

“A Flat Carnavalesque Intention of Being a Cannibal,” Or, How (not) to Read the *Cannibal Manifesto*

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Abstract: In this article, I propose that, in the face of the *Manifesto antropófago*'s inchoate endeavor to supersede a dominant narrative about the irresistible rise of modern rationality, the critic can either accept the terms of this attempted repudiation or reposition it within the very epistemological framework which that text seeks to displace. In accordance with this latter epistemic model, *antropofagia* cannot but appear contradictory. Yet the passages that seem paradoxical and nonsensical appear so only because their essential meaning cannot be fully grasped from this frame of reference. It is therefore the epistemological framework which informs our “re-readings” of the *Manifesto*—rather than a failure or banality intrinsic to the text—that produces what he or she may come to define as nonsense and paradox.

Keywords: *Manifesto antropófago*, *antropofagia*, modernism, cannibal, avant-garde.

My real purpose is to observe [in the Kaapor Indians], in their behavior, what has remained of the ancient Tupinambá who inhabited the Brazilian coast in 1500 and who have strongly shaped us.

Darcy Ribeiro, *Diários índios*

Truth is always with the Other, and always in the future.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Araweté: os deuses canibais*

Most of us are probably familiar with the nebulous border that separates research from writing, that elusive instant which falls somewhere between the last word we read and the first one we type, the hesitant inscription of what can as yet be only the promise of an essay, an article, or a chapter. To borrow Leonard Cohen's mordant allusion to the elusive arrival of democracy on U.S. shores, perhaps the moment I am striving to name "is there but it ain't exactly real, or it's real but it ain't exactly there." In his magisterial analysis of literary beginnings, the late Edward Said asserts more soberly that this idea of a starting point reveals a mode of thought that hungers perennially "for an object it can never fully catch up with in either space or time" (73). It is "something of a necessary fiction," therefore, a scarcely thinkable fantasy that "cannot truly be known, because it belongs more to silence than it does to language, because it is what has always been left behind" (77). Nevertheless, this artifice, this "disguise [defying] the perpetual trap of forced continuity" (77) came to me—with all the anxiety, self-doubt and paranoia that inevitably accompany it—as I held in my hand an advance copy of *Cannibal Modernities*.

And it occurred to me because, although it took me a long time to finish it, at that moment I could not help but think that I had completed the book too soon. Scarcely had I submitted the final copy of the manuscript, it seemed, then I had encountered several texts I ought to have included in my bibliography. Some of the more glaring absences from this list include Carlos Fausto's *Inimigos Fiéis* and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's *Araweté: deuses canibais*, whose subtle analyses of ritual cannibalism resonated in surprising ways with my own, Sara Castro-Klarén's provocative re-interpretation of Oswald de Andrade's renowned manifesto in terms of what she calls "the Socrates-Carib quarrel," and Carlos Jáuregui's examination of the "specular dimension" of the cannibal trope in the sixteenth-century travel narratives which Oswald and his cohorts were wont to nominate "the classics of *antropofagia*." Regrettably, these were contrasts and affinities which I would never be able to explore as rigorously as they surely demanded to be.

No text would appear to require my sustained critical engagement more urgently, however, than the special issue of *Nuevo Texto Crítico* dedicated entirely to *antropofagia*, edited by João Cezar de Castro Rocha and Jorge

Ruffinelli (*Antropofagia hoje?*). Indeed the question the issue's title poses four consecutive times in four different languages echoes the one I implicitly raise in *Cannibal Modernities*. For the book's principal concern is to relocate the emergence of postcoloniality in New World avant-garde movements, that is, precisely within those Modernisms which have traditionally been defined as peripheral and imitative. When I argue that these alleged repetitions of the signs of modernity and Modernism lead to a fundamental rethinking and reformulation of the modern, I am, to repeat K. David Jackson's cogent gloss of the collection's main task, contrasting Brazilian *Modernismo's* "theories of social utopia with today's powerful forces of internationalization and globalization, in an attempt to gauge [their] possible relevance and value for our own time" (273). Thus, for not having carefully considered the "renewed reading" (or "double re-reading of the notion of antropofagia") (10, 7) that so many of this issue's contributors elaborate, my own account of the movement is poorer, I believe. Since that cannot be helped at this late hour, I should like here—by way of retroactively making good this lacuna—to look more closely at this anthology.

