



AT THE BORDER OF EUROPE FOR A TRANSATLANTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE EURO-AMERICAN SPACE

Ettore Finazzi-Agrò¹

Being asked once more to write about what I understand by “European Studies” in a country like Brazil, and how I see the role and the function of an Institute for European Studies in the Brazilian context, right from the start, I find myself in a difficult situation: although an European, yet for many years visiting the large South American nation, its centres of cultural elaboration and diffusion and being, more generally, a modest specialist in that culture in all of its manifestations (the artistic and literary as well as the ones related to the political and social performance, in its evolutive and/or problematic aspects). This embarrassment, this difficulty in taking a side on an issue concerning my double “citizenship” (the documental and the intellectual one) could be overcome only through a historical re-evaluation of the image built by Europe about Brazil, and vice-versa, of how Brazilians have reacted toward the Europeans and the culture they have imposed to the New World, either by violence or by simple induction.

The reflection on the relations between Brazil and Europe and how to construct a shared knowledge may actually bring along the obligation of walking on roads that have been defined for centuries, through already walked tracks, where it would be useless or even arrogant to march again. For this reason I think that, instead of generically retelling or evaluating the history of relations between the

¹ *SAPIENZA UNIVERSIDADE DE ROMA

large South American country and the Old Continent, it would be better to consider how the two sociocultural dimensions (taking – which already represents an arbitrary choice, although justified by the existence of a Community and/or of a community space – Europe as a whole) have faced the issue of the exchanges and the reciprocal interferences both in the ideological and in the imaginary scopes along the centuries, pointing to some significant figures that swing, as we shall see, between experience and fantasy, between reality and its metaphorical transposition. Likewise, in this case we could talk about a presumptuous gesture, or, more precisely, of an act of Hybris, wanting to surpass the frontiers of a necessarily limited and partial knowledge, since the reflection on the relations between the two sides of the Atlantic has been largely explored for a long time, both from the European and (maybe mainly) from the Brazilian side.

For this reason, I will try to face the issue from the “sneaking” or “marginal” point of view, starting precisely from the Margin, the Frontier issue, or better, from the ambivalence between *limes* (limit) and *limen* (threshold). The initial citation, in this sense, could be – and forcefully should really be – the famous incipit of *Raízes do Brasil*:

The attempt to implement the European Culture in a vast territory, endowed with natural conditions, if not adverse, largely strange to its millenary tradition, the dominating factor in the origins of the Brazilian Society, and the richest in consequences. Bringing from distant countries our ways of living, our institutions, our ideas, and with the pride of keeping all of this in frequently unfavorable and hostile environment, we are still like outcasts in our land.²

As it is known, the first chapter of the book by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda is called “European Frontiers”: published for the first time in 1936 and many times reviewed and corrected by the author until the final edition (the fifth, published in 1969), the text suffered changes throughout the years, yet from its first press release, kept this essential idea of Brazil as Europe’s border (and vice-versa) and consequently, the situation of a permanent and irredeemable banishment of the Brazilian society and culture.

This perennially exiled identity which the great historian and critic from Sao Paulo attributes to the people and to Brazilian institutions, defines, in this optic,

2 S. Buarque de Holanda, *Raízes do Brasil*. 12ª ed., Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1978, p. 3.

an aporia, that is, in its etymological sense, outlines a “finite” place with no exit. For this, it is enough to consider the paradox of a possessive adjective (our) applied to a land that is qualified as exile: the space, finally, where we dwell does not belong to us, however our space, the space where we dwell and which we may come to own, only dominate in isolation. Inside and through this logic incoherence and this declared aporia, in my point of view, there is a suspicion that may open a new path in the apparent absence of roads or exits.

The direction is precisely the one we can define as the option for the Neutral: instance on which the European thought has leaned with great interest, discovering in it a possibility of suspension of any historicist or ontological dialectic, in the supposition of a third place which, according to the etymology, is neither one thing or another and, at the same time, is both one thing and the other.³ In fact, the Latin word *neuter* which, in its turn, is formed by joining *nec* and *uter*, signifying the mutual exclusion of opposites, actually indicates, in its ambivalence, a dimension that is compromising and of commitment, where the opposites are combined in a third and hypothetical instance. *Uter*, in fact, can mean “one of the two”, “one or the other”, or “either one of the two”: the association with the negative prefix *nec* gives thus a virtual sense that arises inside the contradiction, indicating a situation that swings between “neither one or the other” and “be it one or the other”.

