

Brazilian Cyberpunk and the Latin American Neobaroque

Political Critique in a Globalized World¹

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O propósito principal deste artigo é explorar como são usados três dos elementos retóricos do neobarroco latino-americano nos contos de Ivan Carlos Regina, coletados em O fruto maduro da civilização (1993). A fusão entre o neobarroco e o cyberpunk produz o “cyberbarroco,” e este texto incita o leitor a refletir sobre a globalização através de uma leitura crítica e política que tem em conta os padrões culturais e sociais. Considerando as diferenças entre o cyberpunk brasileiro e o americano, e combinando a análise literária com os estudos sociais, esta interpretação de histórias de Regina explica como os elementos do neobarroco e do cyberpunk oferecem uma visão crítica do consumo, e leva o leitor a reconsiderar as dimensões culturais dos processos econômicos e tecnológicos do mundo globalizado.

Latin American science fiction has recently received considerable critical attention from scholars working in the United States, beginning with Yolanda Molina-Gavilán's *Ciencia ficción en español: una mitología moderna ante el cambio* (2002) and *Cosmos Latinos: An Anthology of Stories from Latin America and Spain* (2003), which she edited with Andrea Bell, both of whom have been laying important groundwork for research in the field. Elizabeth Ginway's book, *Brazilian Science Fiction: Cultural Myths and Nationhood in the Land of the Future* (2004), Darrell Lockhart's *Latin American Science Fiction Writers: an A-to-Z Guide* (2004), Fernando Reati's *Postales del porvenir: la literatura de anticipación en la Argentina neoliberal* (2006), and J. Andrew Brown's *Test Tube Envy: Science and Power in Argentine Narrative*

(2005) demonstrate further pioneering work in the genre in Latin America. Substantial articles on topics such as Argentine fantasy writer Angélica Gorodischer by Luis C. Cano, Cuban cyberpunk by Juan Carlos Toledano and Brazilian cyberpunk by Elizabeth Ginway also demonstrate a growing scholarly interest in the science fiction subgenres of fantasy literature and cyberpunk in the region by major journals, to the point that *Science Fiction Studies* has dedicated an entire issue to Latin American Science Fiction with a chronology on science fiction in Latin America (1775–2005), and articles by Rachel Ferreira, Aaron Dziubinskyj, and J. Andrew Brown.

While most of these studies and articles focus on a single country or a series of authors, my interests here are cross-cultural and interdisciplinary. I analyze Brazilian cyberpunk considering its differences with American cyberpunk, and by combining literary analysis with other methods from social sciences. This will allow us to consider the main purpose of this article: to explore how three of the rhetorical elements of the Latin American neobaroque are used in Ivan Carlos Regina's short stories in the collection entitled *O fruto maduro da civilização* (1993). His experimental science fiction can be considered a type of fusion between the neobaroque and cyberpunk, producing a "cyberbaroque" text which incites the reader to reflect on globalization through a critical and political reading of cultural and social patterns. The stories analyzed in this article share an emphasis on consumption and its effects on individual and collective identities. In *O fruto maduro da civilização*, consumption is represented both as a tool for the creation of individual and collective identities, as well as for their coercive and systematic reproduction. These stories confirm what has been seen as a Brazilian cannibalization of foreign art and culture in the process of creating new national art forms involving critical assimilation (Ginway 139). It is precisely this last aspect that is emphasized in the texts by the neobaroque and cyberpunk elements, offering a critical view of one characteristic of the current global productive conditions: the overlapping of the workday and leisure time, which differentiates these stories' subjects from Latin American science fiction that deals with the dictatorial traumas and the social decay of the nineties². In this sense, Regina's stories propose a reconsideration of the social effects and cultural dimensions of the economic and technological processes known as globalization beyond its regional particularities.

In Regina's stories, the idea of consumption as an attitude that refers to an individual's identity is dismantled by portraying consumption as a tool for domination. Consumption is seen as a means for individual and collective production of identities, and their reproduction within a specific cultural and productive system. According to the traditional Marxist defini-

tion, “production, distribution, exchange, and consumption are a syllogism with all the rules: production is the universal concept; distribution and exchange are the particular terms; and consumption is the singular one which completes the idea of all as an entity” (Marx 27). It is precisely this inter-related nature of consumption, its necessity for creating a new production, what it is analyzed in this article: “. . . consumption creates the necessity for a new production cycle; therefore it becomes the production’s cause, its inner impulse . . .” (Marx 30). Although in these stories consumption involves resistance and irony, it does not have the agency that Arjun Appadurai has seen in the era of mass media (7). On the contrary, in Regina’s stories consumption creates and reproduces dominant social relations which embody processes of identification³ that function in a worldwide productive system characterized by increasingly precarious working conditions. In this sense, these stories invite the reader to revise the labels created by consumption and the accepted conception of identity as something unchangeable. Before embarking on a close reading of Regina’s texts, I wish to offer a definition of the terms and concepts that I will use as critical tools in my argument: neobaroque, cyberpunk and tupinipunk.