The provisional aim of my belated glance might appear at first blush both over-simple and somewhat redundant. Nevertheless, I will not seek once more to ascertain, as I do in *Cannibal Modernities*, whether antropofagia anticipates the postcolonial project to "provincialize the west," whether it succeeds in altering our understanding and construction of the modern, producing what could be termed an incipient "counter-discourse" of modernity. Rather than repeat an argument I have already had occasion to rehearse in a more sustained and thorough-going manner, I want to return to antropofagia by inverting the perspective of my own and rather modest "double re-reading," and consider it from the standpoint of the interpreter (or cannibal-critic, in more partisan terms) against the backdrop of what Walter Mignolo defines as an "epistemic hegemony": "just as it is difficult today to conceive of economic models that ignore capitalism, it is likewise difficult to conceive of epistemic models that ignore the paradigm according to which modern (Occidental) epistemology has habituated us to think the world" (60). As I propose in what follows, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's commentary on Oswald's famed *Manifesto* (included in *Anthropophagy Today?*) affords a convenient vantage point from which to

consider this epistemic foreclosure. Such a consideration might entail examining Gumbrecht's article in the light of the central aim of the collection as its co-editor Castro Rocha construes it, that is, to regard antropofagia as a problem whose value "cannot reside in the monotonous recipe for national identity," for "discourses about identity are essentially useless [and] inevitably tautological" (5). To be sure, it is with this "flat [discursive] taste" ("goust ... un peu fade")—as Montaigne describes the flavor of New World manioc in his canonical essay—that too many of the available interpretations of Oswald's (in) famous text ultimately leave us as well. It is in a sense against this tendency that Gumbrecht's reading, indeed, his conspicuously tentative reading of the *Manifesto antropófago*, probably ought to be read as well. What follows, however, is not so much a critique of Gumbrecht's piece as a meditation on the perdurable valence of a familiar account of the exceptionalism of Europe's civilization.

It is evident from the start of his essay that Gumbrecht is fond neither of the *Manifesto* itself nor of the genre. "Manifestos (in particular: literary manifestos) I cannot stand," he declares at the outset. And what he dislikes about manifestos is precisely the fact that they tend to manifest:

Manifestos ... confront you with the intentions and, in the worst case, even with the introspections of strangers, without leaving any freedom for your imagination [...] What shall we then do with the energy, the excessive energy of manifesto-writers who, instead of keeping their intentions implicit and letting their readers play the interpretation game, yell their intentions at them? ("Biting You Softly" 191)

Understandably, therefore, Gumbrecht calls attention to the *Manifesto's* more scandalous and strident pronouncements: "How could Oswald dare to say: *Antes dos portugueses descobrirem o Brasil, o Brasil tinha descoberto a felicidade?* Let us hope this was a hundred percent self-ironic (although I fear it was not)" (194). At the same time, however, Gumbrecht appears to object just as strenuously to the obscure and ambivalent lines, those that whisper their intentions, or, in Gumbrecht's own words, those that by "keeping their intentions implicit" challenge the reader to play the hermeneutic game. "Very many things in the

Manifesto antropófago are—and remain—unclear to me,” he concedes (196). About Oswald’s definition of antropofagia as “a expressão mascarada de todos os individualismos, de todos os coletivismos,” for example, Gumbrecht queries:

Can anything simultaneously stand for collectivism and individualism? And what would a “masked expression” be? Is expression not the opposite of masking? ... And is a mask not that which protects you against the effects of expression? ... A “masked expression” is as contradictory a concept in and by itself as anthropophagy ... Why this? [He wonders about the repetition of the word *roteiros*] Does it matter that the text repeats the word *Roteiros* exactly seven times here? ... I will now leave this list without any further commentaries. For a commentary on all that resists commentary would be the beginning of a vicious endlessness. ... How can we imagine the feeling, the Stimmung out of which this *Manifesto* came? (196-97)

In a collection whose declared aim is to *read* antropofagia anew, this professed inability to interpret its foundational text strikes a *manifestly* discordant note. It is in some ways refreshing that the critic who articulates this peremptory refusal to comment was once regarded as one of the young luminaries of the Constance School of *Rezeptionsästhetik* (reception aesthetics) and wrote his thesis under the direction of Hans Robert Jauss, one of the school’s founders. Why “further commentary” on these recalcitrant lines would lead inevitably to a kind of bad interpretive infinity, or “vicious endlessness,” rather than retrace what Jauss defines as the hermeneutic circle, for instance, remains somewhat unclear. Whatever the limitations of Jauss’s interpretive model, one might be able to proceed a bit farther in a consideration of the *Manifesto* by calling to mind Jauss’s central assertion that literary history shapes aesthetic views and that those views change over time. I shall return to a particular variation of this interrelation below, but for now, I cannot help but briefly recall what has since become a canonical exchange between Paul de Man and another of Jauss’s students, Karlheinz Stierle.

