


UNVEILING BRAZIL: SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL REALITIES OF THE LATE '80S THROUGH BRÁULIO TAVARES' STUNTMIND

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/arev6n3-325>

Date of submission: 25/10/2024

Date of publication: 25/11/2024

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ABSTRACT

The present article aims to show how Brazilian Science Fiction provides an interesting reading of Brazil's economic and political context and its social and cultural disturbances in the late 80s. With the end of the military regime, writers tended to explore the social context focusing on the contradictions of the process of modernization and its negative results for Brazilian society. In this context, writers did not hesitate to combine technology and cultural alienation in a Third World political perspective. By analyzing Bráulio Tavares' "Stuntmind" it is possible to see his critique to the effects of globalization toward Brazilian culture, as well as toward Brazil's political and economic development.

Keywords: Stuntmind. Brazilian Science Fiction. Bráulio Tavares. Political Context.

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INTRODUCTION

In the late 1980s, Brazil faced a profound period of transformation marked by the end of the military dictatorship and a surge of social, economic, and political shifts. This era, filled with optimism yet tempered by the complexities of modernization, spurred Brazilian writers to reflect on the country's challenges and contradictions. Science fiction emerged as a powerful lens through which these upheavals were examined, with authors creatively exploring the impact of globalization, cultural alienation, and uneven economic growth on Brazilian society. Among these voices, Bráulio Tavares' *Stuntmind* stands out for its incisive critique of the effects of globalization on Brazil's cultural and economic landscape.

Through a nuanced blending of futuristic technology with a Third World political perspective, Tavares reveals the darker sides of modernization, questioning whether Brazil's path to development might lead to further social and cultural disruption rather than progress. This article delves into *Stuntmind* as a compelling narrative that highlights the perils of Brazil's modernization journey, offering readers a reflective mirror on the lasting impacts of globalization.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF BRAZILIAN SCIENCE FICTION

The early 20th century witnessed the efforts of Brazil's literary elite to establish a national literature which would recover the roots of national identity. According to Alfredo Bosi in his book *História Concisa da Literatura Brasileira*: "existia a certeza de que as raízes Brasileiras, em particular, indígenas e negras, solicitavam um tratamento estético, necessariamente primitivista (2014:341) [there was the certainty that Brazilian roots, particularly, indigenous and Black ones, required an aesthetic treatment, a necessarily primitivist one]. That was the primary theme of Brazilian Modernism, the main ideas of which were based on Oswald de Andrade's *Cannibalism Manifesto* in which the writer explores the dialectic of the self/other, import/export, influence/authonomy, and national/foreign. Andrade advocated the creation of a new and unique Brazilian culture through the process of cannibalization in which foreign influence would be devoured ruminated on and refashioned using a Brazilian approach to literature that would differentiate it from that of the Europeans and Americans which, especially since Independence, Brazilian writers had tended to follow slavishly.

Using this perspective, writers were encouraged to write about "Brazilian roots" which resulted in a growing number of works focusing on national identity. Works such as

Mário de Andrade's *Macunaima* (1928), Oswald de Andrade's *Pau Brasil* (1924), Cassiano Ricardo's *Martim Cererê* (1928), and Plínio Salgado's *O Estrangeiro* (1936) represent this period of nationalist literature. All these works – whether poetry or novels – explore social aspects of Brazil, and thus emphasize national myths and customs. That is why science fiction was not seen as a genre that could satisfy this agenda since science and technology were not considered part of the lives of ordinary Brazilians.

Under these circumstances, it was difficult for literary science fiction to gain credibility within Brazilian cultural circles since it was seen as a First World genre that did not correspond to the exigencies of the Modernist movement. Even in countries such as the United States and Britain where plenty of science fiction had been and was continuing to be produced, the genre did not achieve critical credibility until the 60s – prior to which most examples had been regarded as pulp fiction. However, despite the failure both within and outside Brazil to recognize the validity of Brazilian science fiction, it has a long history.

