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*Montaigne and the Consecration of the Individual (1996)*

*The Limits of Voice* (1996) examines the relationship between the consecration of the individual in the wake of the collapse of the Christian order (as seen in Montaigne), the pressure for a concept of Law, defined, in its primacy, as a principle of regulation (as seen in Kant and Schlegel), and the rise of literature as an autonomous discursive mode; and in this, how the problem of the control of the imaginary accompanies this ascent of literature, and how the question of the fictional arrived at, is also examined: and is at once dismantled by Kafka.

The current excerpt comes from the final pages of the first chapter of that book. It is significant because it contextualises the early development of the essay form in Montaigne – in relation to the consecration of the individual – as prefiguring the rise of literature; it is also, in this connection, the first instance of the use of the term ‘criticity’ in Costa Lima’s work. In a translator’s note, Paulo Henrique Britto describes this term:

“Criticity” is a neologism – as in the Portuguese *criticidade* in the original – coined in order to distinguish the act of questioning from both the act of judging (“critique”) and the activity of by means of which the act of judging is effected (“criticism”). The questioning, non-normative function is certainly already present in Kantian criticism, but the distinction was never captured by a contrasting pair of words, in English or Portuguese.

An excerpt from *Limits of Voice, Montaigne, Schlegel, Kafka* by Luiz Costa Lima, p56-68 © 1996 Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr. University. Translated by Paulo Henrique Britto. All rights reserved. No further use, distribution or reproduction is allowed without the prior written permission of the publisher. Originally published in Portuguese as *Limites da voz* by Editora Rocco Ltda., Rio de Janeiro © 1993 by Luiz Costa Lima.

## MONTAIGNE AND THE CONSECRATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL TOWARDS AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE ESSAY

According to Montaigne, the essay is to be distinguished from the letter because it is not addressed to a specific person: "For to traffic with the wind, as some others have done, and to forge vain names to direct my letters to, in a serious subject, I could never do but in a dream, being a sworn enemy to all falsification."<sup>i</sup> La Boétie's death had deprived him of his one interlocutor; his disdain for the culture of glory further distanced him from letter writing; the need to write, however, made him search for a form.<sup>ii</sup> But what was he to write? and to whom? and what for? What he wanted to express was no doctrine; his addressee was anonymous, if at all existent; his object could only be to bear witness. All of this pointed to autobiography. However, a number of reasons converged in the refusal to write autobiography.

Montaigne says he does not trust himself enough—"I, who am monarch of the matter whereof I treat, and who am accountable to none, do not, nevertheless, always believe myself"<sup>iii</sup>; he abhors the flowery language of letter writers, and to it he opposes his own preference: "I have naturally a humorous and familiar [*privé*] style"<sup>iv</sup>; above all, he knows he has not achieved great feats that merit perpetuation: "I can give no account of my life by my actions; fortune has placed them too low: I must do it by my fancies."<sup>v</sup> But by differentiating the three motives we in a way deform them, for we seem to suggest they are factors that are added one to the other, whereas they are in fact aspects of the same figure. Their unity is acknowledged in the passage that immediately follows the one we have just quoted:

And yet I have seen a gentleman who only communicated his life by the workings of his belly: you might see in his house a show of a row of basins of seven or eight days' excrements; that was all his study, all his discourse; all other talk stunk in his nostrils. Here, but not so nauseous, are the excrements of an old mind, sometimes thick, sometimes thin, and always indigested.<sup>vi</sup>

This passage seems to express the modesty of someone who felt unworthy to speak of himself; after mentioning the ironical case of the gentleman whose sole interest was excrement, he speaks of his own style, "humorous and familiar," as equally unworthy. What, after all, does Montaigne believe in if not in himself? But what sort of belief is this if, in order to justify his lack of self-confidence, he says he has to watch out for "*boutades de mon esprit*" (sallies of my own mind) and "*certaines finesses verbales*" (certain verbal quibbles), at which he shakes his ears?<sup>vii</sup>

Pascal, who admired Montaigne without following him, answered this question: "It is in this doubt that doubts itself, and in this ignorance that ignores itself, which he calls his master form, that the essence of his opinion is to be found."<sup>viii</sup> The confidence was not in himself, but in his language: the *Essays* "carry sometimes besides what I apply them to, the seed of a more rich and bolder matter."<sup>ix</sup> Language is not outside the self, as an object of dignity and mastery, nor is it indistinguishable from the subject's means of expression. The former negation implies that Montaigne could not put aside his aristocratic ethos and see himself as a professional writer; the latter implies that his form could not be the same as Rousseau's, whose *Confessions* are the very epitome of the genre.