Refuting Stierle’s contention that the opening lines of Mallarmé’s *Tombeau de Verlaine* exemplify a “loss of reality” (*Entrealisierung*) allegedly characteristic

of literary Modernism, De Man suggests that the definition of modern poetry as incomprehensible because it is no longer representational ultimately fails in its own terms. He concludes his “corrective” exegesis of Mallarmé’s sonnet by affirming that “the polysemic process” he has just traced out in the poem “can only be perceived by a reader willing to remain with a natural logic of representation ... for a longer span of time than is allowed for by Stierle, who wants us to give up any representational reference from the start, without trying out some of the possibilities of a representational reading” (179). Something analogous to what De Man detects in Stierle’s analysis of Mallarmé’s sonnet may be at work in Gumbrecht’s surrender before the supposed opacity of Oswald’s text. The first point one might adduce in this respect is that abstruseness of meaning (or what the members of the Constance School called *Entrealisierung*) is arguably one of the essential features of Modernist literature. The observation that a Modernist text is incomprehensible ought therefore to figure as the point of departure, not the conclusion to one’s reading.

Interestingly, Gumbrecht’s earlier analysis of nineteenth-century European Modernisms seems bereft of such perplexity:

Within the historical context of the nineteenth century ... accordance with the new future-oriented understanding of the present as *evidenced in countless manifestos* marks that turning point where the ‘force of tradition’ as an orientation for human action is replaced on a broad front by the ‘force of selection’ [...] It is precisely the growing recognition of the difference of historical, hence semantic, developments in various contexts of life that is one of the achievements of our present-day consciousness of modernity. (*Making Sense* 100, 106, my italics)

This of course is the sense of futurity, the stereotypically Modernist claim to a new beginning, that several of the contributors to the collection readily recognize as the not-so obscure feeling or *Stimmung* that gives rise to the *Manifesto*. As we shall see below, these readers of the *Manifesto* underscore an important difference in their elucidation of antropofagia’s relationship with modernity. To them, the movement signals more than the momentous shift from the

axis of contiguity (or “tradition”) to that of “selection” that Gumbrecht detects in “countless [nineteenth-century European] manifestos.” Gumbrecht himself questions whether there is “anything different from the European—and, for that matter, from the North American—Modernisms in the *Manifesto antropofago*, something that could only have happened in Brazil” (197). To pose this question in another form, do the passages that elicit Gumbrecht’s bafflement do so precisely because they embody the difference he indicates here?

Let us take as the starting point to this inquiry Gumbrecht’s interrogation of Oswald’s characterization of *antropofagia* as *a expressão mascarada de todos os individualismos, de todos os coletivismos* (“Antropofagia [is] the masked expression of all individualisms, all collectivism”). Whether *expressão mascarada* (masked expression) is as irreducibly oxymoronic as Gumbrecht contends is a debate I will not enter into for now. Nevertheless, the dichotomy might be easily resolved if we understand *mascarada* not as an adjective modifying *expressão*, but as a past participle in a passive construction, i.e., “antropofagia [is the] expression disguised [*mascarada*] by all the individualisms” etc. Although atypical, even agrammatical, this rendition does not seem entirely unwarranted in the context of the nudity / disguise, authenticity / inauthenticity binary that structures much of Oswald’s manifesto: “What ran over truth was the clothing [...] Down with the oppressive and clothed social reality” (“O que atropelava a verdade era a roupa ... Contra a realidade social vestida e opressora”). Now as to the question, “can anything simultaneously stand for collectivism and individualism,” Gumbrecht answers it unequivocally in the affirmative in one of the section titles of his 1997 book, *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time*: “Individuality = Collectivity” (383). Elsewhere in the same text, he specifies the nature of this equation, linking it to “the future associated with the Soviet Union ... a dream of collectivity, a dream (or nightmare) of individual goals and hopes merging in consensus and harmony” (273).

Quoting from a discussion of the politics of education in the Soviet Union by the German poet and dramatist Ernst Toller, who in 1926 was a recently released leader of the defeated Bavarian Socialist Republic, Gumbrecht calls attention to the dramatist’s “unambiguous enthusiasm for the ideal of a paradoxical convergence of Individuality and Collectivity” (384), that is, precisely

the concurrence that Oswald articulates in the *Manifesto*. Indeed, both the political climate that informs the “paradoxical [doxological] convergence” Gumbrecht identifies in Toller’s text and the German poet’s sense of political commitment as a writer are by no means uniquely European. Raymond Williams, among many other critics, notes the disparate political orientations adopted by Modernist and avant-garde movements: either toward “socialist and other radical and revolutionary tendencies [or] very strong national and eventually nationalist identifications, of the kind heavily drawn upon in both Italian and German Fascism” (58). Wilson Martins describes a similar breach (or “ponto de ruptura”) in Brazilian Modernismo—which he coincidentally places around the year 1926—separating “literary politics from political literature or literary revolution from revolutionary literature ... [in] which one faction of Modernismo accepts its political implications moving toward the right ... while another acknowledges the same implications, but shifts to the left” (125). As Martins further specifies, both on the right and the left, Modernismo evinced “a totalitarian political vocation” (127), again, the kind of political attitude that would favor the contradictory doxological confluence of individualism and collectivism.

