denunciation of acquaintances was encouraged and protected from reprisals, torture took on terrifying proportions, and the press was silenced. As a result, the importance of ideology increased, all of which meant a proliferation of Brazilian flags, of propaganda leaflets, and the setting up of courses in gymnastics and civic values for university students. The phraseology of Jaw-and-order patriotism, suddenly back in favour, could be found everywhere. What chance did the government have of forging a real national ideology? If it needs it, it is only because it has to confront subversion. In the previous situation, it preferred to do without it, since in essence it is a government associated with imperialism, with demobilization of the people and with technological solutions, to whom any verifiable ideological commitment will always seem like a limitation. Aside from that, there is also the massive, and well-established penetration of US culture, which does not sort well with God, family and country, at least, not in the Latin-American sense of those words. So, resistance to the spread of a fascist type of ideology is inherent in the situation. On the other hand, such a resistance will hardly find much support in the liberal conscience, which had moments of courage after 1964, but now seems to be almost dead. In 1967, when the student movement was very active, the dock police were brought to São Paulo. Their sinister brutality, routinely applied to the workers, was for a moment turned against the children of the bourgeoisie, causing shock and revulsion. Such violence was unknown in the city and nobody had thought that the defence of the regime needed such specialists. That is the way things still are. Shamefaced, the bourgeoisie accepts the cultural programme laid out for it by the military.

Simplifying a little, what is being repeated in these comings and goings is the combination, in moments of crisis, of the new and the old: more exactly, of the most advanced manifestations of international imperialist integration, and of the most ancient - and obsolete - bourgeois ideology, centred on the individual, on the indivisibility of the family and on its traditions. Superficially, this combination only represents the coexistence of symptoms linked to different phases of the same system. (For the purposes of this argument, we are not interested in the celebrated cultural variety of Brazil in which it is true that one finds African religions, indigenous tribes, workers sometimes sold as slaves, share-cropping and industrial complexes.) The important thing is the systematic character of this co-existence, and its meaning, which can vary. While in the Goulart phase modernization involved relations of power and property, and ideology, which would have to give way in the face of the pressure of the masses and of the necessities of national development, the 1964 coup - one of the crucial moments in the Cold War - was founded on the defeat of this movement, through the mobilization and confirmation, among other things, of traditional and localistic forms of power. Thus, imperialist integration, which immediately modernized the economy of the country for its own ends, is reviving that part of ideological and political obsolescence which it needs to preserve its own stability. From being an obstacle and a residue, this archaic world becomes an intentional instrument of a
very modern oppression, just as modernization itself, from being libertarian and nationalist, becomes a form of oppression.

In such conditions, in 1964, simple homespun thinking suddenly rose to historical pre-eminence - a crushing experience for the intellectuals, who had become unaccustomed to such things. This experience, with its own logic, provided the raw material for an important artistic style, that of tropicalism, which reflects on it in various ways, exploring and defining a new artistic, intellectual and class situation. With no pretence to having the final word, I am now going to attempt a sketch of its main outlines. Venturing a little, perhaps one can say that the basic effect of tropicalism depends precisely on its subjection of such anachronisms, at first sight grotesque, but on second thoughts inevitable, to the white light of ultra-modernity, so that the result is transformed into an allegory of Brazil. The stock of images and emotions belonging to the patriarchal country, rural and urban, is exposed to the most advanced or fashionable forms and techniques in the world - electronic music, Eisensteinian montage, the colours and the montage of pop art, the prose of Finnegans Wake, theatre which is at one and the same time raw and allegorical, with physical attacks on the audience. It's in this internal contrast that the peculiar attraction, the trade mark of the tropicalist image lies. The result of the combination is strident, like a family secret dragged out into the middle of the street, like treachery to one's own class. It is literally an absurdity - this is the first impression it gives - however, the misfit reveals to the onlooker a real historical abyss, a junction of different stages of capitalist development.

There are many ambiguities and tensions in this construction. The vehicle is modern and the content archaic, but the past is noble and the present commercial; on the other hand, the past is atrocious and the present authentic, etc. Politics and a kind of collective social exhibitionism were combined: its artistic power derives from quoting, without sympathy or collusion, as if they came from Mars, the civic values that have come out on the streets - but intimately, for Mars is actually back home; it also derives from a kind of affectation of treachery, which shows family and class secrets off to the profane eyes of a less restricted public. Virginal brides, senatorial countenances, phrases of the most impeccable dignity, cheap tango passions - unprotected by social distance and their prestige-laden context, recorded in some plastic-metallic-phosphorescent, electronic material, these figures take on a strange glow, and it becomes unclear whether they are forsaken and abandoned, or malign, ripe for some kind of fascism. Again, this background of traditional images is often represented by its debased copies in radio-soap operas, operettas, club repertoire, and so on, which produces one of tropicalism's best effects: the old and authentic was as hungry for fame as are the commercial excesses of our own day, with the single difference that it is out of fashion; it is as if a top-hatted gentleman, who insisted on his superior morality, were told that nobody wears hats any more. To express this in a more systematic way: the crest of the wave, which is where the tropicalists are now, is at one moment measured by its critical aim; at another it is measured against the success of what is most up-to-date in the great capitals of the world. This indifference, this absolute value of what is new, allows the historical distance between theme and technique given definition in the typical tropicalist image, just as it may express an attack on reaction, to express also the triumph of the city-dwelling grandchildren over their provincial grandparents - the undeniable achievement of having been born later and of reading foreign magazines. Against the ambiguous background of modernization, the line between sensibility and opportunism, or between criticism and social integration is blurred. An analogous ambiguity appears in the combination of violent social criticism and bare-faced commercialism, whose results can easily turn out to be conformist, but can also, when they cast an ironic light on its doubtful side, capture the hardest and most difficult contradictions of present intellectual production. In fact, to judge by the indignation of the right (which isn't everything), the irreverent, scandalous and commercial side seems to have carried more political weight than the deliberately political side.