Although there are early examples of fantastic literature in the 19th century, the formation of a body of Brazilian writing that today is recognized as being in the genre of science fiction began in the early 20th century. According to Yolanda Molina-Gavilan in *Chronology of Latin American Science Fiction, 1715-2005* (2007), in the mid-19th century, Brazilian authors begin writing tales of imaginary societies and voyages into the future in the mode of Jules Verne and Camille Flammarion. These descriptive works dealt mainly with political reforms through the depiction of future events or society, as in Joaquim Felício dos Santos's *Páginas da História do Brasil* [*Pages from Brazil's History*] (1868-1872) and Emílio Zaluar's *O Doutor Benignus* [*Dr. Benignus*] (1875). After the turn of the century, the genre developed with writers starting to focus on social and agrarian reforms, as well as eugenics and the social roles of women as in *Brazil no Ano 2000* [*Brazil in the Year 2000*] (1909) by Godofredo Barnsley and *O Reino do Kiato* [*The Kingdom of Kiato*] (1922) by Rodolfo Teófilo, *A Liga dos Planetas* [*The League of Planets*] (1922) by Albino Coutinho and *A Amazonia Misteriosa* [*The Mysterious Amazonia*] (1925) by Gastão Cruis, among others. All these works are nevertheless somehow derivatives of Anglo-European science fiction.

In 1926, Monteiro Lobato wrote *O Presidente Negro* [*The Black President*], a satire which relates the story of an ordinary man and a professor of physics who invents a time machine that is able to foresee the future of the United States until 3527. In this mood of invention, there is also a transport-radio able to transport things via radio, thereby solving all

the traffic problems of a city. Among many other inventions, there is also a “theater of dreams” where people’s dreams can be projected on a screen. H. G. Wells’s influence is notable in Lobato’s narrative.

Like Wells, Lobato uses a time machine as a literary device to explore Darwinian ideas. As suggested by Adam Roberts: “... the time machine is like a clock, a car, a weapon and all the various things that critics have read into the tale built around it” (2005: 146). Even in the last twenty years, most Brazilian science fiction critics do not consider *O Presidente Negro* as science fiction because it was written at a time when the genre had not been established; instead it is classified as fantasy or categorized as “a predecessor of the speculative genre in Brazil”, as pointed by Otero (1987: 185). As has already been noted in the first chapter, the term was only coined in the 1920s in relation to the American tradition. However, the key difference is that, in the US, the idea of science fiction took off – science fiction seemed to speak about American society – but in Brazil, it remained marginalized because this genre seemed to underpin the imperial ideology of First World technologically advanced countries.

Also, Brazilian readers of science fiction were predominately young upper middle class males, confirming Adam Roberts’ assertion: “science fiction has long been viewed as a genre produced and consumed by young white males” (2000: 29). Thus, the idea of using this speculative genre to allow space for different ‘voices’ to explore the nature of Otherness and futurity was still far from one that most Brazilian writers would have chosen to explore.

Another important work written in this period was Adalzir Bittencourt’s *Sua Excelência, a Presidente no ano 2500* [*Her Excellency, the President in the Year 2500*], (1929) which portrays Brazil as a world power that has made reforms in the areas of health, urbanization and political organization. The author depicts Brazil as a country with “potential for national greatness” (Ginway, 2004: 18). However, for some critics, this period was a time of inauthenticity in Brazilian science fiction. In Molina-Gavilan’s words:

Brazilian science fiction before the 1950s was heavily influenced by Portuguese translations of Jules Verne, Emilio Salgari, J. Aragon, Gustave L Rouge, and H. G. Wells, as may be discerned from titles such as Érico Veríssimo’s *Viagem à aurora do mundo* [*Travel to the Dawn of the World*, 1939] or Gerônimo Monteiro’s *3 Meses no Século 81* [*Three months in the 81st century*, 1947]. This lack of autochthonous models meant that what regional science fiction was prior to the 1960s involved the irregular efforts of isolated writers who, for the most part, had no particular commitment to the genre but found it a useful means of critiquing society, promoting a particular agenda, or continuing the *fin-de-siècle* fascination with the supernatural (2003: 4).