The Neobaroque as a Critical Tool for Understanding Brazilian Cyberpunk

The baroque is a visually and verbally elaborated aesthetic associated with the Counter-reformation and the colonial period in Latin America. In the twentieth century, the neobaroque emerged as the latest version of Latin American baroque which, according to Severo Sarduy, calls attention to the post-colonial experience of Latin America. In Sarduy’s view, the baroque attempted to oppose the balance and purity of classical style, which was grounded in the fixation of meaning and the authority of master narratives. Baroque rhetoric takes the form of a signifying chain moving in a circular motion (forward or outward), which allows new meanings to emerge from the text, free from any grounding. The metaphor leads this movement, along with the ellipsis, parable, and hyperbole, which are also present in neobaroque style. These figures of speech create a constant flow which stimulates the reader to experience a state of revision of and reflection on any fixed meaning. As Haroldo de Campos has noted, referring to the experimental literatures in “underdeveloped” countries, Brazilian baroque has been connected to the destabilizing and dehierarchizing nature of the anthropophagic movement of the twenties: “Já no Barroco se nutre uma possível ‘razão antropofágica,’ deconstrutora do logocentrismo que herdamos do Ocidente . . .” (14). In this sense, the neobaroque techniques infuse the scientific and technological elements present in Brazilian Cyberpunk with a

sense of rupture which questions their logocentric character and permeates the possibility for re-configuring discourses about representations of consumption in Latin American societies.

The neobaroque is generally associated with Cuban author José Lezama Lima, whose works from the 1960s are characterized by a sense of rupture with the master narrative that captures the postcolonial reality of Spanish America. In his works, there is an attempt to redefine the notion of cultural identity, as Irleamar Chiampi has noted: “. . . Lezama insiste en la idea de lo americano como un devenir (un ser y un no ser), en permanente mutación . . .” (26). In the neobaroque text, meaning emphasizes the intensification of the experience, which adds a change at the level of the content to the decentralizing movement of the baroque.

According to Severo Sarduy there are three mechanisms that distinguish the neobaroque from the baroque: 1) the substitution of signifiers that are not closely related in semantic terms, 2) the profusion of signifiers (and unrelated signifiers far from the starting word) that questions meaning, and 3) the condensation and joining of words to produce a third one (using phonetic games) which reinforces the perception of meaninglessness. These three elements break the denotative character of words by setting up a game of signifiers. For Sarduy, the neobaroque is the “. . . reflejo necesariamente pulverizado de un saber que ya no está apaciblemente cerrado sobre sí mismo. Arte del destronamiento y la discusión . . .” (103). The combination of these three elements of neobaroque infuses Regina's short stories with constant movement and stasis at the same time. But they are also influenced by his own experience of the postmodern world of the 1990s in Brazil, and the American cyberpunk movement of the 1980s, which we must also understand in order to appreciate his work more fully.

Cyberpunk and Postmodern Aesthetics

For many critics American cyberpunk is a movement within American science fiction that emerged during the eighties to reflect the postmodern context and effects of globalization. Inside the postmodern scene, the organizing principle of cyberpunk's aesthetics consists of a lack of certainty, or indeterminacy, so that the boundaries between elements normally experienced as opposites (natural/artificial, rational/irrational, cultural/non cultural, or original/copy) become blurred. Most critics agree that *Neuromancer* (1984), by William Gibson, is the narrative model for cyberpunk. In this work of fiction, no distinction is made between the organic and the artificial. According to Veronica Hollinger, this lack of differentiation is experienced by both the characters and the reader since “. . . the human world replicates its own mechanical systems and the border between the organic and the

artificial threatens to blur beyond recuperation . . . ” (205). Therefore, what is human and what is mechanical are not clearly differentiated since the trope of the machine consists not only of implants in the human body, but also in the amount of information individuals consume in order to survive in a postmodern era. The cultural diversity present in everyday life and in media discourses is processed by rhetoric of fragmentation, which reinforces simultaneity, multiplicity, and autonomy in contradictory forms.