What is the social position of tropicalism? To judge it, one needs to have a certain familiarity with international fashion - something which is commoner in some arts than it is in others. This familiarity, without which one loses that sense of distance, of lèse-majesté towards the patriarchal heritage, is the monopoly of university students and the like, who, by means of it, can speak a language exclusive to themselves. As we have already seen, tropicalism submits one system of private, prestigious notions to the language of another milieu and another time, an operation from which it gets its demythifying, leftist energy. However, this second language is also private, though it belongs to a different group. We're not going from the particular to the universal, but from one sphere to another, admittedly a much more politically advanced one, which finds a form of identification within it. More or less, then, we know whom this style is talking to: but we still don't know what it is saying. Faced by a tropicalist image, faced by the apparently surrealist nonsense which is the result of the combination we
have been describing, the up-to-date spectator will resort to fashionable words, he'll say Brazil is incredible, it's the end, it's the pits, it's groovy. By means of these expressions, in which enthusiasm and disgust are indistinguishable, he associates himself with the group who have the 'sense' of national character. But on the other hand, this climate, this imponderable essence of Brazil is very simple to construct, easy to recognize and reproduce. It is a linguistic trick, a formula for sophisticated vision, within many people's grasp. What is the content of this snobbery for the masses? What feelings does the tropicalist sensibility recognize itself and distinguish itself by? (By the way, just because it is simple it is not necessarily bad. As we will see later, the tropicalist effect has a profound and interesting historical foundation; but this too is indicative of a class position, as we will see in a moment.)

Coming back to the subject: for example, in the Paulo Freire method the archaic nature of rural consciousness and the specialized theory of the teacher of literacy are also combined; however, in spite of this conjunction, there is nothing less tropicalist than this method. Why? Because the opposition between its terms can be resolved - people can be made literate. For the tropicalist image, on the contrary, it is essential that the juxtaposition between old and new - either between content and technique, or within the content itself - should make something absurd, should be an aberration, which is the basic point of reference of the melancholy and the humour of this style.

In other words, to obtain its artistic and critical effect tropicalism works with the weird combination of the archaic and the modern, which the counter-revolution has given shape to, or to put it another way, with the results of the previous, failed attempt at national modernization. There was a moment, a little before or a little after the coup, in which, at least in the cinema, the order of the day could be summed up in a phrase of Glauber Rocha (who seems to be evolving in a direction far removed from it): 'for an aesthetics of hunger'. Some of the best Brazilian films, in particular Barren Lives, Black God, White Devil, and The Guns,* are linked to this idea. Simplifying brutally, one can say that the impulse of this aesthetic is revolutionary. The artist would look for his strength and modernity in the present stage of national life, and would keep as much independence as possible in the face of the technological and economic machine, which is always in the last analysis controlled by the enemy. Tropicalism goes in the other direction: from the point of view of the international avant-garde and of fashion, it records the backwardness of the country as something aberrant. In the former case, technique is given a political dimension. In the latter, the stage it has reached at the international level is accepted as the parameter of our national misfortune: we, the up-to-date, the ones who are plugged in to the movement of capital, recognize now that the attempt at social modernization from above has failed, that what is absurd is our own soul and that of our country. The notion of a 'Brazilian poverty', which victimizes rich and poor equally, which is typical of tropicalism, is the result of a generalization of this kind. Some Indians in a bleak, poverty-struck landscape, filmed in deliberately humorous technicolor, a china cabinet in the middle of an asphalted motorway, a high society party which after all is said and done is just a provincial knees-up - according to this point of view, everything is in the same state of privation. Obviously, the poor don't have this notion of poverty - for them, lack of food and lack of style can hardly be of the same order of inconvenience.

