

Humanist Readings Club Session XII, Brazil - Radical Multiculturalism

In the 1920s in Brazil many people felt that the old traditions of Catholicism and its enemy, anti-clerical rationalism, weren't working. Many looked to a pragmatic humanism for an alternative. This humanism would support reason and reject imposed authority. But it would also embrace all aspects of humanity, including people's religious feelings and traditions if they were not destructive. But how to combine traditions in a country like Brazil where so many different cultures were important and many people had roots, including biological ancestry, in more than one? How does this work?

A group of artists and intellectuals created a movement called *Antropofagia*, the Greek word for cannibalism. At one level this was a joke, a play on the 16th century European fascination with the Tupi, an indigenous Brazilian ethnic group which did indeed eat people. On a serious level, they were calling for a new culture based on digesting and incorporating everything they could find.

The first expression of this idea was a 1928 painting by Tarsila de Amaral, which she named "Apaporu", a Tupi word for "person who eats people."



Tarsila de Amaral



Apaporu

The concept was developed by Tarsila's partner, poet Oswald de Andrade, in his essay "Manifesto Antropofago", the cannibal manifesto.

MANIFESTO ANTROPOFAGO

Só a antropofagia nos une. Socialmente. Economicamente. Filosoficamente.

—

Única lei do mundo. Expressão mascarada de todos os individualismos, de todos os collectivismo. De todas as religiões. De todos os tratados de paz.

—

Tupy, or not Tupy that is the question.

—

Contra toda as cathecheses. E contra a mãe dos Gracchos.

—

Só me interessa o que não é meu. Lei do homem. Lei do antropofago.

—

Estamos fatigados de todos os maridos católicos suspeitosos postos em drama. Fread acabou com o original mulher e com outros sustos da psychologia impressa.

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O que atropelava a verdade era a roupa, o impermeável entre o mundo interior e o mundo exterior. A reação contra o homem vestido. O cinema americano informará.

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Filhos do sol, mãe dos viventes. Encontrados e amados feramente, com toda a hypocrisia da saúde, pelos imigrantes, pelos traficados e pelos turistas. No país da cobra grande.

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Foi porque nunca tivemos gramaticas, nem "collecções de velhos vegetaes. E nunca sabemos o que era urbano, suburbano, fronteiriço e continental. Preguicosos no mapa mundi do Brasil.

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Uma consciencia participante, uma rythmica religiosa.

pobre declaração dos direitos do homem.

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A idade de ouro annunciada pela America. A idade de ouro. E todas as girls.

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Filiação. O contacto com o Brasil Carahiba. O Villaganshon print terre. Montaigne. O homem natural. Rousseau. Da Revolução Francesa ao Romantismo, á Revolução Bolchevista, á Revolução surrealista e ao barbaro technizado de Keyserling. Caminhamos.

—

Nunca fomos cathechizados. Vencemos através de um direito sonambulo. Fizemos Christo nascer na Bahia. Ou em Belem do Pará.

—

Mas nunca admitimos o nascimento da logica entre nós.

Só podemos attender ao mundo crecular.

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Tinhamos a justa codificação da vingança. A sciencia codificação da Magia. Antropofagia. A transformação permanente do Tabú em totem.

—

Contra o mundo reversível e as idéas objectivadas. Cadaverizadas. O stop do pensamento que é dynamico. O individuo victima do systema. Fonte das injustiças classicas. Das injustiças romanticas. E o esquecimento das conquistas interiores.

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Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros.

—

O instinto Carahiba.

—

Morte e vida das hypotheses. Da equação eu parte do Kosmos ao axioma Kosmos parte do eu. Subsistencia. Conhecimento. Antropofagia.

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Contra as elites vegetaes. Em communicação com o sólo.

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Nunca fomos cathechizados. Fizemos foi Carnaval. O índio vestido de senador do Imperio. Fingindo de Pint. Ou figurando nas operas de Alencar cheio de bons sentimentos portugueses.