This precarious territory opening up inside every opposition is, in my view, the one in which it would be possible to find “our exile”, that is, the originality of a culture and of a social structure which are neither American or European, being both at the same time. Moreover, this “third” statute of the Brazilian identity has been confirmed over the centuries, through figures that are halfway between “seizing” and “alienation”, combining themselves paradoxically (i.e., out of any *doxa*), with some sensation of constant estrangement. In fact, to cite another famous intellectual of the last century, like Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, the Brazilian identity statute would always be fundamentally linked to this difficult task of elaborating an impossible authenticity.

3 Among the several researchers who analyzed this instance, it is reasonable at least to point out to the real obsession for the Neutral, present in many parts of Roland Barthes' theoretical work. Here I will just mention his essay (actually, the transcription of an inaugural lecture which he gave at *College de France*) called “Le désir du neutre (Introduction au cours de 1978 et première « figure »)” and published in *La règle du jeu*, 2e année (août 1991), n° 3, pp. 36-60.

We are neither European or North American, but deprived of an original culture, nothing is foreign to us, since everything is. The painful construction of our own selves is developed in the dialectic between not being and being another.⁴

Perhaps the “figure” that more sharply expresses this strange and impassable dialectic that swings between the not-being and the being-another is the identification of Brazil as Island.

An inaugural figure, since it soon appears in Caminha’s Letter (Carta do achamento) through which Pero Vaz de Caminha, the scribe aboard Cabral’s fleet, announced to king dom Manuel the discovery of a new land which, after being several times mentioned as such (and “land”, in the Portuguese of that time, was considered as almost a synonym of “continent”), and his document dates like this: “From your island of Vera Cruz, today, Friday, the first of May, 1500”.⁵ Why offer the sovereign an island, after having suggested, throughout the text, the suspicion of having acquired a new land to his domains (never before was the word island mentioned)? After having presented and described to him a huge and unpredicted space? Was it a late caution of a literate man not accustomed to navigations, to cartographic measurements, of course,⁶ but also – and perhaps, mainly – a debt paid, forcefully, to a very old cultural tradition that pictured (and pre-figured) only islands in what the map-makers and the Arab travelers already nicknamed “Sea of Darkness”, which they dotted with portentous islands and populated with *mirabilia*.

Therefore, this “found” island ends up by being at the crossroads of contradictions, enrolled in a fundamentally suspended and uninterrupted temporality, which is simultaneously European and foreign to it.⁷ Neutral time again, marked by the absence of a succession of seasons – according to the formula dictated many centuries before by Isidoro of Sevilla about the Earthly Paradise: “*Non ibi*

4 Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, *Cinema, Trajetória no Subdesenvolvimento*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2001, p. 77.

5 Cited from ed. Diplomática, org. por Anna Unali, *La “Carta do achamento” di Pero Vaz de Caminha*. Milan: Cisalpino-Goliardica, 1984, p. 163.

6 The scribe, in effect, before his description, declares their incompetence regarding the coordinates of the land: “about the navigating procedure and directions I will not give account here to Your Highness, because I shall not know how to do it and the pilots must take such care” (ed. cit., p. 82).

7 “The land itself has good airs, as cool and temperate as in Entre Doiro and Minho, because in the time now we found they were like the airs there.” (ed. cit., p. 116). It would be good to observe the anacoluthon between the “time now” (is, the present when the letter is written) and the past (found) relative to the European climate.

frigus, non aestus".⁸ This climate neutralization, which is found in almost all accounts by the explorers and which outlines, after all, a cultural "common place" in which to understand and to contain the Difference, relating it to an Identity, whether past or future and, in any case, timeless in relation to the present.⁹ Deviation or distance, which inevitably overflows from the temporal plane, in the spatial one, producing an undefined (and indefinable) separation between the new land and any possible *here*, its displacement to a *before* or an *after* that seem irreducible to any *now*: so, for example, the island of Vera Cruz is located, in Caminha's Letter, at an exaggerated distance (660 or 670 leagues from Cape Verde Islands)¹⁰ and, in fact, immeasurable compared to what is Known. A paradisaical place preserved by the remoteness, made intangible for being out of any known route...