In a seminal discussion of the relation between modernity and revolution, Perry Anderson defines the contextual “mood” I am evoking here as one of “three decisive coordinates” whose intersection produces the complex set of sociopolitical conditions that enable the rise of Modernism. Anderson calls it “the imaginative proximity of the social revolution,” a heightened feeling of precariousness and instability exacerbated by the sense that “the possible outcomes of the downfall of the old order were ... still profoundly ambiguous. Would a new order be more unalloyedly and radically capitalist, or would it be socialist” (326)? Along similar lines, Fredric Jameson has recently suggested that the conventional accounts of Modernism that underscore its purported subjectivization of reality miss their mark. In the last instance, Jameson argues, Modernist ‘subjectivity’ betrays a longing “for some new existence outside the self, in a world radically transformed and worthy of ecstasy;” Modernist subjectivization, he concludes, is “allegorical of the transformation of the world itself, and therefore of what is called revolution” (135-36). Jameson’s interpretation of Modernist individualism as a latent form of Utopian collectivism

provides another implicit and dialectic response to Gumbrecht's query regarding the conditions under which the two principles would converge.

In *Living at the Edge of Time*, Gumbrecht detects a similar paradox in Luiz Carlos Prestes' march across thousands of miles of Brazilian territory in 1926, the episode commonly known as the *Coluna Prestes*. As the renowned *Cavaleiro da Esperança* would later describe the aims of his expedition: "in objective terms, we were against imperialism and large landed estates [*latifúndios*], without knowing what imperialism or what a *latifúndio* was" (qtd. in Vianna 76). In the course of the campaign, Prestes' figure would reach epic dimensions, and his string of military successes came to symbolize the possibility of social and political transformation. For Gumbrecht, on the other hand, "if anything is clear in Prestes' own declarations, it is the absence of strategic objectives beyond the potentially infinite continuity of movement [...] the only evidence of [its social] function... is the movement of these soldiers, zigzagging and circling across the map of Brazil, almost like a dance" (*In 1926* 370, 388). Curiously, this assertion iterates Mariano Azuela's depiction of the final ride of one of Francisco Villa's fictitious generals at the end of *Los de abajo*: "It is of no importance to know where they are going and where they come from; what they must do is march, march always, never come to a halt" (129) ("Nada importa saber adónde van y dónde vienen; lo necesario es caminar, caminar siempre, no estacionarse jamás"). In his own subsequent assessment of his own march, Prestes acknowledges that without a specific program for social and economic change, the column could not go on indefinitely, and needed therefore to come to a halt: "Because we lacked a clear political objective, signs of degeneration began to emerge in the heart of the column, which could cause many of its members to turn into highwaymen and bandits" (qtd. in Vianna 76). Gumbrecht wonders, however, whether "the concern with keeping things in motion replace[s] the need to know the direction of the movement," maintaining that "so long as Prestes keeps his followers in motion, they do not ask where he is leading them" (*In 1926* 387, 388).

This prevailing pun on the planetary (rather than social) sense of revolution as repetition underpins Azuela's *novela de la revolución mexicana* as well. Against the backdrop of the center-periphery divide which often subtends

the critical discourse on Latin American avant-gardes, this aimless or “potentially infinite continuity of movement” recalls the asymptotic road to development, the perennially unfulfilled temporality connoted both by the gerund (*developing*)—and the now outmoded past participle (*under-developed*)—that customarily modify the nation-states from the South. In such a context, perpetual motion signifies immobility, an ineluctable and incessant repetition in the periphery of an itinerary which the center has always-already charted out in advance. In *Making Sense of Life and Literature*, Gumbrecht elucidates this developmental dynamic:

“Modernization” has been used specifically since about 1960 to describe the developmental efforts of Third World countries ... From our perspective at least, modernization in the underdeveloped countries is determined by a desire to catch up with present levels in the industrialized countries, and is thus taking place somewhere between decolonization and our own present. At the same time, the industrial nations are moving out of this present into an open future, without being able to predict the way to it or what it might conceivably look like. (108)

A close conceptual link could be established between the temporal structure this fragment outlines and Gumbrecht’s stated predilection for the *Manifesto*’s “cute double reference to *a mãe dos Gracos*” (“Biting You Softly” 195): “Contra todas a catequeses, e contra a mãe dos Gracos [...] Contra Goethe, a mãe dos Gracos.” (“Down with all the catechisms, and down with the Gracchi’s mother [...] Down with Goethe, the Gracchi’s mother”). For Luiz Costa Lima, the allusion to the classical epigone of maternal virtue that is Cornelia, the Gracchi’s mother, denotes epigrammatically what Oswald deems one of the fundamental errors that have hitherto hampered Latin American efforts to engage creatively with the cultural legacy of the Occident: “Taken seriously, antropofagia implies: (1) the necessity of an intensive learning process regarding what is and has been processed in the West; (2) the no less pressing need to absorb and hence transform it” (219). This “intuition,” as Costa Lima characterizes it, reveals more than incidental affinities with the process the Cuban

