

## Introduction

### Silviano Santiago, a Voice In-Between



Among present-day Brazilian critics, Silviano Santiago occupies a unique place owing to his pioneering development of concepts that have nowadays become current coin in Brazilian and international criticism. Developed in several of his writings since the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, concepts such as the space in-between and hybridism are central for an innovating thought that managed to articulate from a Brazilian and Latin American perspective the strategic relation between notions of dependency and universality.

The differentiating feature of the role played by Santiago in the Brazilian cultural scene is his circulation within challenging theoretical spaces and distinct *loci* of enunciation. The movement among theory, fiction, criticism, and poetry also confers on his work the discursive mobility that characterizes the traveling intellectual in postmodernity. The possibility of this circulation is doubtlessly related to his professional experience, from his work as an active film critic at the Center of Cinematographic Studies in Belo Horizonte, where he did his undergraduate work at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, to his years of graduate study at the University of Paris, Sorbonne, where he wrote his dissertation on the genesis of André Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, based on an unpublished manuscript of the author he had discovered in Rio de Janeiro. While he was writing the dissertation, Santiago went to the United States to teach Brazilian and French literatures. He taught at various institutions, including the universities of New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, Texas, California, and Indiana, the University of Toronto, and the University of Paris. In 1970, he was awarded tenure at State

University of New York at Buffalo, but he decided to return to Brazil as a professor at the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. His experience during this period was decisive, for he was responsible for the introduction of poststructuralist thought into Brazil, particularly the work of Jacques Derrida, which he was one of the first to study systematically, as can be seen by the publication of *Glossário de Derrida* [Glossary for Derrida], which he edited in 1976. The publication of *Uma literatura nos trópicos: ensaios sobre dependência cultural* [A literature in the tropics: Essays on cultural dependency] (1978) opened the way for a deconstructionist reflection on Brazilian culture, which was consolidated in the 1980s with the essays collected in *Vale quanto pesa: ensaios sobre questões político-culturais* [Worth its weight: Essays on political-cultural questions] (1982) and *Nas malhas da letra* [In the meshes of the letter] (1989). He has recently edited the important collection *Intérpretes do Brasil* [Interpreters of Brazil] (2000), with eleven classical works of Brazilian culture. Also worthy of mention is Santiago's academic leadership: he has been the advisor for more than forty dissertations, a consultant to government agencies for the definition of a policy for supporting research in his field, and a professor responsible for creating various courses that proposed a reordering of the Brazilian literary canon in the light of the theories that informed his intellectual production. In this way, he has contributed decisively to the formation of generations of scholars, to the academic consolidation of literary and cultural studies in the country, and, especially, to the updating of Brazilian critical thought.

To his broad critical activity and theoretical reflection must be added Santiago's artistic production, which functions as a supplement to what was left open in these areas. Among works that include novels, short stories, and poetry are *Em liberdade* [In liberty] (1981); *Stella Manhattan* (1985, English translation by George Yudice, published under the same title by Duke University Press in 1995); *Viagem ao México* [Journey to Mexico] (1995); *Keith Jarrett no Blue Note* (1966); and *De cócoras* [On squatting] (1999).

The essays in this volume were chosen with the aim of offering an articulate vision of Santiago's critical work, from his reflections of a more inclusive character on the status of Latin American literature to those that focus on specific questions of Brazilian culture. Such questions constitute a theoretical field that defines the problematics of cultural difference from a point of view that evades the traditional studies of source and influence in comparative literature. This cultural perspective gives the essays in this volume a broader reach than that of a study of a specific, national literature.