By the late 1930s, whereas the genre of Anglo-American Science fiction had already established a tradition that gathered writers and publishers who fed a broad readership, no such movement had been developed in Brazil. Moreover, there was no national masterpiece or authorial figurehead, who might, for instance, have been a critic as well as a creative writer who could have influenced these or other authors to develop themes already raised or to explore new avenues in subsequent works. According to Araújo (2024; 2020), The influence of the Anglo-American tradition during these initial steps toward a national model of science fiction in Brazil and in the whole Latin America is undeniable. However, it is also true that many genuinely national works were written during this formative period, contributing, in part, to the consensus that a national version of the genre gained recognition in the 1960s.

During this period, the genre started to be patterned using a genuinely Brazilian outlook and a growing number of Brazilian science fiction works started to be published in domestic magazines. With the advent of the first electronic and automobile industries, and prompted by the discourse of the New Wave writers, the number of science fiction works increased considerably and the idea that Brazilian writers were unable to produce science fiction was slowly replaced by a more positive perspective.

In reflecting on *Stuntmind* through Araújo's perspective, we find Bráulio Tavares demonstrating a unique depth of critical awareness about Brazil's traditional values, which are constantly challenged by the pressures of modernization and technological advances. Tavares, like other quality science fiction authors from nations still grappling with industrialization, uses his work to explore not only the allure of technological progress but also the profound impacts this shift has on longstanding religious, socio-cultural, and ethical frameworks within Brazilian society. By situating *Stuntmind* in a world where the promises of high-tech industries clash with Brazil's deep-rooted values, Tavares emphasizes the tension between cultural continuity and disruptive change.

Rather than embracing modernization uncritically, Tavares' narrative becomes a reflective space where he interrogates what might be lost in the pursuit of technological advancement. His story raises critical questions about how globalization and modernization may erode the socio-cultural foundations that define and sustain Brazilian identity. This awareness reflects a broader trend in quality science fiction from the Global South, where authors navigate the complex intersections of progress and tradition, offering critiques grounded in the particular challenges and values of their societies.

This critical sense seems to have been the key element in this process of nationalizing the genre. Writers' critical reflection allowed them to explore Brazil's colonial history and its neocolonial situation, as to the use of the genre as a means of exploring what some consider the factual bases and others the myths of national identity. Such reflection enables it to be seen that a nation, like Brazil, which for long was a colony and exploited as such, will clearly have a different sense of national selfhood, than a nation like England in which the sense of national identity stretches much farther far back into the past and the history of which includes colonizing others. All these factors contributed to the production of a distinctively Brazilian form of science fiction.

Another important aspect that can distinguish Brazilian science fiction from the Anglo-American tradition is the fact that during the 60s and 70s, the genre in Brazil emerged at a time when the country was governed by a regime that engaged on repression in politics and the arts and therefore, science fiction became a useful tool in the struggle against repression. While most writers insisted on adopting a posture of resistance by criticizing the regime through autobiographical writings or reportage literature, science fiction writers camouflaged their critique by using strategies inherent to the genre and a figurative language based on irony and metaphor. After the military regime, particularly in the late 80s, writers tended to change the focus of their critique by showing the disastrous effects of authoritarian regimes for society as a whole, by emphasizing cultural, political and economic aspects.

ANALYZING BRÁULIO TAVARES' *STUNTMIND*

In general terms, Brazilian science fiction written during the 60s, 70s and 80s is marked by the way writers responded to socio-cultural and political aspects of Brazilian society as a whole. During the 80s, the genre was used in response to important changes and tendencies that emerged after the military regime, particularly to the quickening pace of globalization and growth of information economies. In this context, Bráulio Tavares occupies a prominent position: he is probably the most important contemporary writer of Brazilian science fiction. His importance for the genre is due to his contribution in the last 60 or so years, not only as a writer but also as literary critic.