—

Já tinhamos o communismo. Já tinhamos a lingua surrealista. A idade de ouro. Catiti Catiti Imara Notia Notia Imara Ipejú

—

A magia e a vida. Tinhamos a relação e a distribuição dos bens phisicos, dos bens moraes, dos bens dignarios. E sabiamos transpor o mysterio e a morte com o auxilio de al-



Desenho de Tarsila do Amaral. De um grupo, nos bastidores da sua primeira exposição de Junho na Galeria Perceus, em Paris.

The most famous line is, in English::

Oswald- Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question

Mixing the native American name with Shakespeare's famous line illustrates the key point, we steal from everybody.

Other famous quotes are:

Oswald- Only Anthropophagy unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically.

Oswald- I am only interested in what is not mine.

Originating in painting and poetry, the spirit of *antropofagia* has had its greatest impact in Brazilian music. The most famous style developed in the period was samba, a complex mush of multiple styles with prominent African, Native American, and European roots. The intellectuals did not invent samba. It was happening anyway. But they made it a defining example of Brazilian culture. In the language of the contemporary United States, the *antropofagists* rejoiced in all "cultural appropriation" and had no interest in any sort of "authenticity". If Carmen Miranda's putting silly fruit on her head helped sell samba in the United States, that was just fine.

In the 1960s, Brazilian musicians, led by Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, invoked the spirit of *antropofagia* as the inspiration for the wildly syncretic musical style, "Tropicalismo"

In 2002 Veloso wrote.

Veloso- We Brazilians should not imitate but rather devour new information from wherever it comes... Oswald launched the myth of anthropophagy, bringing the cannibal ritual into the arena of international cultural relations.

The idea of cultural cannibalism fit *tropicalistas* like a glove. We were "eating" the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix.

(Spelling note: Antropofagia is a Portuguese transliteration of a Greek word. Anthropophagia is an English transliteration of the same word.)

Background - 16th Century European Response to Brazilian Cannibalism

From 1555 through 1567 the France had colony called France Antarctique at the location of modern Rio de Janeiro. This resulted in the visit of several Tupi leaders to France. In 1562 in Rouen, three Tupi had a long conversation with the writer Montaigne. In 1580 Montaigne wrote of the Tupi in glowing terms.

Montaigne- It is a nation, I would tell Plato, in which there is no form of commerce, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name for magistrate or political superiors, no customs of servitude, or riches, or poverty, no contracts, no inheritance, no division of property, no occupations, other than leisure ones, no respect for kin relationships, except for common ties, no clothing, no agriculture, no metal, no use of wine or wheat. The very words which signify lying, treason, dissimulation, avarice, envy, slander, and forgiveness are unknown.

Montaigne was using the Tupi to support the classic humanist argument that because humans are basically good, there is value in all cultures even ones as different as the Tupi. The moral quality of Tupi culture demonstrated that people did not need Christianity in

order to be good. Montaigne made that point explicitly by comparing the relative humanity of Tupi cannibalism to the Catholic Inquisition:

Montaigne- I believe that there is more savagery in eating a man when he is alive than eating him when he is dead, more in tearing apart by tortures and the rack a body full of feeling, roasting it piece by piece, having it mauled and eaten by dogs and pigs—treatments which I have not only read about but seen done a short time ago, not among ancient enemies but among neighbors and fellow citizens, and, what is worse, under the pretext of piety and religion—than there is in cooking and eating a man once he is dead.

In 1603 Montaigne's work was translated into English. Shakespeare read it and adapted the first passage quoted above in his 1610 play, *The Tempest*. In Act II, scene i, Gonzalo describes an idyllic state:

Shakespeare- Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation; all men idle, all,
And women too, but innocent and pure;

All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavor; treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth
Of its own kind all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.

Montaigne is stealing ideas from the Tupi. Shakespeare is stealing from Montaigne. And with "Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question" the *antropofagists* are stealing from Shakespeare.