In these terms, Santiago shows himself to be immune to evolutionist concepts and firmly opposed to ethnocentric ones. This can be seen particularly in the essay "Why and For What Purpose Does the European

Travel” and in the essay with the provocative title of “Eça, Author of *Madame Bovary*,” whose arguments are supplemented by “Latin American Discourse: The Space In-Between” and “Universality in Spite of Dependency.” In the first essay, Santiago focuses on the pedagogical and modernizing function of the European traveler in the New World. His interest in the question of travel is related to a long tradition of travelers in Brazil, who, since the colonial period, in cultural and artistic missions or in response to the expansionist interests of their countries of origin, contributed to the gradual constitution of an image of nationhood for internal and external consumption. Most of the texts by these travelers try to “impose a meaning on the Other in the very place of the Other,” as Santiago points out. In opposition to Umberto Eco’s *Travels in Hyperreality*, Santiago prefers the concept of *supplement*, a counterpart offered by the so-called New World for the constitution of a new regime of alterity. In this way, America is perceived as excess whose supplementary status defines the force-field within which both the American and European identities are configured; the latter is then displaced from its hegemonic centrality by the notion of a “happy and affirmative copy.”

Santiago had worked on these notions in his earlier essays “Latin American Discourse: The Space In-Between” and “Universality in Spite of Dependency.” In these essays, the ideological fallacy in which notions like source and influence are often clothed is dismantled, and the value of the (peripheral) copy with respect to the (hegemonic) model is recovered. Their relation comes to be seen no longer as the dead-end of dependency and the impossibility of Latin American cultural identity, but as a process of differentiated repetition in which the insertion of the native culture into the universal totality is sought. By the overturning of values such as “backwardness” and “originality,” what is affirmed is the value of the text of the colonized culture as space in-between, which retroactively affects the text of the dominant culture, thus creating the possibility for a concrete evaluation of the universality of the texts of the metropolis.

The approach to peripheral or reflexive literatures, therefore, passes through a discussion of dependency made from a comparativist perspective—as Santiago warns, by way of Antonio Candido—in characterizing the object of study of comparative literature: “The object must be double, since it is made up of literary works produced in different national contexts, which are, nevertheless, analyzed and contrasted for the purpose of both broadening the limited horizon of artistic knowledge and the critical vision of national literatures.”

It is not, of course, a question of a mechanical reduction of the text to the social process from which it originates or of ignoring this relation. It is a

question of making the two interact, holding in view the movement of the producer-subject through the corridors of a library whose books, inevitably out of place, will seem to him strange and familiar—whether because they are depositories of a “foreign sign,” or because they are the constant object of appropriation and digestion, defined by “a kind of global translation, pastiche, parody, digression,” and situated in a cultural context marked by something similar to the Freudian *Unheimliche*.

The notions of the original and the copy are seen as fundamental in this process: presuppositions such as identification, plagiarism, and transgression inherent in these notions are discussed by a return to the innovative works of Jorge Luis Borges, especially “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quijote*.” From this short story, Santiago takes the metaphors of the *visible* and *invisible* texts he uses as the operational concepts that allow for the reading of the relationship between dominant and dominated literatures. Its “originality” lies in the invisible dimension of the copy. Thus, there is an acceptance of the dominant culture as prisoner and, at the same time, an active revolt against this imprisonment. If the concept of prison form (taken by Santiago from the poetry of Robert Desnos) is seen as the initial obstacle to the sphere of effective action of the dependent production, its working-out will allow the reader to establish a dialogue with the model borrowed from the dominant culture, which in turn will reveal the difference established by the copy. From this point of view, the decolonized text of the dominant culture begins to have unforeseen richness and energy, “because it contains within itself a representation of the dominant text and a response to that representation within its very fabrication. And this is a cultural response which creates a means of gauging universality which would be as efficient as those already known and catalogued.”

The initial step in the deconstruction of the notions of original and copy is taken by Santiago in “Universality in Spite of Dependency” through the “archaeological” withdrawal of the critic to the beginnings of the formation of discursive practices among us, that is, at the moment when the impasses of the European holy wars are displaced from their context of origin to the New World. The result of this displacement is seen as an imposition of an ethnocentric cultural standard, evident, in the Brazilian case, in the catechistic work of Anchieta, which introduced the Indian into a field of struggle that was not his, requiring his introjection of a strange sociopolitical and socioeconomic context—that of the unity of the Church and of the constitution of the strong European state.