Tavares was born in 1950, in Campina Grande, Northeast of Brazil but moved to Rio de Janeiro where he started a career in journalism while undertaking other jobs as a writer, namely those of songwriter, TV writer and translator (he has translated important science

fiction books by H. G. Wells, R. L. Stevenson, Isaac Asimov, Tim Powers etc.). In 1989 he won the coveted Caminho Award for Science Fiction, in Portugal, with his collection *A Espinha Dorsal da Memória* (*The Backbone of Memory*) where “Stuntmind” was first published. He is considered a major national literary figure in speculative fiction and his science fiction works have been published in countries such as the USA, Canada, Portugal, Russia and Spain. Discussing the future of Brazilian science fiction and its relationship to Anglo-American writers, Tavares admits the absence of models other than Anglo-American ones that have influenced Brazilian writers. In an interview on the blog *From Bar to Bar* (2011), he states his opinion about learning from different sources

We have to learn with everyone. Our problem in Brazil is that we only drink from Anglo-Saxon sources. I've read very little French SF. I don't remember reading any SF from Italy or Spain. I've read only a dozen books of Russian SF. I have no idea about SF in the Netherlands, in Germany, in the Czech Republic, in India... OK, someone may say that those countries have not produced outstanding, memorable SF. But, then again, the same can be said about ourselves!

Tavares goes on to state that if Brazilian writers paid more attention to other writers such as Stanislaw Lem from Poland, the Strugatski brothers from Russia, and recently Zoran Zivkovic from Croatia, they could be closer to discovering the road to a Brazilian genre because they would begin to see a number of elements that are foreign to British-American science fiction, elements that may be seen as these nations' new contributions to science fiction. Indeed, Tavares represents a group of writers who argue for a more literary and experimental science fiction which could represent a national model or style.

Although he criticizes the strong influence of the Anglo-American writers upon Brazilian literature, this influence can be seen in many of his writings. In “Stuntmind”, for instance, he starts the narrative with an explicit reference to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The way the narrator of “Stuntmind” depicts Van Dali's photo at the opposite end of the large marble room, as if it were in an art gallery, is very similar to the way the picture of Dorian Gray is depicted by the painter Basil who identifies himself with the picture: “I come here every day, before breakfast. I look at this photo and I think about me” (p. 216). The photo also recalls the giant faces on the cinema screens and advertising posters which may suggest a more general reflection on glamour and celebrity culture.

“Stuntmind” tells the story of Roger Van Dali, someone who was predestined to be a ‘stuntmind’ i.e. a person whose mind was, for some random genetic reason, suitable for mental contact with outsiders. Millions of government agents combed the world to find

potential stuntminds. Whenever one was found, he/she was enrolled, trained, and taken in a space shuttle to the Orbital Station, where an Outsider scout ship subjected him to another series of tests. Some were turned back, without explanation. Those approved were taken to the main Outsider ship and put in mind-contact with the Outsiders by a process, the details of which were kept secret by the aliens. After a period of mind-contact, the man was taken back to the station.

Van Dali was thirty-two when he was discovered and sent to a Contac Mission where he stayed for two weeks. When he returned to Earth, he was physically exhausted, “no more than a zombie, but a prolific zombie nonetheless”. He came back to Earth with the blueprints of the topological structures of the Interwoven Universe in his mind. It was only after this that the nations of Earth could master the projection of physical objects in Hypertime.

Stuntminds created and developed the most eccentric mathematical formulae and wrote things without their having an inkling of understanding of what they had written. However, when their information was exhausted they were officially retired, mentally ill and were withdrawn from the world to spend their last years like sheiks, maharajas, mandarins, in mansions with ninety-nine rooms. In these mansions there are rooms for everything: swimming rooms, rooms full of fishbowls, rooms full of children’s toys, rooms full of books. They can have whatever they wish to be distracted or have fun.

The narration is divided into a series of alternating first- and third-person sections. Some of them are told from the perspective of Van Dali, and the other parts from the perspective of the outsider, as if there were two different narrators. In the first part, the narrator is an outsider who awoke in Van Dali’s body after the Contact and stayed in his body forever. He lives in Van Dali’s mansion and because of that he has to talk to Van Dali’s biographers and answer their questions. In fact, Van Dali and the outsider became two in one. So the reader’s initial confusion about alternating point of view resolves into an understanding of hybrid identity, where the continuing presence of the human is uncertain. Some newspapers regard the stuntminds as useless parasites of mankind. The multistate companies spend more and more money on stuntminds every year, because every Contact, every message demands a new untouched brain. For the narrator,

“... the countries of the Earth needed stuntminds who gave their minds to be raped by equations, by aliens’ formulae, by data that Earth scientists eagerly receive and examine with wonder; something for which a scholar would give half his life, and which billions of people pay homage to but do not understand” (p. 219).