Hence, there is a decentering of the body, a loss of its borders in a world in which physical elements (as implants) are combined with an overload of information and with a diverse range of social practices. In such a context, determining and defining specific borders between the marginal and the central become elusive. However, as Hollinger observes, while there is a decentering of the body, cyberpunk narrative still attempts to construct a hero. Most of the time, this hero is presented as a solitary hacker or punk who sets out like a hardboiled detective to solve mysteries on his own. In this sense, he is concerned with putting together parts of a whole in order to attain some undeniable truth within a context which is simultaneously deconstructed. He is not located in an urban space but in cyberspace, where he efficiently uses vast amounts of information to his own advantage for a bodiless experience which, as a paradox, provides him the only space to attain human transcendence. Therefore, cyberpunk deals with the current context in which technology and information have become a political, historical, cultural, and individual milieu.

Aware of the multifaceted nature of cyberpunk, Hollinger has described it according to the following characteristics: a sense of political detachment combined with apocalyptic ideas, a sense of nostalgia and subjective sensitivity, coolness and ingenuity, along with an overdetermined system of signifiers, a proliferation of irrelevant details, frivolity, and verbal overload. Hollinger ultimately finds that cyberpunk lacks the possibilities of presenting models of experience or perception other than those related to a continuous process of deconstruction. In her view “. . . cyberpunk . . . was a response to postmodern reality that could go only so far before self-deconstructing under the weight of its own deconstructive activities . . . [and this] . . . [f]orecloses any possibility of political engagement . . . ” (217). Although continuous deconstruction implies a negation which is in itself a political statement, its potential to involve the reader in a political reflection on the contradictions of globalization is reduced due to the characters’ subjective, and individualist vision and experience of the postmodern world.

In Brazilian cyberpunk, postmodern aesthetic produces a very different effect when it is combined with the perception of the effects of globalization and neo-liberal policies. In 1996, Roberto Sousa Causo rejected the notion of “cyberbaroque” to identify some of the science fiction written during the 1990s, and defined the main traits of the Brazilian cyberpunk, which he

renamed Tupinipunk, to differentiate it from American cyberpunk.⁴ Even though both American cyberpunk and Tupinipunk or Brazilian cyberpunk are responses to the effects of globalization, they differentiate themselves by the particular way in which each views, experiences, and criticizes global effects and neoliberal policies.

The first difference is that Brazilian cyberpunk is a spontaneous, not pre-defined, movement in Brazilian science fiction dating from the mid-eighties, just after the cultural and social transformation that Brazilian society experienced with the redemocratization of 1985. Brazilian science fiction embodies a reflection on the years of repression and censorship, and a narrative expression of “otherness” as well as alterity. Literary production started to deal with issues of “multiculturalism” through folkloric themes and topics as well as through other kinds of “otherness.” Even though the movement can be identified under a common aesthetic, authors themselves did not know one another, nor did they recognize themselves as belonging to a particular movement. This is the first difference with American cyberpunk, whose members have tried to differentiate themselves from each other’s tendencies in science fiction as well as in the debates about cyberpunk’s affiliations with the postmodern aesthetic.

A second difference between American cyberpunk and Brazilian cyberpunk is the way they both use technological language to present themes or topics. According to Sousa Causo:

Assim como o cyberpunk anglo-americano [tupinipunk] seria uma resposta ao globalismo e ao multiculturalismo -mas uma resposta própria de um país que vive uma situação diferenciada de desenvolvimento cultural e científico, onde a modernização ainda esbarra em elementos que remetem aos modelos de nossa colonização. E essa resposta se dá principalmente por uma recuperação da idéia do sincretismo. (5)

Causo identifies some of the rhetorical elements Tupinipunk borrows from Brazilian literary tradition, such as “modernismo antropofágico.” He visualizes elements from the cubist prose of Oswald de Andrade, with its multiplicity of voices, a utopian vision of sex as a liberating force, and to some extent as a certain primitiveness (6). As a result, Tupinipunk or Brazilian cyberpunk narrative conveys a particular treatment of certain topics presented in a different form. According to Causo, the differences between Brazilian cyberpunk and Cyberpunk are:

Tupinipunk/Brazilian Cyberpunk	Cyberpunk
Physical ambiguity and symbiosis	Implants
Referential science (only as quotations)	Hard science
Emphasized sex	Sex