The conversion of the Indian at the end of the sixteenth century displaced him from his culture and he, divested of this true alterity and reduced to a simulacrum of the European, began to memorize and live a

European fiction. The foundation of schools in the same century would reinforce the didactic character of the colonizing process and the role of memory as its fundamental prerequisite. This is so because an alien history was narcissistically imposed as material for memorization, making uniform the different existing civilizations, westernizing the newly discovered, and strategically imposing European history as universal history. Later, the institutionalization of the dominant class as proprietor of a cultural discourse will take place, by the hierarchical suppression of native or Negro values, through the preservation of European culture as exclusive proprietor of knowledge and truth and as the culture of reference that establishes the hierarchies. In "The Rhetoric of Verisimilitude," Santiago offers an enlightening example of this dilemma, based on an analysis of Machado de Assis's *Dom Casmurro*. This essay is seminal for the development of the critical fortunes of the oeuvre of the greatest Brazilian novelist. Santiago analyzes the discourse of the narrator as spokesman for class values derived from the Brazilian rhetorical tradition and religious instruction inherited from the colonial period.

Developing further his reflection on the periods of the fashioning and consolidation of "Brazilian intelligence," Santiago focuses on the dilemma that will permeate its subsequent impasses. His decentralizing, historico-anthropological approach is not a question of abstract reason but is based on the political and cultural causes of the problem. When he uses anthropological discourse and contrasts it with historical discourse to fill certain methodological gaps of which the latter does not seem aware, he detects a possible identity for the Brazilian cultural product. This occurs precisely because he does not place at a lower level the determining factor of this equation—the position occupied by the intellectual in the peripheral cultures—which only the interaction of both discourses can situate more clearly, effectively, and adequately. The intellectual is explained and at the same time destroyed by historical discourse, in the sense that we have been living "a fiction since they made European history our history." The intellectual is recovered and constituted, though not explained, by anthropology, "since what is considered by History to be superstition constitutes the concrete reality of our past," and he ends up by being constituted as a cultural being in an ambivalent space in-between, drawn within the limits of the two disciplines.

It is from this place that Santiago speaks, and it is by taking up this position that he manages to expose the demotion of the dominated culture's product, from the initial simulacrum of the model of the metropolis, through the moment at which it begins to be questioned, to the phase of its being effectively surpassed. Exemplary, in the two latter cases, are the au-

thor's studies of the literary production of the modernists. Santiago approaches modernism as the surpassing of the model by the copy, the parodic appropriation of the discourse of the Same by the Other who subverts it. The paradigmatic example of *Macunaíma* by Mário de Andrade uncovers the new circulating space of the text-of-difference and of the clash of unequal voices that compose it: "It is in this not very pacific space in-between that the Brazilian intellectual finds today the volcanic soil where he may unrepress all the values destroyed by the culture of the conquerors . . . , that the novelist sees in the mirror not his own reflected image, but that of an anthropologist who does not need to leave his own country."

The question of the copy is not exhausted, however, in the virulent gesture of desecration, decentering, and the dismantling occasioned by parody, in the context of a country that attempts through modernization to break with the old, dominant oligarchies. After its renovation by the tropicalist movement that arose in the sixties, the parodic discourse became more commonplace, but in recent years it has lost its oppositional force and its reason for being, and has been substituted by pastiche.

More than a mere artistic technique of appropriating the discourse of the Other or a new fashion from the hegemonic centers, pastiche is taken by Santiago as an operational category which, on sharply differentiating itself from parody's firm opposition to the past, allows the understanding of the dialogue between the past and the present—without undervaluing the first term of the relation—in a space in which different and opposed elements live together, in a soil where figures that contradict each other coexist.