In the search for a determination of the form to be used in the *Essays*, all the questions raised in the book come together. Form is the magnet that will make its existence possible. In Montaigne the question concerning this form does not proceed from a previously given answer. It seems plausible, in fact, that he found it only as he wrote his work. This is the conclusion one arrives at after comparing Montaigne's observations on the portrait and those on the essay.

The original model for the portrait had been the work of the painter. We have seen that the ideal portrait was a correlate of the ideal self, understood as the requirement to capture what it ought to be, once the soul were freed of the misfortunes caused by fantasy; we also saw that the failure of one was caused by the same element that had blocked the actualization of the other: the "motion" that unceasingly affects the creature and makes it different from what it was the moment before. Now, the essay has no need for such a planned circuit—or rather, it is born of the ruins of the portrait, ruins that accumulate simultaneously with the effort to achieve the project and are not the result of giving it up. This can be inferred from a factual datum: whereas the decisive passage that denies any plans of autobiographical record—"I can give no account of my life," and so on<sup>x</sup>—was added to the 1588 edition of the *Essays*, in the postmortem edition of 1595 the original formula was reiterated: "I present myself standing and lying, before and behind, my right side and my left, and in all my natural postures [*eten torn mes naturelspilis*]."<sup>xi</sup>

Although conceived simultaneously and not in succession, the portrait and the essay are opposites. And what Merleau-Ponty said about Montaigne is as apt in relation to the essayist as it is incorrect if applied to the goal of the portraitist. "He does not know this place, of rest, this self-possession, that Cartesian understanding is to be. To him the world is not a system of objects facing the idea, to him the self is not the purity of an intellectual consciousness."<sup>xii</sup>

Though distinguished from the record of one's own life, then, the essay as practiced by Montaigne still has an affinity with the autobiographical. As we have observed, within this sphere the autobiographical genre presupposes a moment of rupture, originating in a "conversion" that separates "the self as character" from "the self as author."<sup>xiii</sup> Given the fundamental importance of this difference, it will be worthwhile to recall a passage from the paradigmatic work of the autobiographical genre, Rousseau's *Confessions*. Although any page would do, we have selected the well-known scene in which Jean-Jacques steals "a little pink and silver ribbon, which was quite old."

When the ribbon was found in his room, the boy defended himself blaming the cook:

She was sent for, to face a considerable number of people, including the Comte de la Roque himself. When she came she was shown the ribbon. I boldly accused her. She was confused, did not utter a word, and threw me a glance that would have disarmed the devil, but my cruel heart resisted. In the end she firmly denied the theft. But she did not get indignant. She merely turned to me, and begged me to remember myself and not disgrace an innocent girl who had never done me any harm. But, with infernal impudence, I repeated my accusation, and declared to her face that she had given me the ribbon. The poor girl started to cry, but all she said to me was, "Oh, Rousseau, I thought you were a good fellow. You make me very sad, but I should not like to be in your place." That is all. She continued to defend herself with equal firmness and sincerity, but never allowed herself any reproaches against me. This moderation, contrasted with my decided tone, prejudiced her case. It did not seem natural to suppose such diabolical audacity on one side and such angelic sweetness on the other. They seemed unable to come to a definite decision, but they were prepossessed in my favour. In the confusion of the moment they had not time to get to the bottom of the business; and the Comte de la Roque, in dismissing us both, contented himself with saying that the guilty one's conscience would amply avenge the innocent. His prediction was not wide of the mark. Not a day passes on which it is not fulfilled.<sup>xiv</sup>