Despite the intellectual superiority of the stuntminds and the sophisticated life they have when retired, their lives are empty, lonely and monotonous.

In the other series of sections, the story is narrated by Van Dali. According to him, men “can thank the Outsiders for the keys to Hypertime and for opening the doors of the universe” (p. 222) but he also thinks that what outsiders really want is to live on Earth and to be like men. Van Dali has some negative ideas about men’s persistence in discovering the secret of the universe. He does not understand this human greediness for space, since the Abyss is only the abyss.

“Stuntmind” is, arguably, the most notable example of a work of Brazilian science fiction that deals with issues of cultural cannibalism and alienation in modern life, at the same time that deals with political and economic issues. For Brazilian modernists, inspired by Oswald de Andrade’s ideas, cultural cannibalism means an aesthetic-cultural attitude that aims to critically devour and assimilate foreign cultural values which were introduced in Brazil by the colonizer, as well as to emphasize national-cultural values which were repressed by the process of colonization.

During the 80s, these ideas were taken up again and contextualized in line with the impact and collateral effects of globalization on the way of life, customs and traditions in Brazil and not forgetting the impact of the English language on Portuguese especially but not only in terms of lexical borrowings from English. One example of course is the very title of this book “Stuntmind”: ‘stunt’ has no cognate in Portuguese and that ‘mind’ and ‘mente’ are cognates would not be immediately apparent to most Brazilians.

In “Stuntmind”, for example, Tavares critiques the way that the process of globalization transforms people into products to be used whenever they are useful and necessary to a commercial negotiation:

And I awoke in Van Dali’s body after the Contact, like one who emerges from a throbbing abyss. I came to Earth and was given this face of mine. They taught me my name, told me my life, gave me a mountain of money and then forgot me: and now here we are... I and I (p. 221).

In this passage it is possible to see two ideas of modern society: the idea that men do not have a consistent identity or value and the idea that money/technology can transform men into empty, lonely and sad creatures. In political and economic terms, this passage can be seen as an allusion to Brazil’s dependency on foreign investments and technological support. During the eighties, Brazil was seen as an emergent economy

whose progress depended on foreign investment that means, its future situation was completely uncertain. Indeed, President Sarney faced a continuing foreign debt crisis stimulated by the savage recession of 1981-1983, the worst since the Great Depression. In other words, Sarney inaugurated the “New Republic” in an economically precarious situation. Most newspapers, TV stations, church representatives and young economists from the most important Brazilian universities pressed the government for immediate actions against the inflation.

Thus, in late 1985, a group of innovative and young economists designed a heterodox economic plan (The Cruzado Plan) inspired by the Austral plan introduced in Argentina the month before. The Austral Plan was an economic program that implemented a new currency,

wage and price controls which brought down inflation and restored the confidence of international bankers. Like Brazil, Argentina had faced a continuing foreign debt crisis and reached an economically precarious situation in the early 1980s; the Austral plan, thus, worked as if it had created an economic miracle, as stated by Carlos Abraham (2005).

In this perspective, the Cruzado Plan came into effect in February 1986 and initially it seemed to be a brilliant and promising plan. Prices, the exchange rate and wages were adjusted and frozen and indexation seemed to have disappeared. Sarney called on all Brazilians to join in the struggle against inflation. He invited citizens to be price inspectors at their local stores, denouncing shopkeepers who raised prices in violation of the price freeze. People did meet his expectations; the plan was an instant success with the public, and overnight Sarney became a sort of national hero. However, this rapid economic growth was not enough to change Brazil's international image. In terms of the US-Brazil bilateral relationship this was a period of growing tensions. According to Pecequillo,

Os choques se tornaram frequentes no âmbito bilateral e multilateral, com pressões norte-americanas diretas atingindo o Brasil na forma de retaliações comerciais, inclusão na Lista Negra do Departamento de Comércio, suspensão da venda de supercomputadores, acusações de protecionismo e desenvolvimento de programas bélicos, dentre outros (2012: 43) [Clashes became frequent in the bilateral and multilateral context, with direct U.S. pressure affecting Brazil in the form of trade retaliation, inclusion on the Blacklist of the Department of Commerce, suspension of the sales of supercomputers, accusations of protectionism and development of weapons programs, and so forth].