However, let's move on to another question: what is the historical foundation of the tropicalist allegory? By finding a satisfactory reply to this question, we would also be explaining the really remarkable interest that these images have, which stands out even more surprisingly if they are part of a mediocre work of art. The coexistence of the old and the new is a general (and always suggestive) feature of all capitalist societies and of many others too. However, for the countries which were once colonized and have now become underdeveloped, it is central, and carries the power of an emblem. This is because these countries were incorporated into the world market - to the modern world - in an economically and socially backward role, that of suppliers of raw materials and cheap labour. Their link to what is new is made by means of, structurally by means of, their social backwardness, which reproduces itself, instead of cancelling itself out.* In the insoluble but functional combination of these two terms, then, the plan of a national destiny is laid out, there from the beginning. What is more, by cultivating 'latinoamericanidad' - in which there is a faint echo of the continent-wide dimension of the revolution - which in Portuguese-speaking Brazil is extremely uncommon, the tropicalists show that they are aware of the implications of their style. And it is true that, once this way of looking at things has been assimilated, the whole of Latin America does turn out to be tropicalist. On the other hand, the generality of this blueprint

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*See 'Cinema and The Guns', Chapter 11, this volume.
is such that it embraces all the countries of the continent, at every stage in their history - which might seem to be a defect. What can a formula say about Brazil in 1964 which is equally applicable, say, to nineteenth-century Argentina? However, because tropicalism is allegorical, this lack of specificity is not fatal to it (as it would be, in a symbolic style). Schematically, where in the sign form and content are indissoluble, and the symbol is the ‘visible’, so to speak the natural form of the idea, in an allegory the relationship between the idea and the images which have the task of expressing it is external, and belongs to the domain of convention. Since they signify an abstract idea with which they have nothing to do, the elements of an allegory are not artistically transfigured: they persist in their material form, functioning as documenters of the truth. They are like the reefs of the real history which constitutes its depths.6 Thus, it is precisely in the effort to find suggestive and dated materials - with which they allegorize their atemporal idea of Brazil - that the tropicalists get their best results. That is why their films, plays and songs look like and sound like inventories, presenting as much material as possible, so that it can undergo a process of allegorical activation. Once this anachronistic conjunction has been produced, along with the conventional idea that this is Brazil, the ‘ready-made’ images of the patriarchal world and of imbecilic consumerism start signifying on their own, in a shameless, unaestheticized fashion, over and over again suggesting their stifled, frustrated lives, which we will never get to know. The tropicalist image encloses the past in the form of images that are active, or that might come back to life, and suggests that they are our destiny, which is the reason why we can’t stop looking at them. I think this structure is at work even when the image is at first sight comic.6

Commenting on some houses built after 1964, planned by avant-garde architects, one critic has pointed out that they were no good for living in, because their materials, principally bare concrete, were very rough, and because the space was excessively divided up and rationalized, out of proportion with the aims of a private house. However, according to him, it was precisely in this lack of proportion, that their witness to history, their cultural honesty was to be found.

During the developmentalist years, linked to the building of Brasilia and to the hopes of socialism, the consciousness of a collectivist meaning for architectural production had matured. So that, for anyone who had thought of rational, cheap construction, on a large scale, as part of a movement of national democratization, for anyone who had thought his way through the labyrinth of the economic and political connections between technology and imperialism, a project for a bourgeois house is inevitably an anti-climax.7 When the political perspectives for architecture were cut off, what was left however was the intellectual education it had given to the architects, who would torture space, overloading with aims and experiments the houses commissioned from them from time to time by newly-married friends with a bit of money. Outside its proper context, carried out in a restricted sphere and in the form of merchandise, architectural rationalism turns into a mere show of good taste - quite incompatible with its deeper aims - or into a moralistic, uncomfortable symbol of the revolution which didn’t happen. This outline, though with a thousand variations, can be generalized for the whole period. The cultural process, which was breaking down the frontiers of class and purely commercial criteria, was dammed up in 1964. Once the contact with the exploited, which was their real aim, was checked, formal solutions were used in a situation and for a public for which they were not destined, and changed meaning. From being revolutionary, they changed to being the saleable symbol of the revolution. They were welcomed triumphantly by the students and by the artistic public in general. Political forms, which had been the most abundant, the liveliest and most instructive attitude they took, full of the materialistic obviousness that previously had been in bad taste, became the moral symbol of politics, and this was their most forceful content. The gesture towards instruction or education, even though at times it was naïve and taught its cultivated audience nothing that was not obvious - that imperialism exists, that justice is a matter of which class you belong to - had its effect as an example, it gave value to what was not permitted in a culture that was hemmed in: political contact with the people.

Thus there came into being a kind of ambiguous exchange, which on the one hand sold indulgences of political emotion to the middle class, but on the other hand, consolidated the ideological atmosphere I spoke of at the beginning. The infinite repetition of arguments well known to all - nothing could be more redundant, at first sight, than the theatre which came immediately after the coup - was not, in fact, redundant: it showed that people were still there, and had not changed their opinion, that a lot could be said if you were ingenious enough, that it was possible to run risks. In these shows, in which not even the shadow of a worker appeared, the intelligentsia identified itself with the oppressed, and reaffirmed their debt to them, inasmuch as they represented our hope for the future. They
unleashed exciting, imaginary battles against inequality, the dictatorship and the United States. They established the conviction that what is poetic and alive, today, is the struggle against capitalism and imperialism. That was the reason for the importance of public genres, of theatre, advertisements, popular music, cinema and journalism, which transformed this climate into something like a demonstration or a party, while literature proper left the centre of the stage. The poets themselves felt this way. In a recent public debate, one accused another of not having a single line capable of landing him in jail. This search for the revolutionary which culture imposed on itself and kept up for some time naturally could not proceed without contradictions. Some of them can be seen in the evolution of the theatre during this time.