This long excursus on the definition of the "found" land as island could stay linked to beliefs and to the real ignorance of the explorers in relation to the existence of the American continent, if it were not that the image (or the figure) of a Brazil-island is presented again when the European culture has already acquired and accepted the idea that the lands discovered by Columbus and visited, after him, by many other European navigators belong to a new and unexpected continent. In fact, precisely at the time when the Portuguese started to get acquainted with the new region; precisely when the exploration of the country's interior begins, paradoxically, the conviction that the land found (or discovered) by Cabral is really an immense island becomes stronger. This island would be limited in the North by the Amazon and in the South and the Plata river in the South. Both rivers, in effect, would have their origin from a large interior lake, sometimes called Lake of Gold or Golden Pond (a name clearly

8 See Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *Visão do Paraíso*. 3a ed., São Paulo: Cia. Editora Nacional, 1977, pp. XX-XXI, pp. 162-67 e *passim*. Also accord. to Arturo Graf, *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del Medio Evo*. Roma: Plurima, 1989 [1a ed.: Torino 1892], vol. I, pp. 30-32.

9 "This paradisaical world, whether christian or pagan, would invariably remain in the past, or in the future, or in the dream, alienated and adverse to current life" (S. Buarque de Holanda, *op. cit.*, p. 147). Before (or inside) the image of the Golden Age or of the edenic image – anyway, before or inside the dream of a previous condition and, in any case, unrecoverable – we find, indeed, the utopia of a Paradise to be built, of a "joyful" future, not possible to locate in relation to the present: let us think (in a religious scope, but this time, unorthodox) of the interpretation of the New World as "promised land" that impelled the Jews and the Reformed Christians to the Americas. Neither is possible to omit the role of the millenarianism, of a joachimite root, infiltrating in the fold of the orthodox, catholic view, of a land not yet evangelized: as we know, this messianic component has deeply marked popular religion in Brazil, always following the country's history.

10 Cf. *Carta*, ed. cit., p. 61. See, in relation to this, the considerations of Jaime Cortesão in his *História dos Descobrimientos Portugueses*. 2a ed., Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 1979, vol. II, pp. 193-98.

linked to the Eldorado myth), sometimes called, in the language, as *Eupana* ou *Paraupava*. So, due to the frightening perception of a space with no frontiers, the answer comes again from the logic of desire, closing an unlimited land, for this reason also ineffable, inside certain and thinkable limits: since only what can be cut and delimited in a Place can “make sense” (be it really a sense of Difference, in view of the “compensatory” character of this Brasil-Island), while the infinite Space has no voice and no name, not getting to be identified or dominated.

Something that cannot escape from the eyes of contemporary historians anyway, is the political meaning of this cartographic myth, which “gave the Portuguese empire in South America a geographic basis and suited the purposes of the Portuguese imperialism against its Spanish neighbor”.¹¹ Stated in other words, if the land found by Cabral was an island, it belonged, by law and completely to the King of Portugal, who was allowed, therefore, to infringe and trespass the limits between the Spanish and the Portuguese domains established by the Treaty of Tordesillas. However, the situation was not as simple as it seemed, since (from what is known) the first one to diffuse – by the middle of the XVIth Century – the legend of a “Brasil-Island” was João Afonso,¹² pilot and mapmaker, who was certainly from a Portuguese origin, but who lived in France and worked for a long time at the service of the king of France (even adopting, in the documents of the time, the “French” names of Jean Alphonse Saintongeois or Jean Fontenau).¹³ What could be the real interest of a naturalized French citizen in diffusing, in his country of choice, a functional geographic myth to the Lusitanian expansionism – and this in a time when France was making projects, or was already supporting its “Antarctic” adventure? Besides this (as reminds Oliveira Marques himself), the legend of “Brasil-Island” is not accepted between the second half of the XVIth Century and the first half of the next century, just by the Iberian cartography, but neither by the Italian or the Dutch – and the Netherlands, especially, were also making efforts, during the same period (precisely between 1598 and 1654), to grab large chunks of Brazilian territory from the Portuguese domain.

