

LITERATURA LITERATURE

CULTURITIBA

Paulo Leminski

Translated by

Michael Rubin

Gustavo Dalaqua

Culturally, Curitiba belies economic determinism.

Judging by its standard of living and the resources of a great part of its population, Curitiba should have an intellectual and artistic, cultural and creative life, much more intense than the vegetative one it has.

A middle class city.

Average purchasing power.

Plenty of universities and schools.

Curitiba has many advantages over most other state capitals.

But what about our part in books, films, plays, social movements, shows, LPs publications?

Here, economic determinism doesn't work.

Favorable infrastructure does not automatically generate a rich and productive superstructure.

Other ingredients are necessary for the soup.

What ingredients would these be?

Many, it's a no-brainer.

One, however, we note is missing; the layer of humus underlying popular culture. Curitiba has reached a high degree of middle-class commonness. Compared to other cities, the distances between the social classes here are not as steep nor as far.

Curitiba is a socially democratic city. Like Sweden. Belgium. Austria.

Here, one does not see, as distinctive as in other capitals, wealth and opulence insulting extreme poverty.

We don't see a palace with three Rolls-Royces next to a slum where children die of hunger.

A large and powerful middle class has access to universities. They can buy books and magazines. Learn languages. Buy LPs. Subscribe to publications. Take courses. Purchase ink, paper, film . . .

The Darwinian intensity of the struggle for survival that currently mediocrizes Rio and São Paulo has not yet arrived here.

This means: there is an excess of free time that *Cariocas* and *Paulistas* no longer have.

We have everything. What is missing for us to reach, culturally, the high level of comfort the city provides?

It seems that culture has a more complex metabolism and biorhythm than mechanistic economic determinism can imagine.

In order for our hundred flowers to bloom, we are lacking the substratum of popular culture lying beneath the surface.

Without this popular cultural humus, with its forms, traditions and inherited symbolic habits, the middle class, alone, does not seem able to generate its own culture, autonomous and with the power to distinguish itself with works of novelty, intensity or beauty, capable of rivalling similar ones from other places with a greater popular presence.

The middle class lacks verticality. Depth in time. Roots.

Modern Paraná begins with immigrants. Pragmatic people. Lost in their work. Calvinist. Lovers of order. Zealous for property.

People focused on practical results. Material. Palpable.

The happiness of the middle class is here: consumption.

Access to industrialized civilizations' goods, the great existential adventure of the middle class.

Perhaps one only produces, culturally, in response to great need.

When the stomach growls of hunger, we become extraordinarily inventive.

No bright ideas after a bountiful barbecue. Except for sleep or that other thing also done in bed.

The experience of every song or singer: you play and sing better when hungry. Brecht demanded from his actors, after a rehearsal:

– Tomorrow, at the same time, but you have to fast!

Our cultural dearth is just the other side of our abundance of material wealth.

Isn't the newest thing that appeared in Europe, in the field of literature, the boom of Latin American literature?

Peru. Mexico.

Colombia.

Nicaragua. Guatemala.

Argentina. Ecuador.

Cuba.

The creative originality of monstrously miserable Latin America begins swiftly to replace the old-fashioned mediocrity of sated Europe.

Africa is on the rise.

And Asia fights for her turn.

Curitiba, meanwhile, is Europe. The white race. Consuming.

It's only natural that those who are so absorbed in consuming do not feel the need to produce.

Cut off from its European origins, geographically distant from the Indian-Afro-Luso Brazil farther north, the Curitiba middle-class is left with the role of applauding *Baiano* musicians. To read *Mineiro* short story writers/novelists. To watch American or Italian films. To admire *Paulista* or *Carioca* artists. And, of course, to consume television from the Rio-São Paulo axis.

Without roots and without want, what to do?

In: LEMISNKI, Paulo. *Ensaíos e anseios crípticos*. Campinas, SP: Editora da Unicamp, 2011. p. 163-6.

Michael Rubin

Bachelor's Degree in English from Rutgers University

Gustavo Dalaqua

Doctoral Candidate in the Philosophy Department at the University of São Paulo