Among the countless episodes in the *Essays* involving the author's own persona, not one is as detailed as this. The difference has to do with the distinction between the genres adopted by the two authors. Driven by sheer mobility, the essay has no resting point, whereas autobiography remains close to the portrait—it is a branch of the same tree, which raises the intriguing question: How could the latter branch ramify after its failure in Montaigne? Precisely because in Rousseau the individual's own heart is the source of the moral Law, whereas in Montaigne it was seen as errant, finding stability only when enmeshed in custom. That is, in Rousseau the laying bare of one's own heart, which reveals the individual subject, covers up the absence that, since the individual subject's self-sufficiency was not assumed, required that it be explained. If autobiography and essay are both derived from the same emphasis on the self, they are radically distinguished not only by their characteristic, approaches—a life confessed versus a life considered in reflection— but, even more importantly, by the way they deal with the absence correlated with the individual.<sup>xv</sup>

This question becomes even more interesting when we relate it to the question of literature. Indeed, since literature was to become, with the prerogatives of the individual subject, beginning with the early German romantics, the discursive form par excellence, a consideration of the different ways that autobiography and essay treat absence will be decisive for its theoretical reconsideration. We have said that autobiography, assuming that self-questioning as to the motives of one's own conduct was sufficient, made it possible to forget the absence. Now, as the question of literature, in modernity, came to concentrate on its articulation with the inner riches of the subject, it tended to forget its correlate, the shadow of absence. (In the next chapter [of *The Limits of Voice*, "The Subject and the Law: A Kantian Heritage"], when we examine a temporally distinct aspect of the same Law-Subject-Literature complex, we shall see that these basic terms are still connected to the alternative between criticism and aestheticization.) In the late sixteenth century, this alternative did not exist. The essay, however, was already fully developed. Practiced but not conceptualized, or also practiced as it was conceptualized and, at the same time, contradicted, the essay as a genre, in any case, was to have a much less brilliant future. The sequence of the argument will allow yet another correlation: the essay's less brilliant future will be associated with its critical bent.

Let us examine the essay as a form, less to contribute to our reading of Montaigne's work than to strengthen one of the pillars on which our own work stands.

## CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING THE ESSAY

In 1910, Georg Lukács published an analysis of the essay that remains of capital importance to this day. In the following year, a modified version of the work was published in German. In its very opening, the author questions the form's ambiguity, which seems to make it unique: its wavering between art and science, its inability to distinguish itself from both "without blurring the frontiers of either."<sup>xvi</sup> This was what distinguished it from poetry, which had long before become autonomous, in "primitive, as yet undifferentiated epochs" when "science and art (and religion and ethics and politics) [were] integrated."<sup>xvii</sup>

This indefinite status is the core of Lukács's reflection. First of all, he characterizes the indefiniteness he must deal with: "Science affects us by its contents, art by its forms; science offers us facts and the relations between facts, but art offers us souls and destinies."<sup>xviii</sup> It might be argued that the young Lukács was excessively attached to the humanistic conception of art. Such an objection, however, would be ridiculous, since the only other alternative he had before him was the rhetorical conception of *belles lettres*. His conclusion is what matters: "Only when something has dissolved all its content in form, and thus become pure art, can it no longer become superfluous; but then its previous scientific nature [is] altogether forgotten and emptied of meaning."<sup>xix</sup>

This primacy of form points to the first characterization of the essay: it belongs among the works in which "questions are addressed directly to life itself," without resorting to the mediation of literature or art.<sup>xx</sup> Akin to literature and the arts, since its focus is on the soul's fate, the essay differs from them in the nudity and informality of its body. The difference derives from the existence of two ways of considering the reality of the soul: one emphasizes life, the other living.<sup>xxi</sup> This duality correlates with two means of expression, which are founded on the opposition between image and significance.<sup>xxii</sup> Decades before Sartre formulated the notion of poetry as *mot-chose* (word-thing), Lukács associated the first mode with poetry—"Poetry in itself knows nothing beyond things; for it, each thing is serious and unique and incomparable. That is also why poetry knows no questions: you do not address questions to pure *things*, but only to their relationships".<sup>xxiii</sup> The second mode, presumably, is that of the essay, introduced in the figure of the critic.