Theatre's first reply to the coup was musical, which was a find in itself. In Rio de Janeiro, Augusto Boal - the director of the Teatro de Arena in São Paulo, the group which reformulated its aims in the quickest and most methodical way - put on the show Opinião. The singers, two from humble backgrounds and a female student from Copacabana, mixed the story of their lives with any songs that might fit in. In this plot, the music acted principally as the authentic summary of a social experience, as the opinion that every citizen has the right to formulate and sing about, even if the dictatorship doesn't approve. Thus, popular music (along with football, the cultural expression closest to the Brazilian heart) and democracy, the contradiction. Some of them can be seen in the evolution of the theatre.

In an inventive way, the same liberal plan - resistance to the dictatorship - worked for another great success, Liberdade, liberadade, in which there was an anthology of Western libertarian texts, from the sixth century BC to the twentieth AD. In spite of the tone almost of civic affirmation of these two shows, one of communal protest and mutual encouragement, it was inevitable that one should feel aesthetic and political unease in the face of the total agreement between the stage and the audience which they produced. The real drama was not what was going on on stage. No elements of the critique of populism had been absorbed. Mutual confirmation and enthusiasm might have been important then, but it was also true that the left had just been defeated, which gave a rather inappropriate air of complacency to the wild applause. If the people are intelligent and courageous, why were they defeated? And if it had been defeated, why so much congratulation? As we will see, the lack of a political reply to this question would become the aesthetic limit of the Teatro de Arena.
that actors should collect and analyse the best gestures they can observe, to perfect them and give them back to the people, from whom they originally came. The premise of this argument, in which life and art are harmonized, is that the gesture should exist on the stage just as it does outside it, that the reason for its appropriateness should not merely lie in the theatrical form that sustains it. What is good in life gives life to the stage, and vice versa. So, then, if the artistic form stops being the restricted centre of the whole, it is because it accepts the effects of the social structure (or of a social movement) - to which it is no longer in essence opposed - as equivalent to its own effects. As a consequence, there is a relaxation at the level of the form, and the work enters into an agreement with its public; it may be able to amuse it and educate it, instead of contradicting it all the time. These speculations, which derive from the idyll that Brecht had imagined for socialist theatre in the GDR, give an idea of what was happening in the Teatro de Arena - where this conciliation was made possible by the rising socialist theatre in the GDR, give an idea of what was happening in the good example. Since they were neither singers nor dancers, the actors had student movement. The search for what might be attractive, vigorous and funny, or despicable, for a new generation, gave an extraordinary attractiveness - which would also be graceful and interesting. At the same time, they worked to prevent the solutions they found sticking only to the junction of one actor and character: each character was played by many actors, and they could be taken up again, so that the actor could be at one moment a Gestures could be taken on and off like hats, and so could be acquired. The play was a real investigation into, and presentation of the most seductive ways of rolling around or rolling over on the floor, of lifting your arm, of getting up quickly, of calling out, of showing decisiveness, but also of the most everyday ways that the dominant classes have of lying, or ordering their employees around, or of underlining their own social importance, by a particular movement of the bum. However, at the centre of its relationship with the public - something which only made it the more successful - Zumbi repeated the tautology of Opinião; the defeated left triumphed on the stage with no criticism, and in front of a full house, as if the defeat had not been a fault.

**Zumbi**, a musical which tells the story of slave escape and rebellion, is a good example. Since they were neither singers nor dancers, the actors had to develop dance and song which would be within the layman's compass, but which would also be graceful and interesting. At the same time, they worked to prevent the solutions they found sticking only to the junction of one actor and character: each character was played by many actors, and each actor did many characters, besides which the principal character was the group. Thus, the characterizations were entirely objectified, so that they could be taken up again, so that the actor could be at one moment a character, at another one of the mass: that is, they were socialized, immutable. Gestures could be taken on and off like hats, and so could be acquired. The play was a real investigation into, and presentation of the most seductive ways of rolling around or rolling over on the floor, of lifting your arm, of getting up quickly, of calling out, of showing decisiveness, but also of the most everyday ways that the dominant classes have of lying, or ordering their employees around, or of underlining their own social importance, by a particular movement of the bum. However, at the centre of its relationship with the public - something which only made it the more successful - Zumbi repeated the tautology of Opinião; the defeated left triumphed on the stage with no criticism, and in front of a full house, as if the defeat had not been a fault.