In this sense, Brazil has no option other than give in the US's pressure. This conflicting situation is well illustrated by Tavares in Van Dali's figure in a sense that men can

be dehumanized or hybridized in accordance with social or political interests. The following passage illustrates this feeling of being impotent or merely servant in political and economic fields: “During his training, with dozens of physicians around him, he asked what he was supposed to do. Someone will say something in your mind, they answered. You will listen, and then you will tell us” (p. 217). This could also be seen as a reference to the political spying service so common during the military regime for which someone was paid to infiltrate a group or political party in order to keep the government informed about any different actions or movements that could be considered a threat, an act of rebellion or opposition to the regime. At the same time, it could also be an allusion to Brazilian institutions, perhaps even companies, sending Brazilians to other countries to study new subjects, at first little understood in Brazil, and then they return and help their superiors replicate what they have seen and learned.

Considering that “Stuntmind” was written four years after the ending of the military regime, it is clear that Tavares used life under the regime – and immediately thereafter – as inspiration for part of the narrative. In this sense, the story can be read as an allusion to the climate of uncertainty that swept Brazil after the dictatorship. In a powerfully ambiguous way, the text allows the reader to think that the alien is a purely mental entity that has transferred to Earth or has merely established a telepathic link with van Dali while remaining physically elsewhere. Paradoxically, if on the one hand, the alien is the one with superior power who comes to Earth and takes over Van Dali’s body and life, on the other hand he represents a sense of loss and lack of identity and representation, unable to take decisions or to raise his voice: “we are a guild of silent people” (p. 221). In order to adapt himself to this strange world, the alien has to take advantages of his numerous abilities combining them with other elements provided by the environment in which he has to live:

I have been tied to the propeller of a plane and had the engine turned on... I have fought rattlesnakes with my teeth, with my hands tied behind my back. I have jumped from a plane at six thousand feet, tied to an elastic cord. I have been entombed for six days and six nights (p. 221).

In general terms, this passage could be read as a criticism of First World decadence but it could also be seen as a reference to the Brazilian political and economic scenario. In the late 80s, Brazil was said to be in a prominent position in its economic standing in the world due to its making ever increasing technological advances and competing with other countries in the global market. Hence, it moved from being deemed a Third World country

to that of being an emerging nation (and more recently, that of being one of the four leading emerging nations called the BRICs: Brazil China Russia and India). However, paradoxically, Brazil's population continues to show high rates of poverty, illiteracy, and other social inequalities, as if its economic and political independence were limited no matter its status as an emerging country. In the science fiction field, this period is marked by the appearance of an increasing number of Portuguese translations of Anglo-American works and the transmission of series such as *Land of Giants*, *Lost in Space*, *Star Trek* on Brazilian TV, as well as the immense popularity of films such as *Blade Runner*, *Alien*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and *Star Wars*. All these factors contributed to a literary production that focused on the social changes arising from the uncertainty of Brazil's political situation and the struggle to found a national form of artistic expression.

In order to demonstrate Brazil's paradoxical situation, Tavares seeks to stimulate and exploit readers' imaginations by calling his attention to what is real and what is representation. According to him,

A FC sempre questionou o nosso paradigma de Realidade, mas o conjunto de sua produção atual nos dá um aviso que pode ser condensado na fórmula: *Somos cada vez menos capazes de distinguir o que é o real e o que é sua Representação...* e nessa fusão entre *o-mundo-em-si* e *o-mundo-como-o-percebemos*, a FC sugere que Matéria e Espírito são uma só coisa e que o que chamamos de Linguagem ou Pensamento é o canal que serve de ponte entre os dois (2005: 73) [The SF genre has always questioned our paradigm of Reality, but the set of contemporary production gives us a warning that can be condensed into a formula: *We are increasingly less able to distinguish what is real and what is its Representation ...* and in this merger between the-world-in-itself and the world-as-we-perceive-it, SF suggests that Matter and spirit are one and the same thing and that what we call Language or Thinking is the channel which serves as a bridge between two].