This is the basis on which Lukács builds his argument—the differentiation between expression through images and the search for what never reaches their sphere. This brings us close to the decisive passage:

There are experiences [*Erlebnisse*], then, which cannot be expressed by any gesture and which yet long for expression. . . . The question is posed immediately: what is life, what is man, what is destiny? But posed as a question only: for the answer, here, does not supply a "solution" like one of the answers of science or, at purer heights, those of philosophy. Rather, as in poetry of every kind, it is symbol, destiny and tragedy.<sup>xxiv</sup>

In poetry, form appears as destiny because, dealing with images, it can conceive a figured picture that is destiny and at the same time shapes destiny. The essayist's situation is quite different: his work does not place him in immediate contact with destiny, nor does he give shape to destiny; his task is to speak of objects that have already been made into form: "The critic is one who glimpses destiny [*Schicksalhafte*] in forms: whose most profound experience is the soul-content which forms indirectly and unconsciously conceal within themselves."<sup>xxv</sup>

In poetry, the question asked of destiny is solved in form. In the essay, instead, the questions burn so brightly that there is no space for them to resolve into form. Lukács gives as an example a comparison between tragedy and Socratic dialogue: "For a tragic life is crowned only by its end, only the end gives it meaning, sense and form to the whole, and it is precisely the end which is always arbitrary and ironic here, in every dialogue and in Socrates' whole life."<sup>xxvi</sup> Hence the errant character of the essay, including the "modern essay." Although it no longer has to serve "books or poets,"<sup>xxvii</sup> and therefore has become the genre of problematization par excellence, its own richness will not allow it to assume a form: it remains protean, formless.

Two conclusions ensue: "The essay is a judgment [*Gericht*], but the essential, the value-determining thing about it is not the verdict (as is the case with the system) but the process of judging."<sup>xxviii</sup> And: "[T]he essay is an art form, an autonomous and integral giving-of-form to an autonomous and complete life."<sup>xxix</sup>

The reader of Lukács's text, or even of the summary presented above, will notice that the second conclusion does not really follow from the preceding argument, but merely restates what had been said in the beginning. But we do not agree with Adorno when he writes that this flaw could have been corrected if the author had observed that "because of its means—concepts—and its claim to truth" the essay has no aesthetic autonomy.<sup>xxx</sup>

This might well be true, but not sufficient. Although it is acceptable that the problem of science—at least of the so-called hard sciences—is solved outside of the sphere of form, to deny the essay's claim to formal autonomy would be to submit it to the positivistic conception, as Adorno himself observes. That is, the use of concepts and the claim to truth place the essay outside the field of art but do not locate it in that of science; its place is neither here nor there. What, then, is the essay's place?

The difficulty here comes from the identification between art achieved in words—literature—and the idea of expression of the creative subject's, the artist's, soul. The Lukács who wrote *Soul and Form* accepted this identification. His "overstepping" of these limits by adopting the Marxist system only underscores *objectiveness*, the counterpart of the modern emphasis on the individual subject. But not even Adorno subverts that identification,<sup>xxxix</sup> which is not to deny that some aspects of his rectification are of interest.

According to Adorno, the essay's defining trait is its opposition to the system, the finished theory. And what places the essay in a difficult position in our days is its failure to conform to a division of labor in which there is room only for people who deal with hard facts or people who are up in the clouds (*Tatsachenmensch oder Luftmensch*).<sup>xxxix</sup> In rebellion against a regulated world in which a privileged place is awarded to the positive person, with practical sense and strong instincts—the sort of man Thomas Buddenbrook wanted little Hanno to grow up to be—and the "artist" is relegated to the status of ornament, "the essay not only does without indubitable certainty but also denounces it as the ideal of established thought."<sup>xxxix</sup> "In a peaceful way, the essay denounces the ideal *oiclara et distincta perceptio* [clear and distinct perception] and doubt-free certainty."<sup>xxxix</sup>