11 A. H. de Oliveira Marques, *História de Portugal*. 4a ed., Lisboa: Palas Editores, 1974, vol. I, p. 481.

12 Cf. Jaime Cortesão, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 256-58.

13 Cf. Luís de Matos, *Les Portugais en France au XVIe siècle*. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1952, pp. 22-77, and Luís de Albuquerque, *As Navegações e a sua Projecção na Ciência e na Cultura*. Lisboa: Gradiva, 1987, pp. 37-55.

All of this seems to confirm that, more than just for a political choice, the image of a Brazil-Island should respond to a requirement of a different and more complex nature. To better illustrate this mechanism (which is ideological, but also psychological, similar to the other one – entirely mental, of course, but still with effects in a material sphere – of the Freudian *Verleugnung* which is, at the same time, acceptance and refusal of an experience), it will be perhaps enough to remember what happens in Europe, about at the time of the geographic discoveries, in relation to madness. Also in this case, actually, we see the discovery of a “territory” that was unthought-of up to that moment; that is, we come across the incipient awareness of a dimension of existence, completely external from the known, normal, habitual dimension. Also in this case, to ride the indecision sea between acceptance and refusal, the XVIth Century man prepares a Ship where the crazy is “the Passenger par excellence, i.e., the prisoner of Passage”, since he “has no truth and no home land, except in this infertile extension between two lands that cannot belong to him”.¹⁴ Suspended by this ambiguous condition, the *déraison* will also not take long to find its residence in an insular figure – first identified in the *Fortunate Islands*, where, in fact, the Madness praised by Erasmus of Rotterdam is born; which is then circumscribed in that symbolic (and real) island, which will become the madhouse, the mental hospice: the place of detention for the Non-Sense, in which the Sense mirrors in its “being-another”.¹⁵

As a space of neutralization of differences, the Island becomes thus the expected and feared, where Alterity can be experienced without getting lost in it; the place of Passage allowing to reduce in a suspended time, which is inside and out of the temporal course, the infinite perspective of a *terra incognita*. A sort of miniaturization, of a summary – though in a space that is not necessarily reduced, as in the case of the Brazil-Island imagined during the XVIth Century – allowing to combine the contradictions inside a figure that not only does not cancel them, instead, on the contrary, it exalts them, without changing the

14 This is a translated citation of the Italian version of Michel Foucault's classic work, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (in Italian: *Storia della follia*. 2nd ed., Milan: Rizzoli, 1980, p. 19). The implicit textual reference in these considerations is obviously, *Das Narrenschiff* by Sebastian Brant (published in 1494).

15 I owe this “insular” interpretation of the mental institution – which is present throughout the work of Foucault – to the important study by Michel Serres, “Géométrie de l'incommunicable: la Folie”, in *Hermès I. La Communication*. 2a ed., Paris: Minuit, 1984, pp. 167-90.

sense of proportions, without untying, mainly, the “*verrous de sûreté*” that link the Identical to its Other.

Between these two extreme connotations Brazil will keep on being isolated: as a laboratory of an experienced difference without ever violating – except marginally – the limits of the known; without ever exceeding a mythical and ideological possession which, paradoxically, allows getting to know diversity through the acknowledgement, i.e., through analogies with stereotypes sometimes lost among the folds (and daydreams) of a millenary cultural discourse. Likewise, we cannot be astonished by the fact that the name of the new found island ends up by being almost the fruit of a commitment between the reality and the legend, between what is seen and what is known, between experience and desire.

In effect, if it is true that the denomination of the new land, although among a thousand doubts, ended up by sticking to the name of a tree (“brazilwood”), so copious and so copiously exported by the Portuguese. It is not less true that in this debt paid to experience (and especially to the mercantile experience) a mythical name keeps on echoing, which points out to another experience: that one – fantastic, in this case, literary – lived by Saint Brendan in his High Middle Age Navigation.¹⁶ Since there is really an Atlantic island in the corpus of this very ancient tradition, which is also present in the medieval maps and stubbornly searched by the navigators during the XVth Century, called *Bressail* or, even more clearly, *Brazil*, *Braçir* or *Braçile*, toponym that in the Celtic language should mean “fortunate island”.¹⁷ How not to be surprised in view of this nominal analogy to make a parallel between the island found by Cabral and the island lost by a

16 For a detailed analysis of *Navegação* and a complete information on the extensive literature on this text, I refer to the PhD thesis of Renata Anna Bartoli, called *La “Navigatio Sancti Brendani” e la sua fortuna nella cultura romanza dell’età di mezzo*. Padova: Dott. di ricerca in Filologia Romanza e Italiana, February 1990.