In this perspective, Tavares tries to improve the national genre by raising its literary quality. In other words, he proposes a style which could question the concepts of reality and its representation at the same time that it explores the ambiguities present in the fictional discourses. In "Stuntmind" the reader is led to believe in the possibility of two different realities for the characters which causes the reader to constantly question the text and to grapple with its uncertainties.

"Stuntmind" is arguably the best representation of Tavares' literary approach. While he calls for a more literary science fiction, he also suggests that the writer should focus on everyday life and social context should always be in evidence. However, Tavares' ambiguous style opens a range of possibilities of reading and enables the reader to form

different interpretations and viewpoints. Therefore, the alien, in “Stuntmind”, may represent the paradoxical situation of post-dictatorship Brazil: strange, neutral, passive, lost, without direction, curious, the ‘Other’.

From 1985 to 1989, the political scenario in Brazil was marked by economic crisis, administrative excesses and corruption, as well as various economic plans that attempted to reduce (hyper-)inflation. At the same time that the government tried to show Brazil’s image of a powerful nation at all costs, there was a social tension in relation to the future of the country. One of the most important national goals during the 80s was to raise the Brazilian economy to the model of the Western industrial nations which means that modern technologies were at the top of list for Brazilian investments. For the economist Maria Helena Alves (2005: 368), adopting the technologies of the most developed countries required choices that would lead to a succession of irremediable mistakes that would affect more specifically the poorest people. Tavares seems to be aware of the adverse effects that this exaggerated quest for technology could bring to the population:

The multistate companies spend more and more money on stuntminds every year, because every Contact, every message, demands a new, untouched brain... It is said that our Xanadus insult the poverty of the world’s billions of people. But the countries of Earth needed us (p. 219).

Given that stuntminds are the representation of what is most sophisticated and modern in terms of scientific and technological development, Tavares seems to denounce the uncontrolled investment made by the Brazilian government in the technological field to reach an economy modeled on those of First World countries while there was no investments in education and health systems, for example. Considering that Xanadu is a place of great beauty and luxury, the expression “our Xanadus insult the poverty” is a way to say that the government’s policy” affects more specifically the poorest people”. The way Tavares describes the mansions where stuntminds live also bears witness of his critique toward this disordered investment.

I have dozens of rooms whose furniture recreates other times and other places. I have the dark crypt where Aleister Crowley performed his ritual. I have the room where Paris loved Helen of Troy, and also Messalina’s sultry alcove, and the huge canopy bed of Christine, Queen of Sweden. I have the room where Marilyn Monroe died, and in that room lives a professional Marilyn double, almost a clone (p. 218).

This passage could be seen as a reference to what all new empires do: collect spoils/treasures of previous civilizations but it could also be read as a satire of the way the government uses public money to fulfill the desires of a small (elite) group as if the technological advance would never become part of most Brazilian's lives. Therefore, there is an explicit reference to the retirement of politicians, particularly those who received absurdly generous pension benefits in the form of a so-called life annuity after being in political administration for only eight years. According to Alves (2005: 118), this life annuity was decreed during the military regime in the form of Amendment nº 1 of 17 October 1969. This benefit was initially only for the President but soon it served as a model for States and Municipalities to follow. The States created this benefit for their former Governors and, in some cases, as in the State of Pará, even for former mayors of their municipalities. Also many of the 5,500 Municipalities (at the time, there were 4,000), in Brazil, created these pensions through municipal laws, despite the municipality being extremely poor. In case of death, the benefit was extended to the politician's family.

Although Tavares dedicates part of his critique to the military regime, his emphasis is on modern society and his rejection of modernization. While focusing on the elite, Tavares criticizes the vices, greed, corruption and alienation generated by people's relentless pursuit of power and prestige in a technocratic society. In "Stuntmind" and other stories of his collection *The Backbone of Memory* (1989) he shows his negative view and distrust of the process of modernization via technological development. This negativity is clearly illustrated in the last paragraph of "Stuntmind": "I cannot understand this human greediness for space, since the Abyss is only the Abyss, and nowhere is there a planet so full of perverse beauty as this world of yours" (p. 222). These final sentences suggest an existential conflict in which present, past and future are key elements. Contentious issues are always present in Tavares' life and works, as one can see from this passage from an interview:

We live in an age that could be called The Omnipresence of the Present. The present moment is suffocating our capacity to think about the Past or the Future, because there is a frightening amount of information about the present hour, the present day, the present week... (2011).