If our intention were to discuss Adorno's problem in particular, we would have to refuse the opposition between essay writing and the order of method, which Adorno reiterates. The essay is not against the method, but against its totalizing pretension. (Even less acceptable, then, is young Lukács's statement that the essay was a "precursor" of the system!) In the case of literature, the dominant idea of method implied that the totalization of literature should be consummated in the subject or—under the influence of Hegel and natural science—in the society that is supposed to determine it. In this way, the control of the motions of imagination, which we have seen at work in Montaigne's work, as well as the discussion of fertilizing absence, particularly in works that can give rise to an aesthetic experience, was kept out of sight—that is, was never elaborated as a concept or questioned in essays. If, on the contrary, these issues are called into question, the method will turn critical, and the praise of the essay will no longer treat it as a melancholy guerrilla fighter who knows from the outset that the system is certain to win in the end.

It is precisely because of its affinity with criticism that the essay is marked more by the forcefulness of its questioning than by the unerringness of its answers. That is why the essay is the form that, though not identified with the literary experience, is closest to it. This closeness becomes more visible when we see literature as the discourse that questions and puts into perspective what a society considers to be true—that is, when we see literature as the verbal actualization of fictional discourse.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Since it would be arbitrary to speak of the fictional in the present chapter, which deals with a different historical period, we shall do no more than underscore four points. First, the essay has an "elective affinity" with the fragment: both emphasize what is unfinished or does not seek justification by previously established systems. Second, the essay's very unfinishedness makes it inadequate as a vehicle for the conveying of contents, information, instrumental schemes, so that it tends to focus on its own structure—that is, on form. Third, the essay is not form in the absolute, but belongs in what is previously occupied by form, so that what singularizes it is the interval where it remains. The essay is the genre that occupies the interval between the discourse for which form is the principle—poetical or fictional discourse—and those for which questions about meaning are the principle, above all, philosophical discourse. It is less a medium for the circulation of ideas than a medium for questions. As Lukács observed, the essay is not in the service of the literary or artistic work: its vocation is criticism. That is why it is an excentric genre; thus, fourth, treating the essay as a genre makes it easier to draw attention to its varieties. The essay may either be an antisystematic discussion of ideas or, in its constant antisystematicity, keep close to the writing subject's life.<sup>xxxvi</sup> In this case, it may assume the form of the self-portrait. Whereas in its first variety the position taken by the author is made explicit by the argumentation—that is, by the way the author behaves in relation to the universe of ideas—in the second variety we face the explicit presence of the writing self before the matter of life. In this context, it is important to remember Michel Beaujour's observation that the Montaignean self-portrait is the mature product of the "confessional variant" of the "encyclopedic *specula*" (mirrors) that the Renaissance had inherited from the Middle Ages and that had been made famous by Erasmus.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

## THE BOOK: PRESENCE OF THE SELF AND MARK OF CRITICITY

Since the notion of absence plays a decisive role in my argument, I could hardly finish this chapter without an explicit reference to its introduction in Montaigne studies. This took place in 1968, with Michel Butor's *Essais sur les Essais*.

In a time of civil war, as was Montaigne's time, military valor becomes commonplace and can no longer serve as an indicator of real value. Value, then, was not to be associated with deeds done in worldly life; it was only at the very last moment that it could be recognized, in the way one faced death. Given its location in extremis, this mode of individual singularization implied that recognition of valor was achieved only when the individual in question could no longer be useful to his nation. Thus, Montaigne's defense of La Boétie, his contention that his friend's matchless qualities had not been acknowledged and called for while he was alive, required a different form of proof and demonstration: writing. The Renaissance experience of multiplicity (*Stierle*) and the praise of individual adventure—previously affirmed as the mark of the Renaissance man—were added to the trance experienced in religious wars, and together they pointed to a task that Montaigne, with his aristocratic disdain for the occupation of scholars, saw as inferior. "The book replaces the joust, the closed field."<sup>xxxviii</sup>