17 From the large bibliography related to this made up island, it will be enough to mention the volume by José Osvaldo de Meira Penna, *Utopia Brasileira*. Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, 1988, pp. 21-26. In the proper historical-geographical sphere, it would be good to look up the classical study by Capistrano de Abreu, *O Descobrimento do Brasil pelos Portugueses*. Rio de Janeiro: Laemmert & C., 1900, pp. 47-50, and the most recent contribution of Luís de Albuquerque, *Introdução à História dos Descobrimentos Portugueses*, cit., pp. 154-57. In particular, on page 167 of the latest book there is a table that compares with the various names given to the Azores in documents of the XIVth and XVth centuries: after what we said up to here, it is not surprising to find, not only Brazil (or “Paradise island”), but also “Island of Hell”, among the toponyms. This is another signal of the inevitable compensation between good and evil, of the necessary closeness between edenic and infernal places, inside the “moralized geography” in force during the Middle Ages. An excellent reminder of the symbolic value of the “island” is found, finally, in the important book by Antônio Carlos Diegues, *Ilhas e Mares: simbolismo e imaginário*. São Paulo: Hucitec, 1998.

fabulous saint? By the way, an island drifting between the North and the South in the medieval representations of the Atlantic Sea and which seems to stay without really being that land formerly called, religiously, Vera Cruz or Santa Cruz, and then popularly renamed as “of the Parrots” or “of the cannibals”, until reaching the form that has remained up to now.

If the nominal baptism of the new world is equivalent – as it was extensively stressed¹⁸ – to taking possession of the land, in the case of Brazil this will happen only in the sphere of a commitment that neutralizes reality through fantasy, or this one through that one, reaching an ambivalent denomination that accepts the possession of the truth observed in the dispossession of an imagined truth, proposed by a very old tradition. Inscribed in this ambiguity, interposed between what is new and what is known, between water and land, between hell and paradise, Brazil – maybe more than other American places – for a long time will keep this mixed character, will always remain (also because of its linguistics boundaries) a continent with insular traits, and/or an island which is a continent.

Actually, the insular figure – besides being, obviously, an archetype that has always been visited by literature – seems to be particularly present in the American self-consciousness until today. Regarding the Hispanic America, it will be enough just to mention the “founder” and at the same time symbolic image of the island of Macondo in *Cien años de soledad* by Gabriel García Márquez.¹⁹ However, in my view, it is mainly in Brazil that it becomes a geographical and literary obsession, starting with *Ilha da Maré* by Botelho de Oliveira, up to *Passeios na ilha* by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, of course going through “Fundação da Ilha” in *Invenção de Orfeu* by Jorge de Lima.

This is certainly not the place to carry on a detailed analysis of the frequency and the metamorphoses of this figure in the Brazilian literature: it is enough, here, to stress its relevance in the interpretation of the Brazilian cultural identity – also based on the linguistic “insularity” of the Nation, inside the huge South American territory, i.e., within the hispanophone “ocean”. Regarding other images that, almost obsessively, evoke the figure of the Island, perhaps it is possible to refer

18 See, for example, Tzvetan Todorov, *La conquista dell'America*. Torino: Einaudi, 1984, pp. 32-34.

19 I refer – for other examples and for a study about “La isla como paradigma utópico” – for the important volume by Fernando Ainsa, *Identidad cultural de Iberoamérica en su narrativa*. Madrid: Gredos, 1986, pp. 269-71, 299-302, 462-65 and *passim*.

to various texts, like the view of Brazil as a “huge primitive island”, given to us by Sílvia Romero,²⁰ or like the image of an “island-backlands” – complementary, in a certain sense, to the image of a “sea-backlands” – that we find in the initial pages of *Os Sertões*.²¹ Finally, I still wish to remind the title of a lecture by Gilberto Freyre (given in 1940), precisely about the formation of Brazil and about the history of the Brazilian mentality(ies): “Continent and Island”.²²