historian Fernando Ortiz will designate *transculturación*. It is in keeping with a similar “logic” of transculturation that Vera Follain de Figueiredo examines the same classical reference. Proposing a re-reading of history that would clear the path for elaborating counter-hegemonic narratives of modernity, Oswald—Follain de Figueiredo contends—calls for the outright rejection of the Eurocentric narrative of modernity, a narrative that defines “Europe’s civilizing mission [as imparting] civilization to savage and primitive peoples, even if in order to carry it out [Europe] has [to subject] ‘inferior peoples’ to a necessary sacrifice so as to enable them to climb up the stairway of modernity” (238). By contrast, Gumbrecht’s gloss of the *Manifesto*’s allusion to the Gracchi’s mother illustrates the notion of a hermeneutic circle, where the *Manifesto*’s author remains essentially in the dark about his own utterance, yet the interpreter, knowing the historicity of that blindness, succeeds in retrieving the text’s latent meaning: “instead of pretending to come from the rainforest, this reference smells like the very Romantic South American middle-class ambition of having institutions as rigorous as the Prussian Gymnasium” (194). In a certain sense, then, what Gumbrecht, by his own admission, “enjoys” about Oswald’s *Manifesto* is what he construes as the expression of the recognizable “desire to catch up with” European levels of education.

The two other passages from the *Manifesto* that meet with Gumbrecht’s approval—in which Oswald undoes “embarrassingly black-and-whitish” binaries with the question: *que temos nós com isso?* (“What have we to do with this?”)—perform a rhetorical gesture that he considers just as familiar: “But, again, I cannot associate this gesture with anything exuberant or exotic” (195). The particular contours of this rhetorical procedure reproduce those of an earlier European epoch: “it reminded me ... of the outra-geousness in my (and everybody’s) favorite text, out of the corpus vaguely attributed to the ‘first troubadour,’ William IX of Aquitaine” (195). As if conditioned by the developmental dynamic Gumbrecht outlines in *Making Sense*, the present of the *Manifesto* leads not to an open, unpredictable future, but harks back to Europe’s medieval past. Antropofagia evidently lacks “the new future-oriented understanding of the present ... evidenced in countless [nineteenth-century European] manifestos” (*Making Sense* 100). In marked contrast to the European avant-gardes as

they are described in *Making Sense*, antropofagia seems structurally incapable of experiencing the present “in a new way”; not only does it continue to “allow its periodic limits to be defined by particular qualities in the past” (*Making Sense* 103)—again, unlike what allegedly happens during Europe’s high Modernism—but it must trace out the hieratic configuration which that past projects upon the hermetic chamber that is the temporality of modernization. And it is with an aimless as well as “potentially infinite continuity of movement” that antropofagia is thus compelled to wind its way across the map of modernity, almost as if dancing to the arresting strains of an exotic waltz.

Gumbrecht explains the difference between the Brazilian and European species of Modernism according to the logic of this temporal dichotomy:

What made the entire American continent different from Europe, at that moment, was the absence, the lack of an immediate experience of World War I. That very European feeling, and technology-based military mass-destruction, that feeling which made any optimism about the human condition look shallow and naïve was certainly much stronger among intellectuals at Vienna, Berlin, and Paris than among those at São Paulo or New York. (197)

This account of European Modernist anxiety is not so much inaccurate as partial. What is identified as a *European* feeling was a characteristic of Dadaism rather than of the post-World War I European avant-garde as a whole, I would submit. And the *Stimmung* which defines Dadaism is peculiarly German. Dada, so the story goes, emerges from a sense of the anticipated collapse of German idealism and of that German intellectual primacy which is underscored in *Making Sense*: “From the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century on (and different from the period of the Enlightenment), it was Germany whose philosophy and aesthetic theory had been influencing the general discussion in other European countries” (89). Steeped as they were in the German cultural tradition, the Dadaists viewed this decline as tantamount to the inexorable demise of western civilization. Unable to imagine an alternative to German culture, they regarded Germany’s defeat as apocalyptic, albeit necessary and just. Yet this is not at all the attitude of the Surrealists, for instance,

who, having similarly concluded that it was impossible to ground human existence in any Absolute, ultimately uncover in psychological theory the potential to endow the world with a meaning and purpose as powerful as those that a putatively defunct Hegelianism had once afforded. For the Surrealists, therefore, the realization that induces anxiety in the Dadaists opens up the possibility for untrammled and exuberant creativity, that is, it produces exactly the “shallow and naïve [...] optimism about the human condition” which was arguably much stronger among intellectuals in São Paulo than those in Paris.

