

CROSSROADS

An interdisciplinary journal for the study
of history, philosophy, religion and classics

SPECIAL ISSUE - LUIZ COSTA LIMA REJOINDER

VOLUME IV ISSUE II 2010

ISSN: 1833-878X

Pages 120-122

Luiz Costa Lima

A Somewhat Idiosyncratic Afterword

A SOMEWHAT IDIOSYNCRATIC AFTERWORD

It would be expected that this afterword would constitute a sort of polite remark about the texts assembled above. As a matter of fact, this was my first intention. Almost immediately, however, I made up my mind to prefer another way. And this for two reasons: (a) to write on the previous dozen essays would imply focusing on stand out passages, single reflections or whole essays, so establishing an unpleasant hierarchy among them; (b) it would mean to lose a rare chance to think about what was done in these two special issues of *Crossroads*. What was done? Its editorial board decided to publish a special issue on a certain number of English translations of texts written by a certain literary theoretician and, in continuation, to keep another issue for commentaries on that previous selection. Apparently, nothing is surprising in the decision. On the contrary, at the beginning of the second millennium C. E., it could be a very normal decision: is it not true that in the 60s and 70s of last century literary theory had known a deep and disturbing development, which reverberated at most in anthropology and historiography? Yes, one must agree, it is true. We must, however, not forget that this boundless transformation happened in some European countries, at most Germany and France, spreading out almost immediately through some American universities. From then on, to talk about movements as *Rezeptionsästhetik* in Germany, about structuralism and/or deconstruction in France, about names like Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauß, Rainer Warning, Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, Julia Kristeva or about philosophers who were closely associated with the transformation of the old conception of literature and criticism (Hans Blumenberg, Odo Marquard, Manfred Frank, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Louis Marin, etc, etc) would be as much judicious as usual. But this was not the way that *Crossroads* had taken. Instead of a European or an American theoretician it had chosen a Brazilian one. A Brazilian?! Up to now, Brazil is commonly known as an exporting country of raw materials (some decades ago, from latex to make rubber and coffee, more recently, from cereals and crude oil or, in human terms, of travesties and football players). Against the grain, *Crossroads* discovered someone in the *terra ignota* whose intellectual work seemed to deserve to be presented to the Australian reader or, more extensively, to the reader of the English language.

Since I am that one who was taken out of his tropical cave, I guess I have the duty to explain to the probably surprised reader what intellectually characterizes this unknown part of the world. My purpose is not to hint that Western Europe and U.S. are unfair by ignoring us. One must agree that not only economic and social but also cultural priorities go on belonging to the 'first world'. It is possible, however, that our different position in physical space motivates a different interpretation of sociocultural world phenomena. Notwithstanding this can be true also about economic and social aspects, I will be silent on them, since my expertise concerns only to a narrow area of the cultural field: the area of literary studies. Speaking in more correct terms: I will be talking only about my own singular experience. So, it is from this perspective that I will put in relief the great questions that have absorbed my mind. They are the questions of mimesis, of control of the imagination and, more recently, the unfolding of the question of fiction. Surely, it would be impossible to give a sufficient analysis of each one. Instead, let me try to say something that sounds effective in few words.

As to mimesis, my feeling is that to maintain a ban that comes from Romanticism – with some few but unacceptable exceptions (Adorno, on one hand, Lukács, on another) – helps to increase the critical deadlock in which modern art, at most painting, is submerged in our days. What I am proposing is not to return (!) either to the old Aristotelian conception, or to the Renaissance *imitatio*, but to analyse mimesis' components, stressing what establishes the autonomy of its products and, from the other hand, its articulation with reality. (I like to repeat with Odo Marquard: 'If in a work of art – as think the followers of the realistic trend – everything was part of reality, it would be reality and not a work of art; and, if in art, as think the creative illusionists, nothing would be part of reality, there would be nothing and, so, neither art' (*Aesthetica und Anaesthetica*, 1989).

As to the control of the imagination, it seems strange to me the position that experts on painting and literature undertake on this phenomenon. Although it is difficult to conceive that someone denies the pressure exercised by agents of social institutions (critics, professors, museum curators, etc) on works of art, trying to remove from them any serious objection against social established values; although it is hard to suppose that someone could be so naïve to the point of believing control is restricted to totalitarian regimes, the question itself is never systematically present either in criticism or in art theory. One has the feeling that, for the experts, the question of the control of the imagination must be the concern exclusively of sociological analysis. This would be acceptable if the mentioned control had only a sociopolitical dimension, but, as I conceived it, it has a double dimension: surely, it has a sociological face, but at the same time, it owns also an aesthetic dimension. Following this conception, the mechanism of control is wider and deeper than the evidence of censorship. As a matter of justice, I must take into account that the intuition of the phenomenon appears first in Lukács – i.e., in someone with which I have no manifest affinities. When he was a young essayist, in the preface of his history of the development of modern drama, written originally in Hungarian and published in 1912, Lukács declared:

‘The social element in literature is form’. As long as form is not only an aesthetic phenomenon but a socio-aesthetic compact, it is easy to understand that form is also submitted to social control.

At last, a few words on fiction. It is true that the regrettable Wolfgang Iser had accomplished a remarkable reflection on prose fiction. His work, however, has to be enlarged as much on the relations between the fictional principle and the poetic practice as about what I would call external fictions, i.e., “as if” propositions socially considered as factual truths – as often is shown in juridical matters.

In conclusion: since *Crossroads* visualized an aspect of the dark side of the moon, I mean what is being thought in some place of our despised hemisphere, let me say something about what it means to live intellectually there: it means to know beforehand that your work is going to have no diffusion, especially if your mother tongue is not a cosmopolitan language – it is the case of Portuguese. Furthermore, it means that even in circles of local intelligentsia your reflection is received with a certain distrust, since it is not recognized as something descending from a legitimate ‘source,’ i.e., from a thinker or a movement whose headquarters are located in the first world. I make a point to state this for being sure I recognize not only my surprise but also my acknowledgement to the initiative taken by *Crossroads*.

Luiz Costa Lima
Rio de Janeiro, August, 2009