Sarcasm and Satire

Fragmented prose – Multiplicity of voices

Modernity / Postmodernity

Irony

Fragmented prose

Postmodernity

At this point, it would seem that even if there are differences in narrative forms and themes, Brazilian cyberpunk would not truly criticize the post-modern context and the effects of globalization on culture and society, and would not be opposed to the lack of models indicated by Hollinger for American cyberpunk. In fact, for Causo, Tupinipunk reinforces old Brazilian cultural myths. He perceives it as a type of narrative that strengthens some of the Brazilian traditional structures instead of creating new ones. In Causo's view,

Na oposição (significando 'acomodação' de tensões, sem resolvê-las) e transformação (empregando essa palavra no lugar da desgastada 'revolução'), a maior parte do tupinipunk infelizmente ainda está do lado da conciliação, reforçando mitos antigos, ao invés de produzir novos, acomodando tensões sociais e culturais sob a forma de alegorias carnavalescas e batuques estilísticos, ao invés de investigá-las a fundo em suas presenças formadoras da realidade brasileira, e de sua interface com a realidade internacional. Em grande parte, o tupinipunk reforça modelos que se ajustam a uma prática social e política que impera aqui há tempo demais. (11)

The inclusion of media and popular elements are part of a trend in the 1980s, discussed at length by Nelson Vieira.⁵ He remarks that, "... discussions usually explain the high/low admixture as an indication of the dismantling of barriers, the self-conscious concern with alterity, and the 'hetero' proclivity rampant in postmodernist expression . . ." (110). These high and low elements refer to both the cultural system, which establishes the parameters for aesthetic quality, and the social class distinctions. As the mass media begins to enter Brazilian literary production, it provides a healthy dose of anti-elitism, and not necessarily a proliferation of meanings or informational overload as described by Hollinger. Opposing Causo's hesitation about Tupinipunk's potential to question the social reality behind multiculturalism, Vieira stresses that, "In one sense, the mixing of high and low forms becomes a vehicle for manifesting the actual diversity within Brazilian culture instead of merely acknowledging the multicultural terms. Of course, by extension, this mixing also becomes a mode for advocating politics and cultural liberation" (115). When the introduction of media elements also brings to the texts aspects related to production, labor, and consumption, Brazilian cyberpunk offers the possibility for a political reading of multiculturalism and its social and economic reality of the nineties⁶ beyond regionalities.

Regina's *O fruto maduro da civilização* (1993)

In order to revise these perceptions of Tupinipunk or Brazilian cyberpunk, I analyze Regina's short stories to demonstrate both the differences with American cyberpunk, and the political disposition. I will argue that the infusion of the neobaroque with the criticism of cultural consumption, as Regina does in his short stories, introduces a critical view of postmodernism and globalization. The stories deploy a destabilizing effect over meanings, allowing the reader to critically interpret the texts' view of postmodern conditions in the global context regardless of his or her location.

I analyze five short stories in Regina's *O fruto maduro da civilização* through the topics of self-consciousness, the tensions between modernity and postmodernism, physical ambiguity and symbiosis from the neobaroque perspective. One of the most relevant aspects in these stories is the use of language. The substitution of signifiers implies another referential context as well as their reinforcement. In the story "A derradeira publicidade do Hebe-frênico Alfredo," a glossary warns the reader about the changes in the signification system. In order to understand the story in which a first person, Alfredo, narrates his self-consciousness process, the reader must become familiar with the language used in the text. This substitution will lead the reader into a universe in which previously assumed meanings will no longer be of use. For example, the word "hebefrenia" means a kind of schizophrenia whose main characteristic is the lack of order in thought plus abnormal emotions. Symptoms could be thoughts such as: ". . . o distúrbio do pensamento, até a completa desorganização do pensamento e da palavra . . . Normalmente incidente em jovens brilhantes, com bom rendimento profissional e escolar" (13), or "Meu grande sonho foi e será ser um redator neurótico" (16).