In the image which the European culture built of *Terra brasilis* and in the self-image that Brazilian intellectuals cultivated later, over the centuries, the idea of a separate territory, which was neither European or American and both at the same time, is considerably relevant, also neutralizing the attempts to find, in the natural and anthropic specificity, an access road to an autonomous identity. In the study of relations between Brazil and Europe we should, in this sense, always take into account this feeling of insecurity, keeping, in a permanent state of dubiousness, the evaluation of the historical weight of one and of the other – or of one to the other, or of one over the other, or one beside the other, in a continuous process of construction and failure of the frontiers. That is why, in the definition of what we can impute to the Old Continent influence and what seems specific of the new American condition, we may never attain a decision, which means, in the etymological sense of the word, a cut separating the European from the autochthonous.

What if, along the XIXth Century, what prevails in the Brazilian culture and society – as magnificently stressed by Flora Süssekind – is the “sensation of not being completely”, that is, the impression of not really belonging to the place where one lives, leading to – as another great theorist like Roberto Schwarz – the

20 S. Romero – J. Ribeiro, *Compêndio de História da Literatura Brasileira* (commemorative edition), org. by L.A. Barreto. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 2001, p. 25: “In the huge south-american pear; as some people say, in the enormous ham of South America, as Brazil could be called, occupying more than a third of it, is a special region, distinguished by more than one singularity. Having in general the same configuration of this entire part of the continent, it is, in its central area, the oldest region of the New World and perhaps, of the Earth. It was a huge primitive island that came to be connected to the most recent highlands of Andes and of the Guianas, by specific geological movements and more directly by the action of the two considerable rivers that circulate it – the Amazon and the Paraguay-Paraná-Plata”.

21 Cf. Euclides da Cunha, *Os Sertões*, ed. org. por L. Bernucci. 2a ed., São Paulo: Ateliê Editorial, 2002, p. 91: “Por mais inexperto que seja o observador (...) tem a impressão persistente de calcar o fundo recém sublevado de um mar extinto, tendo ainda estereotipada naquelas camadas rígidas a agitação das ondas e das voragens...”.

22 This text has been re-published in G. F., *Problemas Brasileiros de Antropologia*. 4a ed., Rio de Janeiro-Brasília: José Olympio-INL, 1973, pp. 141-72.

adoption of “out of place ideas”, in other words, echoing fashions and manners of action originally from Europe, this employment of ideologies and foreign experiences will, in fact, continue in the next century. As an example, let us just think about the ironic accusation to Oswald de Andrade – one of the most important exponents of the Modernism in Sao Paulo in 1922 – produced by an intellectual and friend like Paulo Prado, reporting that his protégé and traveling companion had discovered with amazement his own land “from atop the atelier of Place de Clichy – the centre of the world”. A form of acknowledgement in the estrangement, an exiled look, could be said, which is typical of many Latin American intellectuals and who anticipates, in fact, in a speculate and inverted way, a formulation of a Brazil as an exile, as a historical margin of Europe, which we will find a little later in the *incipit* of the founding work (addressing, in fact, the historical and cultural *Raízes* (roots of the nation) by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, which was mentioned in the beginning.

This Brazil, then, which is aligned in the horizon of European desires and ends up by finding itself in those desires (but also in the refusals and resentments) on which the Old World has built and nourished, cannot be considered just as a strange and far away territory, a tropical Eden (or hell) where the exotic imaginary still reigns, but must be seen in its nature of the border of an Europe which is recognized in it and differs from it, always oscillating in this contradiction which François Rabelais had already indicated, in his ironic definition of world, in the mouth of Pantagruel: the upside down world and, at the same time, a place where everything is “comme chez nous”.²³ Therefore, to suppose that the European culture must still be known and disclosed in the vast Latin American nation is a bet, which in my opinion, is wrong: since, if Brazil – despite the current multilateralism and globalization – keeps being, the border of Europe, from another aspect, Europe has been always presented as the border of Brazil.