**Opinião** had produced unanimity in the audience by means of the symbolic alliance of music and the people, against the regime. Zumbi had an analogous, though a more complex structure. The opposition between Portuguese masters and slaves, played out on stage, was paralleled by another, constantly alluded to, between the Brazilian people and the pro-imperialist dictatorship. This trick, which has its own appeal, since it allows one to allude to prohibited things in public, combined an opposition which today is merely moral - the slave question - to a political one, and, on behalf of the latter, capitalized on the relaxed enthusiasm which the former attracts. But the problem is that there was movement in both directions, and of unequal weight. At one moment, slave revolt was blamed on the dictatorship; at another, the dictatorship was re-encountered in the repression of this same revolt. In one case, the plot is an artifice so that we can talk about our own times. The necessarily oblique language has the value of its own cunning, which is a political value. Its lack of fit is simply a sensible way of replying to the reality of police repression. And the relaxed manner of the treatment of the historical material - there are huge numbers of anachronisms - is an aesthetic virtue, since it quite cheerfully points up the procedure adopted and the real topic of the drama. In the second, the struggle between slaves and Portuguese masters is, already, the struggle between the people and imperialism. As a consequence historical distinctions - which had no importance if the slave was an artifice, but do have it now, if he is an origin - are blurred, and the inevitable banality of the commonplace takes over: the rights of the oppressed, the cruelty of the oppressors; after 1964, just as in Zumbi's time (the seventeenth century), people are still searching for liberty. The vagueness of this perspective weighs on the means of expression, theatrical and linguistic, which turn out to lack political energy, orientated as they are by the immediate, humanitarian - and so non-political - reaction to suffering. Where Boal plays hide-and-seek, there is politics, where he plays politics, there is preaching. The artistic result of the first of these tendencies is good, of the second bad.

This duality found its most finished artistic expression in Arena's next work, **Tiradentes**. Theorizing about it, Boal said that the theatre should not only create enthusiasm, it should also criticize. As a consequence, he uses the concepts of distancing and identification, in the manner of Brecht and Stanislavski. The opposition between the two, which in Brechtian polemic had had a historical significance and marked the frontier between ideology and valid theatre, is reduced to a question of the suitability of two styles.
fact, in Tiradentes, the principal character - the martyr of Brazilian independence, a man of humble origins - is shown in a kind of larger-than-life naturalism, as a mythical incarnation of national liberation. In contrast, the other characters, both his companions in the conspiracy, well-situated and indecisive, and his enemies, are presented in a humorously distanced way, in the Brechtian manner. The intention is to produce a critical view of the dominant classes, and another, more enthusiastic, of the man who gives his life for the cause. However, the result is doubtful: the rich make political calculations, have a notion of their material interests, an ability to make a wealth of pithy statements, and so create good theatre; however, the martyr runs madly in pursuit of liberty, is disinterested, a real, boring idealist, whose theatrical results are much less positive. The Brechtian method, in which intelligence plays a large role, is applied to the revolutionary’s enemy; it is the revolutionary who gets the less intelligent method, the enthusiastic one. Politically, this formal impasse seems to me to correspond to an as yet incomplete stage in the critique of populism. What is the composition, in social terms and in terms of interests, of the popular movement? This is a question which populism is not good at answering. Because the composition of the masses is not homogeneous, it prefers to unite them by enthusiasm rather than separate them by a critical analysis of their interests. However, it is only if such a critique were carried through that the real themes of political theatre would emerge: the alliances and problems of organization, which remove notions like sincerity and enthusiasm from the field of bourgeois universalism. On the other hand, this is not to say that theatre will get better just by being able to deal with such matters. It may not even be possible to put them on stage. It is also true that Arena’s best moments were linked to its ideological limitations, to its unconditional fellow-feeling with its young public, whose sense of justice, and impatience, which certainly do have political value, improperly took the place of revolutionary interests, pure and simple. After all, it is a common failing in the arts: social experience pushes the artist towards more radical and just solutions, which become so to speak necessary, but good quality does not necessarily follow from it, just as merit does not always get the honour it deserves. However, not searching for such solutions leads inevitably to banality.

Also on the left, but at the opposite pole from Arena, and ambiguous to the tips of its fingers, there developed the Teatro Oficina, directed by José Celso Martinez Corrêa. If Arena had inherited from the Goulart period its formal impulse, its interest in the class struggle, in revolution, and certain
touched by socialism) took concrete form. Just by the way, this crisis has already reached a kind of stability, and has a considerable number of people quite comfortably installed within it. To return, however, with unheard-of violence - but accredited by world theatrical fashion, by the cachet of the so-called collapse of European culture, which, in the theatre, exemplifies the contradictions of imperialism - Oficina attacked the normal ideas and images of the middle class, its instincts, and its very person. The spectator in the front row was grabbed and shaken by the actors, who insist that he should 'buy!'. In the theatre aisle, a few inches from the public's nose, the actresses fight over, tear apart and eat a piece of raw liver, which symbolizes the heart of a millionaire TV singer, who has just died. The singer's virgin fiancée, having prostituted herself, is crowned queen of radio and television; and she is dressed like the Virgin, with a cloak and crown. Etc. Supported by the lighting effects, there is an air of revelation about these scenes, and the silence in the auditorium is complete. On the other hand, the elaborate bad taste, plainly intentional, and with affinities with crude caricature, of these 'terrible' creations is plain. Terrible or 'terrible'? Moral indignation or malign imitation? Imitation and indignation, taken to extremes, turn into each other, a twist which has great theatrical effect, in which a political position is summed up and exposed to view with great artistic power. The audience, for its part, is shocked three, four or five times by this manoeuvre, and then is simply bedazzled, for it had not expected so much virtuosity where it had thought there was a crisis.