In general terms, Tavares's works reflect a distrust of the process of modernization as an alternative form of social and cultural development. In the story, some references to the purely informational transfer mechanism of colonization can be seen; there is no bodily interaction, only a flow of information. The aliens are like executives safely out of reach, not

vulnerable to hacking. In this regard, Tavares shares the same feelings as his fellow countryman, the philosopher Fernando Magalhães for whom technology has been transformed into an instrument of plundering and human exploitation. According to Magalhães (2004),

O avanço da ciência, especialmente da informática, proporcionou uma revolução na estrutura do conhecimento que ampliou o caráter da dominação, tanto técnico quanto econômico... Em consequência dessa mudança tecnológica, alterou-se, igualmente a estrutura de poder, passando a ser exercida, agora, transnacionalmente, através da economia global (p. 42) [The advancement of science, especially information technology, has brought about a revolution in the structure of knowledge which has broadened the character of domination, whether this be in technical or economic terms... As a result of this technological change, the power structure has altered to the same extent and has started to be exercised, transnationally, through the global economy].

Arguably, the figure of stuntminds represents this transference of power structure in which the dominant economy devours the weakest ones in order to become only one, as in a cannibalistic process.

For some period of time, the minds of Earthling and the alien vibrated and pulsed together, becoming a whole; then they were separated again, and the man was taken back to the station. When Van Dali returned to Earth, he was physically devastated, weighing twenty pounds less than he had two weeks earlier, when he had shaken hands with nine presidents as he prepared to enter the shuttle... (p. 217).

This passage captures some important aspects of the so called global economy: on the one hand, the idea of a uniform economy in which developed and underdeveloped nations would be equally benefited; on the other hand, the situation of the economically weakest nations being devastated and becoming ever more dependent on the strongest ones. The phrase ‘when he had shaken hands with nine Presidents’ can be seen as an allusion to trade agreements that were frequently signed by the Brazilian government during the 80s in order to gain new markets and expand the offer of products. More precisely, it can be regarded as alluding to the congratulatory handshakes seen at G20 and similar meetings, affirming entry into a superior international club.

Taking into consideration that Tavares was aware of Brazil’s economic and political context and its social disturbances in the late 80s, it is feasible to say that “Stuntmind” is a work that reflects particularly the search for technological advance and its social implications in a period of transition between two important historical moments –

authoritarian and democratic regimes. Tavares is arguably the writer who best describes the anxieties and fears brought on by the uncertainties of a new reality imposed by the process of globalization.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In examining *Stuntmind* against the backdrop of Brazil's late-1980s socio-political landscape, it becomes evident that Bráulio Tavares crafts a narrative deeply reflective of a country wrestling with the complex aftermath of dictatorship, economic volatility, and cultural transformation. Tavares' work is not merely speculative but rather an incisive critique of globalization's encroachment on Brazilian society and culture, highlighting the tensions between technological progress and cultural identity. His portrayal of a world where modernization threatens local traditions, social equity, and political autonomy underscores a cautionary tale relevant not only to Brazil but to many post-colonial nations grappling with similar pressures.

Tavares' choice to frame these issues within the genre of science fiction allows him to push the boundaries of social commentary, shedding light on the contradictions inherent in Brazil's development journey. Through *Stuntmind*, readers are invited to consider the costs of economic integration on Brazil's social fabric and the risks of cultural alienation in a globalized world that often imposes external values and systems on nations with unique histories and challenges.

In conclusion, *Stuntmind* serves as a powerful commentary on Brazil's complex relationship with modernization and globalization. Tavares' speculative vision resonates as a critical reflection on how the promise of progress can obscure deeper social fissures and cultural losses. His work encourages readers to question the true beneficiaries of modernization and the price of assimilating into a global order that may not align with local realities. This analysis of *Stuntmind* thus contributes to a broader understanding of Brazilian science fiction as a valuable medium for exploring and critiquing the socio-political and economic forces shaping Brazil and the Global South in the late twentieth century.

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