Within the story, Alfredo's narration takes place in an office of the Mac-Canadian advertising agency. Alfredo is an "office-boy," a person in charge of transporting all kinds of documents that cannot be sent by regular mail or e-mail due to their confidentiality. However, Alfredo does not spend all of his time just doing this; he is also analyzing the company's new advertising campaign. The one he is particularly interested in is a kind of "reality show" in which an average family, the Silvas, live inside a Gessell camera, consuming everything that is advertised on TV. This campaign is designed to encourage people to consume certain products and monitor consumers' behavior. After seeing the devastating effects of consuming all that is advertised on TV, and reflecting about how ad designers increase their creativity by using drugs, he decides to kill the Silva family. At the end of the narration, he argues "Descobri que os Silva não querem mais ser Silva. São Silva porque não têm coragem de deixar de ser. Eu resolvi isto também. Matei

a família Silva . . .” (18). Recalling the final words of Marx and Engels’ *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) where the authors proclaim “. . . working men of all countries, unite” (96), Alfredo’s narration ends with his call to world consumers to unite: “Consumidores do mundo inteiro, uni-vos na morte” (18). In this last act of consumption all ends up being “consumed,” which means all consumers are dead.

Alfredo, affected by hebefrenia, describes in detail his obsession with work. Even though he uses a very specific language associated with psychology and mental illness, he doesn’t describe his own compulsion to work as an illness. In fact, through the profusion of signifiers, the story suggests the obsession for productivity as one of the postmodern personal contexts for individuals. It also shows the naturalization of the extremely deteriorated working conditions in the globalized context. The narrator describes the atmosphere at his job as

Na Mac-Canadian temos 5 redatores neuróticos, ou pseudo-neuróticos: – Roberto, neurótico fóbico – tem pavor de espaços fechados, fez a famosa propaganda do necrófilo com as batatas chip. – Armando, neurótico obsessivo – bolou a foto do close anal que vendeu dois milhões de calcinhas descartáveis. – Ester, neurótica depressiva – fez, entre outras, a propaganda da eficiência do correio baseada em Van Gogh, em que uma orelha é remetida por carta e chega ainda pingando sangue . . . E eu, Alf Car, neurótico de ansiedade, sinto-me sempre intranquilo . . . (Regina, 17).

“Office-boy,” “Mac-Canadian” are expressions resulting from the union of two worlds, and imply the relationship between the body and the work place. Productivity⁷, efficiency and success are increased by drugs, so they are the means to finally become a great editor. In the same way, engagement with the job requires that body and production space be symbiotic. This is a way to show how creativity, productivity, work, body, and mind are all simultaneously conceived and oriented towards consumption. For the “great editor,” unconnected or non productive thoughts are not a positive trait; they are symptoms of anxiety, restlessness, and despair.

Contrary to the violence of some cyberpunk heroes, Alfredo’s heroic attitude consists of becoming self-conscious about the fetishism of consumption and its effects on labour. Using the intertext of *The Communist Manifesto*, he calls consumers’ attention to the final outcome of consumption: death, the consumption of all value. In his own words, he is trying to stop the cycle of production-consumption-production by liberating consumers through a political act, and making them face their identities as producers: “Eu libertei a Mac-Canadian do jugo da responsabilidades. Matei a todos. Quero matar tantos quanto consiga, para libertar a humanidade do consumo” (18). Here what is clear is that progress and productivity lead to de-

mentia, confirming, as the glossary did at the beginning, that meaning itself has become absurd, it has lost its value, it has become void. At this point, it is possible to observe in this story those elements that Causo mentions as the characteristics which differentiate Brazilian cyberpunk from American cyberpunk. The fragmented prose which appears with references to the reality show, the referential science related to mental disorders, and the advertisement industry bring to the text a multiplicity of voices all embodied in Alfredo. But in his consciousness he transforms the anxiety provoked by this simultaneity and multiplicity into a less fragmented prose such as that of *The Communist Manifesto*. Therefore, the irony, fragmentation, and appraisal of postmodernism present in cyberpunk are counteracted by Brazilian cyberpunk's sarcasm and satire, and by its manifested tension between modernity and postmodernism.

The lack of meaning and values is part of the reflection on postmodernism that can be read in a second story: "Um homem porra-louca tempo demais." According to Matei Calinescu:

Modernity in the broadest sense, as it has asserted itself historically, is reflected in the irreconcilable opposition between the sets of values corresponding to (1) the objectified, socially measurable time of capitalist civilization (time as a more or less precious commodity, bought and sold on the market), and (2) the personal, subjective *durée*, the private time created by the unfolding of the 'self' . . . (5).