This game, in which the last word always belongs to the stage, this running around inside a circle of indefensible positions, is perhaps the most important experience which Oficina has given us. In various ways, it has been repeated, and it ought to be analysed. In the examples I have given, two elements of different artistic logic and scope are combined. Thematically, they are images of a deliberately shocking naturalism, satirical and moralistic: all there is in the world is money and sex, that's that. They are absolute, and are a repetition of the action on stage. It starts a kind of competition, a spiral of toughness in the face of endlessly repeated shocks, in which any political and liberating intention that the shocks may have had is lost or turned upside down. The situations do not have intrinsic worth of their own, but work as part of a general trial of strength, whose ideal lies in an indefinite capacity to de-identify oneself and identify with the collective aggressor. This is perhaps what is really happening rather than the overcoming of prejudices. By its content, this action is extremely demoralizing; but since we are in the theatre, it is also an image, and that is where its critical power derives from.

What is presented, criticized and played out here is the cynicism of bourgeois culture faced with its own image. Its formal basis, here, is the systematization of shock, which is no longer a device and has become a principle of construction in its own right. But, in spite of and because of its predatory intent, systematized shock has essential links with the established order in the public's mind, and that is precisely its paradox as a form of art. It has no language of its own, it has to borrow it from its victim, whose stupidity is the explosive charge it operates with. As a form, in this case, shock responds to the desperate necessity for action, for direct action on the public; it is a kind of cultural gunshot. As a consequence, its problems lie in the realm of psychological manipulation - just as in advertising, communication is sought for by tickling our unconscious motives - and these are problems which are not in essence artistic. If you want to shock, you don't speak to the passing breeze - yet every artist has to speak to that breeze to some little extent. And if you want to act politically, you don't...
want to shock ... To sum it up, the barriers between the stage and the audience have come down, but the resultant traffic is only one-way. This inequality, which is a betrayal that has more or less been consented to, no longer corresponds to any absolute theatrical or cultural values, nor, on the other hand, to a political relationship, properly so-called. Encamped in the wasteland of present-day bourgeois ideology, the Oficina invents and explores games which suit the terrain itself, making the nihilistic, post-1964 space inhabitable, disgusting and funny. How can one say then that this theatre carries any weight on the left? The 'hooray-pessimism' of the Weimar Republic, 'jucheppessimismus', which, while it was burying liberalism, was probably the forerunner of fascism and laid the ground for it is well known. Nowadays, given the world context, perhaps the situation is inverted. At least amongst intellectuals, the blackened earth of liberalism seems to produce either nothing at all or leftist vegetation. The Oficina was certainly part of this scorched-earth policy.

Taken as a whole, the cultural movement of these years is a kind of late flowering, the fruit of two decades of democratization, which has come to maturity now, right in the middle of a dictatorship, when the social conditions for it no longer exist, and now coinciding with the first attempts at an armed struggle in the country. The right has taken on the inglorious task of cutting its head off: its best singers and composers have been imprisoned and are now in exile, Brazilian directors are now filming in Europe and Africa, university teachers and scientists are leaving, if not going to jail. But on the left the situation is complicated too, because although it may be in the nature of culture to contest the use of power, it has no means of taking power itself. What use is ideological hegemony, if it not translated into immediate physical force? - even more so now, when the repression which has hit the militants is so extremely violent. If we add the very widespread dissemination of the ideology of decisive, warlike action, which began with the guerrilla warfare in Bolivia, one can understand that the status of those who sit at their desks should be on the low side. Subjected to pressure from right and left, the intelligentsia is entering a moment of acute crisis. The favourite theme of the political films and novels of the period is, precisely, the conversion of the intellectual to militancy. If his own activity, as it has been defined historically in Brazil, is no longer possible, what is left to him but to go over to directly political struggle?

In the months that have passed between the writing of the first lines of this panorama and its conclusion, the purges have continued in the universities, and prior censorship of books has been brought in, to prevent pornography. The first publication to fit in with this definition was the last one in which, even though in a selective, doubtful way, the critical spirit in the country could show itself in public: the weekly Pasquim. In other words, culture's nationwide, political diffusion, which is a great part of its importance, must give way to other objects and aims. As a consequence you can hear it said that the Universities are finished, cinema and theatre too, that teachers have resigned en masse, etc. These expressions, which are a witness of the personal dignity of those who use them, nevertheless contain a factual error: the said institutions continue, though in a very controlled state. What is more, it is not very probable that the government will manage substantially to transform them. What has happened every time the police pressure has been relaxed, from 1964 to now, has been a fantastic wave of popular dissatisfaction; silenced by force, the country is the same, where Goulart left it, more susceptible to agitation than ever. The same endurance is also perhaps true in the realm of culture, where it is difficult to change basic motives. In the short term, police repression can do nothing but paralyse, for there is no hope of fabricating a new past from one day to the next.