At the end of the piece, when Gumbrecht submits the central aims of the collection itself to interpretation, he appears to follow once again the pattern of the hermeneutic circle. Now, however, it is the “Brazilian intellectuals” who invited him to contribute to the volume (rather than the *Manifesto*’s author) whom Gumbrecht portrays as not fully aware of the underlying implications of their own discourse:

Why do Brazilian intellectuals invite us this year [1998] to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the *Manifesto* [...] here is something that I think the Brazilian colleagues in question are perhaps not completely aware of: so it requires interpretation [and] my interpretation is that we are urged to read and we like to read the *Manifesto* as a document for that past’s future which, as most of the futures of past historical moments, was a future that never became a reality ... Beyond that feeling produced by the invocation of a past future, there is not much else, I am afraid, in terms of aesthetic quality or of philosophical complexity, the author of the *Manifesto antropófago* could brag about. (197-98)

Elsewhere Gumbrecht depicts this future anterior (or “past future”) in terms of the center’s conception of the periphery as a space of authenticity, a site “where an elementary and archaic order is supposed to have survived,” which, in the case of Latin America, “becomes associated with a particular vitality [that gives] one ... the impression that Latin America will play a leading role in the future” (*In* 1926 273).

In “Biting You Softly,” he suggests analogously that “what yells at us from the *Manifesto*” is a desire for “global hegemony [which]—at least in its softer

cultural version—was by no means too large an ambition for a South American intellectual of that time;” he adds: “Because they claimed hegemony in the name of a vague *bon sauvage*-principle,” this was a ‘good will to power’ (197). This supposed aspiration for a benign, post-colonial laying-of-hands accords with the posturing to which Gumbrecht reduces Oswald’s intellectual and aesthetic posture: “Oswald reminds me of all those stingy and naturally mediocre middle class tourists (or academic tourists) from Brazil who come to Europe and to North America with the pretension of being the unspoiled and erotically powerful children of Mother Nature” (194). Like South America itself, the penurious and second-rate (academic) tourist from the tropics with unwarranted pretensions to wild sexual potency is suspended in an identitarian nether-world, that timeless state of incompleteness (or underdevelopment) in which *he* (for he is clearly a male) is compelled to oscillate, now playing a derisory copy of his first-world counterpart, now parodying the European stereotype of the noble savage. Curiously, the “impression” of Latin America’s future promise *one* derives from a vague 1920s European perspective of the world that has been thoroughly internalized by 1920s South American intellectuals.

This promise of futurity turns out to be the historically circumscribed “desire to catch up with” a coeval European level of global hegemony. It is the expression of that will to be euro-occidental, to be the same, which defines modernization. It is the wish for a future that could never become a reality because it structurally lacks the openness and unpredictability of the future of industrialized nations; because it is always and irremediably governed by the latter’s *present*. The feature that Gumbrecht asserts we ought to like in the *Manifesto*—the mark of how it putatively “differs” from European Modernisms, the sign of “something that could only have happened in Brazil” (197)—indicates not so much a difference as a recurrent desire for the Same. Yet this desire constitutes, at the same time, one of the *Manifesto*’s few redeemable qualities: “beyond that feeling ... there is not much else, I am afraid, in terms of aesthetic quality or of philosophical complexity.” There is nonetheless another kind of pleasure associated with Oswald’s text: “we like to read it because it makes present a moment in which neither South America felt like a victim, nor Northern America and Europe felt they had to flagellate themselves as the oppressors of Humankind” (198). Today, the

notion that “North America” is in the habit of begging the world’s forgiveness for its catastrophic imperial ventures rings slightly incongruous, but the enunciation of this putative pleasure allows us to posit an alternate epistemic framework for explicating even the more troublesome fragments of the *Manifesto*.

To borrow the words of Vera Follain de Figueiredo, from such a framework, Oswald’s text would reveal “the other face of modernity, the one that is not emancipatory, which, to the contrary, points toward violence and the negation of the other” (237). Indeed, for most of the contributors to the collection, antropofagia must be considered precisely in terms of its open and direct engagement with what Walter Mignolo has called “the other possible narrative of modernity—which involves Spain, Portugal, the Atlantic trade routes, the silver and gold from the Americas as well as the massive enslavement of Africans in America and the near annihilation of Amerindians” (74). Thus, Jorge Schwartz, for instance, contends that Oswald’s canonical text constitutes “one of the most original strategies developed in Latin America to resist inevitable processes of colonization” (164). Eduardo Subirats regards the movement as particularly “relevant for our understanding of the crisis of modernity,” asserting that it “opened the way in a counter-direction to that of the European avant-garde” (176). Vera Follain de Figueiredo affirms concurrently that “the indigenous anthropophagic ritual is recuperated as the metaphor for a non-exclusive world view; consumption would imply the recognition of the Other’s values” (239). And Carlos Rincón, while acknowledging that the current cultural and political moment differs markedly from the one in which the *Manifesto* was produced, asserts that “the [anthropophagic] metaphor becomes indispensable for the search for new models of cultural appropriation, in the face of the crisis involving the ones proposed by a subject-centered culture” (348).