On the horizon opened up by this operational category, it is possible to recover, in a more adequate way and without any kind of prejudice, the reason for the permanence of the discourse of tradition in the world of certain modernist achievements. In the countercurrent of the readings centered on the idea of "the tradition of rupture" (Octavio Paz), Santiago shows how "the discourse of tradition was activated by the first (Brazilian) modernists, and right at the beginning of the movement," on the basis of the recovery of the Baroque of Minas Gerais as a mark of national identity, and in later developments such as the participation of intellectuals like Mário de Andrade and Carlos Drummond de Andrade in state projects related to the preservation of the historical patrimony of the country. In the literary aspect, Santiago emphasizes the importance of Christian discourse in the works of an important poet like Murilo Mendes as a sign of the permanence of tradition in modern Brazilian poetry.

The critical recovery of the historicity of Brazilian modernity situates the readings of Silviano Santiago within the scope of postmodern thought and creates a conceptual field that makes a more rigorous evaluation of

contemporary cultural production possible. The systematic reflection of Santiago on Brazilian literature after the military coup has filled a gap in the general picture of Brazilian criticism. He allows for a firmer grasp of the process of flux and reflux of contemporary literary production in relation to an already established tradition. In his studies on Brazilian prose of recent decades, Santiago foregrounds the “formal anarchy” that characterizes it, although he calls attention to two dominant trends that at first are defined by the camouflaged or displaced approach to the situations vetoed by the censorship and repression of the military regime. In “Repression and Censorship in the Field of the Arts during the 1970s,” Santiago discusses the type of narrative characterized by fantastic, oneiric discourse that in a disguised way radically criticizes the macrostructures of power and the authoritarian microstructures of daily control. He also focuses on the reportage-novel, which imitates journalistic language and thus dislocates to literary space the question of police violence and arbitrariness during the military dictatorship. He calls attention to the discrepancy between the reduction of the already small Brazilian literary public, provoked by the impact of repression and censorship, and the large number of politically committed works produced in the period, which have great value for postmodern Brazilian culture.

In the same way, the discussion of the relation between literature and mass culture offers the critic the opportunity to evaluate in what form the consumption of imported models (in this case the American cinema of the 1940s) reintroduces in other terms the question of the “contradiction between backwardness and modernity.” As he returns to his reflection on recent literature, but now by way of a “detour of mass culture,” Santiago foregrounds the gap between the value of the literary object and its recognition by its contemporaries. This is the starting point for his argument that literature has the ability to mobilize tradition and generate “posterior spaces” where alternative forms of understanding history are realized.

Generating these alternative forms is the role of contemporary fiction, as discussed by Santiago in “The Postmodern Narrator.” Taking up Walter Benjamin’s classic formulation on the narrator, Santiago departs from it when he proposes a new type of narrator in postmodernity. Distancing himself from experience and at the same time confusing himself with it, this narrator decenters the place of the subject of writing and history and identifies himself with the reader in the gaze they cast together on the Other. Uttered by a narrator more and more molded by the mass media, the contemporary narrative for Santiago is a testimony of the experience of the gaze in postindustrial society.

The main questions addressed in the essays of this volume converge in

the final text, “Worldly Appeal,” which discusses the politics of identity and globalization in modern Brazilian culture. Santiago concentrates on an examination of decisive moments of the constitution of the political thought of nationhood and cosmopolitanism in Brazil. Both perspectives, the national and the cosmopolitan, are emblematic of the space in-between of Brazilian culture, pulled toward the worldly appeal (Joaquim Nabuco) as well as the “localist unrepression” (Mário de Andrade). The notion of the consciousness of underdevelopment is added to this dilemma by the Marxist analysis of the historical process of the country, carried out by the writers of the 1930s and Caio Prado Jr. This notion will be paramount for the critical debate in Brazil in the following decades. As he demonstrates the unfolding of these questions up to the present time, Santiago calls attention to “the return to a new cosmopolitan realignment of the instinct of nationhood, now dealing with a globalization produced by the hegemonic force of U.S. pop culture.” In this scenario, he overcomes the pervasive dilemma of Brazilian culture by rejecting the Manichaeist opposition between the theories of national identity and those of globalization.

This deconstructive affirmation of the voice in-between is the stand that best represents Santiago’s contribution to the fashioning of a critical thought on Brazil and Latin America.

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