What chance do the military have of making their position ideologically active? The pro-American group, who are in power, none; subordination does not inspire one to song, and even if they are managing to produce a temporary solution in the economy, it is at the price of not transforming the country socially; in these conditions, of widespread, visible poverty, the ideology of consumerism will always be a mocking insult. The unknown lies with the nationalist military, who to stand up to the United States would have to carry out some reform which would give them popular support, as in Peru. That's the way the Communist Party is placing its bets. But on the other hand, the Peruvian military don't seem too keen on mass movements ... However, there is a simpler cultural presence, which has a more immediate ideological effect - physical presence itself. It is perhaps an important social fact that the military are entering civilian life en masse, occupying posts in public and private administration. In the provinces they are also beginning to enter university teaching, in technical disciplines. This diffuse presence of the representatives of order alters the ordinary climate.

The group, with General Emilio Garrastazu Médici as their presidential candidate, who took power at the end of 1968.
of thinking. Where before the intellectual conversed and thought for years, without ever having to confront authority, which only very rarely made him responsible for his opinions, and only then because of any effects they might have had, now it is probable that one of his colleagues may be a soldier. In the long term, this situation is bound to carry the problems of social life inside the Armed Forces. In the immediate present, however, it brings their authority into everyday affairs. In these circumstances, a fraction of the intelligentsia opposed to dictatorship, to imperialism and to capitalism is going to dedicate itself to revolution, and the rest, without changing their views, will keep their mouths shut, work and fight in a restricted area for better days. Naturally there are defections, as in April 1964, when the theoretical thrust of the coup made a large number of theoretical Marxists convert to structuralism.

An interesting case of an artistic commitment to the dictatorship is that of Nelson Rodrigues, a dramatist with a high reputation. Since the middle of 1968 this writer has been publishing a daily column in two important newspapers in São Paulo and Rio, in which he attacks the advanced section of the clergy, the student movement and the left-wing intelligentsia. It’s worth mentioning him, for, since he can write well and has a certain moral daring, he pays fully and explicitly – abjectly – the price which capitalism demands these days of its lackeys. When he began the series, it is true that it produced a certain expectation in town: what disgusting rubbish would Nelson Rodrigues have invented this afternoon? Mainly, he resorts to a stylized form of calumny. For example, he goes at midnight to a plot of waste ground, there to meet a goat and a leftist priest, who there reveals the true, shameful reasons for his participation in politics; and he tells him too that Dom Helder Camara can hardly bear to put up with the unattainable authority of Christ. In another article, he says that a well-known Catholic opponent of the dictatorship can’t take his shoe off. Why? because his cloven hoof would show. Etc. The vulgarly offensive aim of the story is not hidden: on the contrary, that’s where the comedy of this expedient lies. However, if it is turned into a method and always turned against the same adversaries – whom the police are also attacking – these openly malevolent and lying fantasies stop being a joke, and carry through a kind of liquidation,

or suicide of literature: since no one believes in the reasoning of the right, even when they are on its side, there’s no need to argue and convince. There is a certain formal fitness, even a sociological truth in this misuse of literary talent: it represents, in a somewhat lively fashion, the atmosphere of ‘anything goes’ into which bourgeois order in Brazil has entered.

All through this chapter, we have been speaking of Brazilian culture. However, this culture only reaches less than fifty thousand people with any regularity and in any breadth, in a country of ninety million. Certainly, it cannot be blamed for imperialism and the class society. Still, since it is an exclusive language, it is also true that, at least from this point of view, it does contribute to the consolidation of privilege. For historical reasons, which we have tried to sketch out, it got to the stage of reflecting the situation of those it excludes, and took their side. It became an abscess within the dominant classes. Of course, its audacity was founded on its impunity. However, that audacity did exist, which, converging with populist movements at one moment, and with popular resistance to the dictatorship at another, formed a new conception of the country. Now, when the bourgeois state – which has not even managed to reduce illiteracy, has never organized minimally decent schools, has not made general access to culture possible, and has prevented contact between different sectors of the population – when this state abolishes the very civil liberties which are the vital element in its culture, this culture sees its hope in the forces which are trying to destroy the state. As a result, cultural production undergoes exposure to the infra-red rays of the class struggle, with results that are by no means flattering. Culture is the natural ally of revolution, but this revolution will not be made for its sake, much less for that of the intellectuals. It is carried through, primarily, to expropriate the means of production and guarantee work and a decent means of survival for the millions and millions of people who live in acute poverty. What interest could the revolution have in left-wing intellectuals, who were elite anti-capitalists much more than they were socialists proper? They will have to transform themselves, reformulate their arguments, which however had made them allies of the revolution. History is not a benevolent old lady. A traditional figure in Brazilian literature in this century has been the ‘fazendeiro do ar’ [farmer of the air]:17 the man who comes from the rural propertied classes to the city, where, in prose and verse, he remembers, analyses and criticizes the contact with the earth, with the family, with tradition and with the people which the plantation had allowed him to have. It is a literature of rural decadence. In Quarup, the recent novel which