In the light of this other narrative of modernity, those confusing or scandalous fragments from the *Manifesto* now become explicable. As Roberto Fernández Retamar reminds us, several eminent Brazilian critics, such as Antonio Candido, Benedito Nunes, Roger Bastide, Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, have already assessed “correctly and brilliantly” Oswald’s audacious proclamation (*Antes dos portugueses descobrirem o Brasil, o Brasil tinha descoberto a felicidade*) (208). Retamar encounters in the fragment “the cunning mask [*la máscara*

maliciosa] for a claim to the past [beneath which emerges] the truly creative path of our history and culture” (208). Roland Greene’s gloss of the same line provides a cogent answer to the question, “How could Oswald dare to say [this].” According to Greene, the *Manifesto* “insists not that ‘we must do this’ in the manner of the humanist breviaries, but ‘we already had this’ or ‘we already did this’ before humanism arrived” (122). As for the repetition of the word *roteiros*, Greene relates it to that same alternative account of modernity, indicating that the paragraph addresses the narrative of discovery directly. “Does it matter that the text repeats the word ... seven times,” Gumbrecht asks. By repeating the noun, Greene suggests, the text resignifies and defamiliarizes it, proposing in effect “that discoveries are the results of routes taken and not taken,” thus reinvesting the Brazilian discovery with the contingency “that subsequent history has written out of it” (123). One could well argue, then, that important epistemological implications may be drawn from the reluctance to entertain what most of the anthology’s contributors take as a given, namely that antropofagia seeks to repudiate a “Eurocentric,” “provincial” and “mythic” conception of modernity which posits eighteenth-century Europe as the culmination of an emancipatory project affecting the whole of humanity, to borrow Enrique Dussel’s apt description (350-51, 354).

There is no simple or neutral frame for a critical exchange with antropofagia. The set of criteria or principles that informs our disparate readings of the *Manifesto* is neither fixed nor universal, but variable, contingent and, as Dussel would insist, often parochial as well. It is in an effort radically to alter an enduring Eurocentric conception of the modern, for instance, that antropofagia undertakes the seemingly absurd gesture of gathering up what remains of the dead Tupi in the chronicles and reclaim a cannibal identity. As Caetano Veloso succinctly defines it, antropofagia “is the overcoming of the center/periphery opposition” (240) (“é a superação da oposição centro/periferia”). To be sure, as Brazilian anthropologist Carlos Fausto notes, “Oswald’s naked Indian continues to be a figuration removed from effective indigenous realities” (76). Or, as Gumbrecht puts it more pointedly, “it needs to be said [that Oswald] was neither a *tupi* nor a *jabuti*” (194). Gumbrecht regards this as a “carnavalesque intention of being a cannibal” which, in his estimation, “comes out ... flat” (194). Perhaps one needs to state in turn that however flat or carnivalesque Oswald’s intention might

appear, the *Manifesto* aims to demonstrate that, as Dussel contends, the “world” (in the Heideggerian sense) of so-called primitive peoples, “is not much different in terms of its human development from the modern one, if we ‘penetrate’ the core of its cultural experience” (142) (“no difiere por su desarrollo humano mucho del moderno, si ‘entramos’ en el núcleo de su experiencia cultural.”).

When the *Manifesto* calls for an end to “as histórias do homem que começam no cabo Finisterra” (“the histories of men [sic] that begin in Cape Finisterre), or when it repeats the word *roteiros* seven times, it is advocating a metaphoric *cambio de piel* (“change of skin”) that resembles the one Enrique Dussel establishes as the precondition for rethinking modernity from the standpoint of its silences, its “exteriority”:

We now have to have the smooth bronze skin of the Caribbeans, the Andeans, the Amazonians ... The astonished eyes of those Indians who “watched” barefoot from warm and sandy beaches the approach of never before seen gods, floating upon the sea ... We have to have the eyes of the Other, of another *ego*, an *ego* whose formation process we must reconstruct (as the ‘other face’ of Modernity). (1492 120).

At the same time, as Fausto adduces, no matter how flat and carnivalesque, the “anthropophagic metaphor [is] congruent with indigenous representations;” it expresses “a deep understanding of cannibalism as a praxial and conceptual operation” (81, 76). In *Inimigos Fiéis*, Fausto concedes that his sympathies lie with the *modernistas*, and characterizes antropofagia as “a powerful counter-discourse to colonial continuities” (21). For the Brazilian anthropologist, cannibalism as a socio-cultural praxis constitutes neither a mere identification with, nor a straightforward negation of the other. It must be grasped in terms of Hegel’s *Aufhebung*.¹ Since the Other’s subjective potential can never be entirely neutralized, the cannibal exchange is always and necessarily ambivalent: “The predator negates his/her prey at the same time that s/he affirms it, for s/he emerges from her/his relation with the other as a new subject affected by the victim’s subjective capacities ... The cannibal model of appropriating subjectivities rejoins in this manner the theme of the centrality of the corporeal idiom not only by dint of

consumption—that is, through the destruction of other bodies—but by dint of the construction of new subjects, bodies and capacities” (540, 541).