It is this first determination that leads Montaigne to translate to the realm of words the example of the painters of his time. Before 1574, when the Calvinists frustrated Montaigne by publishing La Boétie's *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, his friend's text "was directly related to the chapter 'Of Friendship' and . . . the chapter that followed did not exist." If this fact is taken into account, Butor adds, "we realize that the two most important 'themes' in the Essays, those on which the author concentrates before the first edition, 'Of the Education of Children' and 'Of Cannibals,' these two secondary portraits, are placed symmetrically in relation to the main portrait."<sup>xxxix</sup> But the blow dealt him by the Calvinists forced him to modify his project. The first book would now revolve around a center that was literally absent. But as Butor shrewdly demonstrates, the same scheme was adopted in book II:

Though the second book turns on the "Apology," as the first had turned on La Boétie's "Discours," it [the "Apology"] is not in the middle position; this is so because the book does not revolve around the essay only, but also around the first book; it is Montaigne's entire literary activity until then that he aims to defend, and the "Apology" itself is part of the defensive shield.<sup>xl</sup>

The book is, then, a defense of writing, a defense of the author's own inner voice. But both writing and self-revelation contradict his role as an aristocrat, in the material act itself they imply, in Montaigne's rejection of the standards of cultivated language, in his unprejudiced outlook. Thus both must be disguised by flippancy to ensure that the author will be left alone. The form not only narrates the author but also defends him. Thus, its copiousness derives from a second absence. Even so, the game of composition has not yet involved all its pieces. *Mouvance* (mutability) is still operating, and in book III the function of *écriture* once again changes: it is no longer conceived as a coat of arms to replace the old insignia of nobility; from a bastion of the self it is transformed into an optical instrument that, like a prism, analyzes itself and the world.<sup>xli</sup>

It is not necessary to mention Butor's name explicitly to realize that he is the seed from which Marc E. Blanchard's thought grows. One need only quote the passage that best summarizes Blanchard's thesis:

Starting, traditionally enough, from the reflection of the self writing a portrait of the dead La Boétie, I will begin by searching for what, in the development of the *Essays*, leads Montaigne to see himself as the *parfait amy* [perfect friend], in this not only borrowing from the poetical fashion of his time but also asking the reader's indulgence for a painting in which the painter, in the attempt to *paint* himself in the likeness of La Boétie, painted someone else.<sup>xlii</sup>

The importance of the path opened by Butor is no less clear in Terence Cave's chapter on Montaigne:

The paper on which the text of the *Essays* appears is, indeed, a place of difference: it allows the rewriting and naturalization of foreign texts; it thereby permits the search for the identity of a *moi* in contradistinction from what is "other"; but at the same time it defers any final access to the goal of the search, since the self is expressly an entirety dissociated from the activity of writing.<sup>xliii</sup>

In spite of this, common ascendancy, which is not explicitly claimed by the authors, their respective developments are independent. Thus, Cave will conclude, on the basis of the gap between author and writing, that Montaigne's text is undeterminable: "One may pursue Montaigne's topics as topics, bearing in mind only that they do not function as representation, that they are articulated in fundamentally indeterminate

discourse."<sup>xliv</sup> And with this he repeats a commonplace that is particularly popular among Anglo-American critics today.

The brief allusion to Butor's essay and its influence was made with the intention of stressing its seminal nature. Our major purpose was to underscore the fact that, by contrasting the subject-centered interpretation with the reading that privileges the relation between the writing subject and the absence that is established at the same time, we highlight the series of points that make up the backbone of this book [*The Limits of Voice*]. As one of the consequences of the focus on the individual subject, the legitimation of literary discourse is parallel to the establishment of the control of the imaginary and to critics' inability to capture it. To repeat what has been said before, by failing to differentiate between the portrait and the essay and solving the contradiction by means of the principle of a creative subject, literary interpretation left unexplored the problem that was implicit in this contradiction. In Montaigne, however, it was formulated precisely in the model proposed for the portrait: the expression of the inner voice was not to be affected or disturbed by the motion caused by his own imagination. That is, on the basis of the subject, literature was legitimated by keeping the control of the imaginary it implied outside the reach of analysis. In this way, it was never observed that the choice of the essay and the failure of the portrait showed that Montaigne had bypassed this veto. Thus, in Montaigne the control was simultaneously affirmed and negated—negated and bypassed as individual achievement; affirmed as a precept to follow. In other words, the centering on the individual subject made it possible to break a prohibition in poetical practice—in the *Essays*, that is—and at the same time made it impossible for critics to elucidate it. Hence we arrive at the importance of investigating the question of the absence: as a constitutive—though not an exclusive—element of literary works, it is one of the instruments that allow the establishment of this control and the subsequent problematization of a field that, within a humanistic framework, could not even be envisaged.