Therefore, this subjectivity opens the path for indeterminacy and the constant dissent which characterizes postmodernism. Postmodernism can be seen as a counterculture which questions the inner contradictions of modernity by bringing chaos to order (Lyotard; 1979). The conflictive duality between modernity and postmodernism is clear in this story, where the overlapping of time devoted to work and time devoted to leisure implies consumption and the confusion of public and private spaces. Consumption and an overload of information expand a sense of indeterminacy that ends up intensifying the sense of alienation. This story develops a meaningless social context in a world where differentiation and creativity do not exist. Its main character's name is a demonstration of the hybridity of this world in which the high and the low are put together: Ricardo Caos, "... nome híbrido e incomum" (23). Identity and personalization appear under Ricardo, and disorder and lack of center under Caos. He lives in a world that a third-person narrator defines as "... grande mundo, sem rima, sem poeta, sem solução" (23), an allusion to Carlos Drummond de Andrade's famous modernist poem of individual alienation, "Poema de sete faces." Like Alfredo, Ricardo attempts to fight against the social ills of his time: consumption and overload of information. But here there are no cyberpunk

heroes who solve problems through mental games in cyberspace or through the computer. Ricardo's thoughts form a "Postulado the agressão," phrases which appear in the text showing the way they appear in his mind. Hence, fragmented prose offers here another discourse in which these "agression statements" are presented in a sequence which presents a vision of world and reality. Ricardo's ideas and values come up from those predominant in his society; hence, the statements of aggression are an exaggerated reaction, an augmented mirror, which criticizes reality. Aggression is a substituted signifier which leads the reader to explore the meaning of a context that is partially described, and in which violence is not directly mentioned but suggested. For example, the first "agression statement" says "Só combatemos aquilo nos é supérfluo / Só amamos aquilo que nos falta / Para combater, é necessário primeiro que abramos mão do essencial . . ." (24). Therefore, it is a response to the inaction and timidity of Drummond's modernist poem where the poetic voice says ". . . Meu Deus, por que me abandonaste / se sabias que eu não era Deus / se sabias que eu era fraco" (3, 4).

The abundance of opposing signifiers demonstrates the contradictions in Ricardo's life. Here we find a characterization of the contradictions of modernity and postmodernism, and even the tension between them, which does not appear in the cyberpunk hero as described by Hollinger. Ricardo goes through several processes of personal transformation that are all guided by his ability to become rich, and thereby to overcome solitude. First:

. . . Através de métodos interativos a séries estocásticas em análises de percursos casuais, desenvolveu um método infalível de ganhar na bolsa de valores. O dinheiro ganho foi aplicado em negócios honestos, tais como: tráfico de drogas, telejogos, prostituição . . . assaltos, venda de hambúrgueres . . . [after his process of clearing] . . . consolidou sua fortuna com duas invenções memoráveis: uma máquina de rezar, onde através de um simples pressionar de dedos, ouvem-se vozes lamuriantes pedindo desculpas por existir, nas versões cristã, xintoísta e budista. Isto atingiu a mais da metade da população. A outra metade, como sabemos, são todos leitores de ficção científica. Para estes aficionados inventou um software interativo . . . (Regina, 25)

The profusion of signifiers ironically portrays postmodernism as a realm where everything is valid, even the most contradictory activities. This last idea can be observed in the next passage "Foi logo e instantaneamente reconhecido como o guru dos macrobióticos, em palestra que discorreu sobre 'O relativismo estrutural monofásico das interações simples do yin' na praça Princesa Isabel" (26). All the contradictions are solved in the achievement of success. Ricardo becomes a cultural icon and in his last "agression statement" it is clear that what is important, after having tried everything, is to

live. He makes a call to “VOCE” (27) in which personalization is recognized as an individual political call out to the reader.

In “Um homem porra-louca tempo demais” physical ambiguity and symbiosis are less important themes than the link between modern and postmodern conditions for life and identity. In “Acúmulo de Skinnot em Megamerc,” on the other hand, physical ambiguity is the most important topic. In this story the Skinnots are people who are not able to differentiate and understand the illusory character of consumption. The relationship between body and information is clearly presented through the amount of signifiers that show the link between information overload and consumption. As seen in the first story, the ultimate outcome of consumption is death. In the second story, the idea is that, despite many contradictions, it is good to call attention to the fact that people should live out their own differences, and not just conform to the demands of consumption. In both cases, the overload of information is a call to action. In this text, the overload is manifested through the continuous mentioning of brands. Scientific and advertising languages are part of a discourse that penetrates bodies, eliminating the uniqueness within them. The Skinnots clearly represent the symbiosis between human beings and products of consumption, which has a different quality than the implants presented in cyberpunk.