Fausto’s dialectic conception of cannibalism resonates with Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s interpretation of the ritual as “the supreme form of spiritualization” (“a forma suprema de ‘espiritualização’”), as an attempted immortalization through sublimation of the corruptible element of the human being: “Tupinambá Society *included* its Enemies, and did not exist outside its relationship with the Other—a *generalized heteronym*, an ‘external’ dialectic of human sacrifice, the necessity of alien deaths and of death by alien hands [*de mortos alheios e de morte em mãos alheias*] ... the incorporation of the incorporeal, a becoming-enemy: that is cannibalism; the opposite of the Narcissistic suction of identification: it is he who eats that both others and becomes other [*quem come é que (se) altera*]” (*Araweté* 666, 669). In this specific sense, I must disagree with Sara Castro-Klarén’s contention that Tupi thought is “radically distinct from all dialectics,” and that “deep European roots superimpose and stifle the Tupi anthropophagic metaphor in the *Manifesto Antropófago*” precisely because Oswald fails to discard “the central idea of a dialectical movement of human history” (252). As both Fausto and Viveiros de Castro’s accounts of ritual cannibalism strongly suggest, it is insofar as anthropophagy is grasped in terms of a negative dialectic that it can be seen to coincide with “the logic of interminable alterity of Tupi thought” (Castro-Klarén 254). If, as Fausto insists, literary antropofagia seizes the essential meaning of Tupinambá predation (literal anthropophagy), then the measure of this profound understanding must be what he defines as the sublatory construction of new subjects. Although undergirded by a western phenomenological operation (the Hegelian dialectic), the anthropophagic construction of subjectivity through the incorporation of alterity simultaneously proposes to transcend western models of subjectivity. In this fashion, antropofagia is not only a “contradictory concept in and by itself,” but a profoundly *dialectical* one.

It is in this sense that we ought to understand Carlos Rincón’s critique of the formula Gumbrecht proposes during a post-lecture discussion in 1997 to refer to cultures associated with cannibalism: “cultures of the production of presence.” “Such a formula,” Rincón suggests, “opens itself up for the construction of a typological-cultural difference: subject-centered cultures or cultures

of subjectivity versus cultures of the production of presence where existence resides in the *body-being*” (354). What subtends this typological and cultural difference (a variation on the more conventional subject-object dichotomy) is a hierarchical conception of culture which cannot but relegate Latin America to the status of “the ‘other’ dominated, exploited, hidden face” of Modernity (Dussel 1492 33). From Gumbrecht’s restricted viewpoint, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to allow for the possibility that antropofagia may in effect adumbrate the global project of liberation that Enrique Dussel calls *trans-modernidad*. For Dussel, this sublation of Occidental Modernity follows a dialectical movement analogous to the cannibal operation described by Fausto and Castro:

Modern reason is transcended (but not as a negation of reason as such, but of violent, Eurocentric, developmentalist, hegemonic reason ... [The] real *overcoming* [of Modernity] (as a Subsumption and not merely as a Hegelian *Aufhebung*) is the subsumption of its emancipatory, rational and European character transcended as a global project of liberation of its negated Alterity. (1492 247, 248)

It is the modern rationality Dussel defines here that Gumbrecht appears to reproduce when he places the rupture of “the present as a ‘modern’ period from the normative model of antiquity ... at the threshold of German classicism and European romanticism,” and classifies it as “the point of departure for a philosophical understanding of the new consciousness of the present that would fundamentally alter the concept of modernity” (*Making Sense* 109). Confronted with the *Manifesto*’s inchoate endeavor to supersede this recognizable narrative, the critic can either accept the terms of this attempted repudiation or reposition it within the very epistemological framework which that text seeks rather unequivocally to displace. In accordance with this latter epistemic model, antropofagia cannot but appear contradictory. Yet the passages that seem paradoxical and nonsensical appear so only because their “essential meaning” cannot be fully grasped from this frame of reference. It is therefore the epistemological framework which informs our “re-readings” of the *Manifesto*—rather than a failure or banality intrinsic to the text—that produces what we may come to define as nonsense and paradox.

Notes

¹ Sometimes translated as “sublation,” *Aufhebung* is Hegel’s term for the dynamic movement towards the whole or “totality.” In accordance with Hegel’s organic logic, the totality is the result of a developmental process which preserves within it each of the “moments” or stages it has overcome or subsumed. *Aufhebung* designates this contradiction of destroying or overcoming while at the same time preserving or raising.

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