Our very brief mention of Rousseau's *Confessions* has an importance here that is not at all proportional to the scarce space devoted to it: if in Montaigne the primacy of the individual placed the issue of the Law in question, it was precisely because the author assumed that the self's actions gained a meaning only as a function of a stabilizing medium. Either he denied a priori that it was possible to find such a medium in himself, or else the failure of the model for the portrait showed the need to find it elsewhere. Hence the emphasis on custom. The same question was posed again by Rousseau, and the answer he gave to it was different: the Law is discovered by listening to the individual's heart. If we recall the relevance of Rousseau's thought for Kant's second *Critique*, we can at least begin to see that the consecration of the individual had the contradictory effect of legitimating literary discourse while leaving in the shadow the dimension of absence and, with it, the control of the imaginary. On these two bases the idea of literature as the expression of the individual was erected. This idea could well leave the question of the imaginary in brackets, as it were, and might even postulate a connection between the creative subject and its imagination, because this expression had previously been stabilized—stabilized from the inside by the Law manifested by the heart (which Kant immediately converted into a moral Law), and from the outside by custom, soon converted into social causality.

In contrast, the questioning of absence, as a constituent of literary works—that is, the questioning of what is not transparent to the writing subject, to its purposes, its intentionality, of what is inscribed in what is written—allows not only the discussion of control but also a different characterization of the literary: a discourse that neither claims to tell truths nor sees itself as abstracting the question of truth, but on the contrary literally places it onstage and discusses it. In literature, the question of the subject simultaneously implies the question of the Law. In order to focus on the relation between the two, it was necessary to begin with Montaigne, just as it will be necessary to end with Kafka. In both of them the Law oscillates; it oscillates and loses its balance between them; in Kant it begins to stabilize, and continues to do so in the reading of Kant adopted by Schiller and in the noncritical direction taken by the early German romantics; and is affirmed by the aestheticization that is already triumphant among the latter.

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<sup>ii</sup> The relevance of the written character of the essay has already been underscored by Michel Beaujour: "Montaigne considers himself more inspired by epistolary improvisation stimulated by friendship than by the laborious invention of the essay, destined to be mediated by the print shop, and which requires that the writer be shown in his solitude. That is why Montaigne's self-portrait may seem to us a necessary consequence of the

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breakdown of a privileged oral and handwritten communication and as an attempt to inscribe in the space of the printed book the persona of one who makes us part of his inspiration although without actually knowing us" (Beaujour 1983. "'Consideration sur Ciceron' (I,XL), l'alongeai comme marque générique: La letter et l'essai." In M. Tetel, ed., *Actes du colloque international Montaigne* (1580-1980). Paris: Nizet. 24.)

<sup>iii</sup> Montaigne, M. de. 1933, III, 8: 457.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid*, I, 39: 114.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid*, III, 9: 457.

<sup>vi</sup> *Ibid*, III, 9: 457.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid*, III, 8: 457.

<sup>viii</sup> Pascal, B. 1975a [1655]. "Entretien avec M. de Saci." In *Oeuvres complètes*. Ed. J. Chevalier. Paris: Pléiade. 564.

<sup>ix</sup> Montaigne, M. de. 1933, I, 39: 114.

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid*, III, 8: 457.

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid*, III, 8:457.

<sup>xii</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. 1960. "Lecture de Montaigne." In *Signes*. Paris: Gallimard, 251.

<sup>xiii</sup> Freccero, J. 1986 "Autobiography and Narrative." In T.C. Heller, M. Sosna, and D.E. Wellberry, eds., *Reconstructing Individualism*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 17.