In this sense, the probably happiest and brightest formula to understand the history of the relations between *here* and *there*, between the two sides of the Atlantic, is the one found by Oswald de Andrade himself in his *Manifesto antropófago* (published in 1928). Starting with the certification that the Brazilian culture has been fed, since its beginning, from the uses and costumes that came

23 About this episode of *Gargantua et Pantagruel* (livro II, cap. 32), I limit myself to refer to the magnificent essay by Erich Auerbach included in his *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (1ª ed.: 1946).

from Europe, the great writer from Sao Paulo even formulates the hypothesis that only through the cannibalization, swallowing and “intestinal” assimilation of this Other it will be possible to produce an autonomous Brazilian identity. Strange autonomy, in fact, based on dependence, acceptance and “digestion” of the European culture, but that produces, through a metabolic process, once more, a situation of neutralization of differences, leading to a historic cultural “third” dimension: neither American or European, and both at the same time.

In view of this compromising situation, it is thus better, a lot better, to keep on studying the past and the present, in search of the intercultural and transcultural plot, which has resulted in the isolation example, in the neutral peculiarity of a dimension suspended between two frontiers. And once again, the literature can help us understand the paradox of this ambivalence in which the Brazilian culture is found in its intricate relationship with heterogeneous instances. In fact, in the story “The third river bank”, published by João Guimarães Rosa in 1962 in his *Primeiras estórias*, he presents a perfect metaphor of this suspension, of this neutralization of differences about which I have spoken up to now. The choice of a father who, at a certain point of his life, leaves everything to go live, until he dies, in a canoe in the middle of a river, can be interpreted as a perfect representation, although fictional, of the “third” character of a Country which does not stay *before* or *beyond*, but in an ideal threshold that it verifies and makes real only with its stubborn “being between”. In the words of who tells the story, the son of man who chose to live (without really staying, moving downstream, upstream, to the middle, from one bank to another) in this medium:

Our father has not come back. He had not gone anywhere. He just listened to the invention of staying in those spaces of the river, from half to half, always in the canoe, so as not to jump from it, never more. (...) What did not exist, happened.²⁴

The “little canoe of nothing” in which he decides to live up to the end, this amazing and aporetic figure that came out of the feather and ink of the great writer from Minas, it can, in this sense, be assimilated to that imaginary and moving island that is aligned in the horizon of the European navigators, or better, it can be a miniature *Narrenschiff* of which – the one who seems to be crazy, without

24 João Guimarães Rosa, *Primeiras estórias*. 12a ed., Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1981, p. 28.

really being²⁵ – it is, again, “the Passenger by excellence, i.e., the prisoner of the Passage”. In this sense, notice the double negative employed by Rosa (“he had not gone nowhere”) suggesting a static and anti-dialectic movement and, above all, for the assumption of a medium and mediator place, for the definition of a virtual border that, although “does not exist”, “happens”.

Thus, based on this precarious but concrete limen, which never becomes a limes, we should, in my opinion, keep looking at the relationship between Brazil and Europe, excluding the possibility of imposing the diffusion and the study of the European culture in an area that is and has always been inhabited by this culture, which is and has always been its frontier, but trying to place us in a transatlantic perspective or, in a third and hypothetical margin – consisting of just an uncompleted displacement which does not lead anywhere or which only leads to that long imagined island, finding its essence, its “happening”, precisely in its not-being and in its “not existing”. Only in this intermedium, in this neutral and suspended space it is possible, in my view, to read and interpret the implicit differences in the shared identity, and vice-versa, that is, it is possible to see that double identity, Euro-Brazilian, which is folded inside the differences.

The history – both the real one, based on facts, and the one that runs through the paths of the imaginary – should, at last, advise us about the impossibility to separate the two sides of the Atlantic, considering Europe and Brazil as two distinct cultural (id)entities, therefore proposing, the implementation of an institute of European studies on the Brazilian ground. The history, at last, should indicate us that the issue that really should be delimited and studied is the one that graphically and materially proposes that hyphen interposed between Brazil and Europe: an impassable threshold that has always been, nevertheless, crossed and “inhabited” since the beginning, a porous border on which is laid the meaning of a relationship that must inevitably be thought of together.

25 “Am I crazy? No. In our house, the word crazy was not spoken, it was never spoken again, during all these years, nobody was condemned as crazy. Nobody is crazy. Or else, everyone” (*op. cit.*, p. 31).