1Dom Helder Camara, the well-known left-wing Archbishop of Recife, who was one of the few people within Brazil who openly protested against the regime after the ‘coup within a coup’ of 1968.
is most ideologically representative for the intellectual left, the road points in the other direction: an intellectual, in this case a priest, travels round the country in a geographical and social sense, rejects his profession and social position, in the search for the people, whose struggle he will join - a certain literary wisdom comes in here - in a chapter after the last one in the book.

Notes

1. Animalia, by G. Guarnieri.

2. For a historical summary of the origins of the 1964 crisis, see R.M. Marini, ‘Contradições no Brasil contemporâneo’, in Revista Teoria e Prática, No. 3 (São Paulo 1968). On the limitations of the national bourgeoisie and on the limitations of the power of populism, see, respectively, articles by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Francisco Welfort in Les Temps Modernes, October 1967.

3. In cases in which the ‘antiquated’ element is extremely recent and international – the neo-fossil habits of the so-called consumer society – tropicalism simply coincides with forms of pop.


5. The idea and the vocabulary here are taken from Walter Benjamin’s study of German baroque drama, The Origin of German Tragic Drama (Verso, London 1977), in which he sets out a theory concerning allegory.

6. Some of the representatives of this line are, in music, Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso in theatre, José Celso Martinez Correia, with O rei da vela and Roda viva; in the cinema there are elements of tropicalism in Macunaíma, by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, Ot horrendos [The Heirs], by Carlos Diegues, Brazil ano 2000 [Brazil year 2000], and Terra em transe [Land in Anguish] and Antônio dos Mortes [lit. António of the Deaths], by Glauber Rocha.


8. Preface to Tiradentes. The play is by Gianfrancesco Guarnieri and Augusto Boal. For a discussion of this theory see Anatol Rosenfeld, ‘Herois e Coringas’ [Heroes and Jokers], in Teoria e Prática, No. 2.

9. This argument is developed by Adorno, in his essay on the values of modern music, when he compares Schönberg and Webern in Klängefiguren, Suhrkamp Verlag.

10. In an interview translated in Parthons, No. 47 (Paris, Maspero), José Celso explains: ‘In the end, it is a relation of conflict, a conflict between the actors and the public…. The play attacks him [the spectator] intellectually, formally, sexually, politically. That is, it calls the spectator a cretin, it accuses him of being repressed and reactionary. And we ourselves are in the same soup’ (p. 75). ‘If we take this public as a whole, the only way of forcing it to undergo a real political process lies in the destruction of its defence mechanisms, all its Manichean and historicist self-justifications (even when they are based on Gramsci, Lukács, and others). We have to put him in his place, to reduce him to zero. The public represents a more or less privileged sector of this country, the sector which benefits, albeit in a mediocre way, from all the lack of history and all the stagnation of this sleeping giant that is Brazil. Today, the theatre needs to demystify, to put this public into its original state, face to face with its enormous poverty, the poverty of a small privilege obtained in exchange for so many concessions, so much opportunism, so many castrations, so many repressions, in exchange for the real poverty of a vast number of people. What matters is to place this public in a position of total nakedness, defenceless, and to incite it to take the initiative, to the creation of a new, united way forward, having nothing to do with all the familiar, opportunistic ways (whether they are called Marxist or not). The political efficacy which can be expected of the theatre with regard to this sector (the petty-bourgeoisie) can only lie in its ability to help people to understand the need for individual initiative, the initiative which will lead everyone to throw his own stone at the absurdity which is Brazil’. ‘As far as this public, which is not going to take action as a class is concerned, the political efficacy of a play is measured less by any given sociological criteria than by its level of aggression. In Brazil, nothing is accomplished by freedom, and the blame for this is not only to be laid at the door of censorship.’

11. Pessach: a trostesia [Pessach: the crossing], a novel by Carlos Heitor Cony (Civilização Brasileira: Rio de Janeiro); Quarup [Quarup] a novel by Antônio Callado (Civilização Brasileira: Rio de Janeiro); Terra em Transe, a film by Glauber Rocha; O desafio [The Challenge], a film by Paulo César Saraceni. It is interesting to note that the conversion plot turns out to be more politically and artistically convincing when its centre is not the intellectual, but the soldier and the peasant, as in Os fazis [The Guns], by Rui Guerra, Deus e o diabo na terra do sol [Black God, White Devil!] by Glauber Rocha or Vidas secas [Barren Lives] by Nelson Pereira dos Santos. In these latter cases, the illusion, disproportionate nature of the moral crises is either objectified or disappears, which prevents the plot getting caught up in less essential matters.

12. Pessach was not closed down. The mistake is left uncorrected, as a homage to the numerous false alarms which threatened daily life at this time.