<sup>xiv</sup> Rousseau, J.-J. 1953 [1782]. *The Confessions*. Trans. J.M. Cohen. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 87.

<sup>xv</sup> Our examination must be complemented by an analysis of the fragment. Since its form will be dealt with in Chapter 2 [of Costa Lima. 1996. *The Limits of Voice*. California: Stanford University Press], for the moment we need only anticipate that the fragment shares with the essay the characteristics of being unfinished and of being an individuality rather than the expression of something previously existent. The fragment is the minimal form of the essay. The reader himself can verify this assertion. Except for thematic distinctions, what is the difference between one of Pascal's fragments and an essay of Montaigne's beyond the latter's relative expansiveness—or, conversely, the former's concision? One thinks of all the Montaignean expansions that could be made to correspond to Pascal's "Man is neither angel nor beast, and it is man's misfortune that who would act like an angel should act like a beast" (Pascal 1957b [1669]. *Pensées*. In *Oeuvres complètes*. Ed. J. Chevalier. Paris: Pléiade. no. 329).

<sup>xvi</sup> Lukács, G. 1974 [1911]. *Soul and Form*. Trans. Anna Bostok. London: Merlin Press, 1.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>xix</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>xx</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>xxvii</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>xxviii</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>xxix</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>xxx</sup> Adorno, T.W. 1958. *Noten zur Literatur*, vol.1 Frankfurt Suhrkamp Verlag, 12-13.

<sup>xxxi</sup> In Chapter 2 [of Costa Lima. 1996. *The Limits of Voice*. California: Stanford University Press] the question we have only posed here will be explored at length. As we will see, it is possible to escape the originally romantic conception of literature as the expression of a creative subject through a more rigorous elaboration of the view of literature as fiction—that is, not as a form of compensating illusion, but as a way of seeing truth in perspective or questioning truth without at the same time postulating an alternative truth. However, in Chapter 3 it will be seen that this idea, fundamentally derived from Wolfgang Iser, must be placed in a historical context. Kafka's fictional practice destroys the security that resulted from the view of fiction as a territory where the dominion of other territories is provisionally suspended—the territories of the pragmatic, of beliefs, of knowledge, which are momentarily placed in brackets to allow fruition of an aesthetic and critical experience, it being understood that the old order waits in the wings while the performance is on. As we will see [in chapter 3 of *The Limits of Voice*], in Kafka's great novels this suspension disappears before the avalanche of practices that contradict the empire of "constitutional" norms. This suspension, as it were, was the limit of what could be done within the framework proposed by Kant. Since Kafka, and in the present climate of generalized socioeconomic uncertainty, aggravated rather than diminished by the collapse of "real" socialism, the question is how to develop a *detrterritorialized* theory of the fictional that does not simplistically see the world as a make-believe realm.

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- <sup>xxxii</sup> Adorno, T.W. 1958, 12.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Ibid, 29-30.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Ibid, 30.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> See Costa-Lima, 1989. *A aguarrás do tempo: Estudos sobre a narrativa*. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 68-109; and Chapter 3 of the present work [Costa Lima. 1996. *The Limits of Voice*. California: Stanford University Press] .
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> On the difference—but not subordination—between the two modalities of the modern essay, the Baconian and the Montaignean, Jacob Zeitlin's reading remains useful (see Zeitlin, 1928. “The development of Bacon’s Essays – with Special Reference to the Question of Montaigne’s Influence upon Them.” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 27, 4 (Oct): 496-519).
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> See Beaujour 1980, *Miroirs d’encre: Rhétorique de l’autportrait*. Paris: Seuil. Particularly pp. 32, 34, and 183.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Butor, M. 1968. *Essais sur les Essais*. Paris: Gallimard, 58.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Ibid, 72.
- <sup>xl</sup> Ibid, 125.
- <sup>xli</sup> Ibid, 193.
- <sup>xlii</sup> Blanchard, M.E. 1990. *Trois portraits de Montaigne: Essai sur la représentation à la Renaissance*. Paris: Nizet, 23.
- <sup>xliii</sup> Cave, T. 1979. *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance*. Oxford: Clarendon, 272.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Ibid, 297.