The title of the story has an evident message: the amount of people losing their identity through consumption. And here the other word saturated with meaning is “Megamerc,” which refers to the omnipresent shopping center. Under the illusion that everyone has fulfilled desires, and feeling the compulsive necessity of renewing their desires, people lose their identity, and this is symbolized through the loss of the skin. The Skinnots are thieves at the shopping center, where they are captured by the security cameras and officers. They are fat, and are in poor physical conditions; they are also albinos and have a somewhat human appearance. They have no expression in their eyes, and behave with fear and lack of comprehension. A third-person narrator explains that Skinnots have never seen actual sunlight, and since they have always eaten junk food and drank sodas, they never developed intellectual skills, and usually die of cancer. While the Skinnots are being searched for, the third-person narrator tells of all the commercial strategies designed to stimulate consumption, which will produce more skinnots. Again, substitution and a profusion of signifiers are used to intensify the message “. . . Ali ele elabora inovações, como servir chips imediatamente antes dos balcões de colas e triplicar suas vendas. Numa visão cubista e hedonista, ele manipula as secções do supermercado de maneira a, dentro de uma visão puramente artística, extorquir os resquícios de timidez dos seus consumidores implacáveis” (34).

Therefore, the final message in this story is that the overload of information, and its consumption, is as important as the final consumption of products. The idea of people as both consumers and producers appears from the first page “. . . Jerfer é pago para resolver problemas e propor soluções. Administra 600 caixas, 600 empacotadores, 30 gerentes, 100 sinalizadores, 50 guardas de trânsito, 30 operadoras de public-address, 50 rotuladores, 50 operadoras de computador, carregadores . . .” (33). And the purpose of the text was to establish a parallel between an implicit “we” and the Skinnot, since the narrator advises that “. . . aproximando seus cérebros vazios, suas mãos se entrelaçam e choram baixinho, olhando para seu passado e prevendo seu futuro, que é igual ao nosso” (36). Their fate is our own, if we do not think about consumerism critically.

Opposed to the constant deconstruction and modification of the body which is typical in Cyberpunk, the Skinnots have a modified body that is not possible to repair. In the stories “Quando Murgau A.M.A. Murgau ou Odes murgaunas ou Balada das pulgas plutonianas ou O 1ro Murgau. Murgau. Murgau. Sexual,” and “O Sr. Info e Dona Ninfo,” physical ambiguity and symbiosis show the idea of recovering the body through union. It is possible to be a differentiated thing as well as part of many others at the same time. For example, in the first story, “Seu esquema reprodutivo é simples, com três sexos diferentes que se escalam, sendo dois tipos ecretores, “A” e “M”, respectivamente de sêmen e óvulos maduros, que são depositados no tipo ‘C’ durante o intercuro sexual . . .” (37). The profusion of names also express this “. . . e que Mugau, e Murgau y Murgau, e Murgau y Murgau y Murgau são um só Murgau . . .” (39). This questions the idea of prevailing models of masculine and feminine identity, as well as reinforces the body over the overload of information. For example “Louco, cego, preso de um indescritível furor sexual arrastei Utuna à perdição, e olvidando Ayalala, tomamos-te num amplexo carnal, curto circuitando nossos canais e fomos uma tríade que dirão alguns, perversa, e outros, improdutiva . . .” (39). Physical contact interrupts the flow of information, so bodies seem to be non-productive. And this seems to be the message of “O Sr. Info e Dona Ninfo,” in which information is a male, productive territory while body and desire is a female, unproductive domain. Mr. Info has a lot of information, including all that is related to Mrs. Ninfo, and organizes it in a productive form by rationally using time, intellectual faculties, more information, and hermeneutics. Perhaps this story demonstrates that there is no organizing center or principle in postmodernism, only the interplay among all of these.

Through the analysis of these stories it has been demonstrated that, using neobaroque style, Tupinipunk can offer a reflection on the postmodern context, the effects of globalization, and also traditional gender roles. Tupini-

punk or Brazilian cyberbaroque presents a critique of consumer and spectacle society that is not visible in cyberpunk, and its treatment of the tension between modernity and postmodernism goes beyond any particular culture by referring to the social aspects of consumption and production. However, in these stories, it is not assumed that to go back to tradition would solve the current uncertainty and restlessness. On the contrary, the stories focus on the present, offering a critique of current reality. They move forward to the future only to review the present once again. Instead of assuring readers by reaffirming the conventional values of the social representations, the stories make the reader feel uncomfortable with the lack of certainty. The reading of Regina's stories in *O fruto maduro da civilização* implies a construction of textual meaning by means of the flow of words, fragments of discourses, brand names which induce a reflection on the "comfort zones" created by consumption. Contrary to Causo's view that Tupinipunk fails to offer cultural alternatives, it is clear that Regina's stories make an attempt to exhibit not only the deconstruction of modern reality but also to produce a critical reflection on the postmodernist world. The lack of meaning that flows through the texts in their use of language, brands, media and advertising discourse, inversion and fragmentation leads us to reflect about the nature of reality in consumer society of the global economy.

Contesting Hollinger's view that cyberpunk lacks political engagement, Regina's questioning of language and body is a first step towards the destabilization of current discourses, mostly those associated with the pleasures of consumption and fixed identities. On the other hand Vieira's positive view of mass culture and diversity in Brazilian social reality can be questioned from the perspective of these stories. They foreground societies in which difference is also part of the world of consumption. As in the story of Ricardo Caos, cultural icons of identity and wealth do not escape the culture industry. Brazilian cyberpunk, as a postmodern discourse, uses neobaroque rhetoric to question the possibilities of unity from the center of language: meaning as a social process. Brazilian cyberpunk does not offer a simplistic critique based on the exhibitionism or technological wonder but recognizes the emptiness of words in order to critique consumerism, and reveal social relations of inequality and domination. It calls for the individual to search for small centers of meaning within the lived experience of being immersed in specific productive social relationships and to deny these as eternal, unchangeable truths. In this sense Brazilian cyberpunk can offer political engagement of critical thought and the possibility of action in a globalized world of consumption. The neobaroque aesthetic present in the Brazilian cyberpunk or Tupinipunk offers the possibility for questioning and reflecting on the borderline between high and low culture. It does not merely offer a description of the current state of things, but allows language

and discourse to free themselves from these categories within the text itself. This can be a starting point for thinking about literature as a tool to read diversity, multiculturalism and intertextuality politically in the globalized context.

Notes

1. I want to thank Dr. Elizabeth Ginway for her comments on this article, and for her encouraging support, and Dr. Susan Hennesy and Hal Clarendon for their help with the English editing.

2. *Guerrilleros: Una salida al mar para Bolivia*, by Rubén Mira, was first published in 1993 by the group Tantalia, a project of young Argentine writers which included Carlos Gamerro, Martín Kohan and Aníbal Jarkowski, among others. Due to the presence of body implants in characters, this text was presented in its edition of 2007 as cyberpunk, but it is still a reflection on the effects of the neoliberal policies in Argentina from the perspective of a new version of Che Guevara's experience in Bolivia.

3. Étienne Balibar has noted that, "There is no given identity; there is only identification . . ." (67). Individuals experience identity as a process which involves two extremes, " . . . in the oscillation [. . .] between the two equally impossible extremes of absolutely simple identity and the infinite dispersal of identities across multiple social relationships . . ." (67). Regina's stories address this problem by reflecting on what is beyond individual and collective identities created by consumption.

4. The term is controversial among Brazilian fans and critics who perceive it as denigrating, since tupiniquim (a term associated with the native or indigenous population) is often used for inferior products or experiences of Brazil as a Third World country.

5. Since the media takes elements from many different sources, in order to appeal to its wide audience, it is able to incorporate such varied elements ranging from popular and folkloric culture to that of elite high culture world, enriching literary production. Vieira says that, " . . . the institutionalization of the high is increasingly being challenged by incursions of the low . . ." (110). He has a positive view of multiculturalism exhibited in the latest Brazilian narrative.

6. During the period under Collor de Mello " . . . Brazil embarked on a new economic course, sloughing off decades of state-led growth and protectionism" (Vanden and Prevost, 492). However, changes that allowed Brazil to get in to the global and neoliberal world market were accompanied by high rates of corruption, culminating in Collor's impeachment, which was " . . . the first time in Latin American history that a president had been legally removed from office through constitutional processes . . ." (493).

7. According to the Internacional Labour Organization, "From the mid seventies, the measure of productivity does not follow a quantitative parameter -amount produced per unit of time-, but qualitative norms: it is the product of the combina-

tion of workers' aptitudes and potential during the working process" (Catalano 97). Therefore, a worker's attitude must be one of "responsible autonomy," which is defined by the international organization as "... the decision-making capacity, based on rational choices and their agreement to the company's objectives ... [which] requires a worker's strong engagement with the productive process, his identification with the company's goals, and his holistic comprehension of his environment ... " (Catalano 98).

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