Oswaldo Costa, Antropofagia, and the Cannibal Critique of Colonial Modernity

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ABSTRACT: Oswaldo Costa was a key member of the Brazilian modernist Antropofagia (Anthropophagy) movement of the late 1920s, yet he has been largely forgotten by critics and marginalized from national cultural history. Costa articulated—as no other member of the movement did, including his famous leader Oswald de Andrade—an Antropofagia intellectually engaged in what we call a cannibal critique of colonial modernity and Occidentalism. Costa’s Antropofagia cannibalized the historical archive, reading against the grain of a triumphant Western imperial history. Throughout his contributions to the Revista de Antropofagia, he questioned Brazil’s cultural allegiance to Europe, pointed out the existence of asynchronous temporalities within Brazil, and defied Eurocentric notions of civilization and progress that ideologically structure Brazilian nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He also enacted an anthropophagous re-reading of Brazilian historiography against its celebration of colonialism and proposed the necessity of a cultural decolonization. This article analyzes Costa’s principal contributions to Antropofagia and rescues his hitherto overlooked countercolonial thought from the oblivion of collective forgetting. Moreover, it examines Costa’s significant view of Brazilian modernity as a perfidious armistice with other barbarous temporalities, and of the Westernization of Brazil as a deceptive appearance that hides ever-present colonial antagonisms.

KEYWORDS: Cannibalism; Brazil; Oswald-de-Andrade; Revista-de-Antropofagia; Occidentalism; counter-colonialism; Antônio-Vieira; José-de-Anchieta.


RESUMEN: Oswaldo Costa, Antropofagia, y la crítica canibal de la modernidad colonial.- Oswaldo Costa fue un miembro fundamental del movimiento modernista Antropofagia de finales de la década de 1920. Pese al olvido crítico de su obra y a su exclusión de la historia cultural brasileña, Costa articuló—como acaso ningún otro miembro del movimiento, incluyendo a su famoso líder Oswald de Andrade—una Antropofagia-otra, intelectualmente trabada en lo que denominamos una crítica canibal de la modernidad colonial y del Occidentalismo. A diferencia de la mayoría de sus contemporáneos, Costa acometió la lectura digestiva y a contrapelo del archivo nacional y de la historia triunfal imperial y occidentalista sobre la que descansaba el imaginario nacional. En sus contribuciones a la Revista de Antropofagia, Costa cuestionó la pertenencia cultural de Brasil a Europa y a Occidente, señaló la existencia de temporalidades asincrónicas en el Brasil, y desafió las nociones eurocéntricas de civilización y progreso que informaron ideológicamente el nacionalismo brasileño de los siglos xix y xx. Costa también adelantó una relectura antropofágica de la historiografía brasileña contra su celebración del colonialismo y propuso la necesidad de una descolonización cultural. Este artículo analiza las principales contribuciones de Costa a Antropofagia y rescata su—injustamente olvidado—pensamiento contra-colonial. Además, examina su concepción de la modernidad brasileña como un armisticio pérfido entre Occidente y otras temporalidades bárbaras y su visión de la occidentalización de Brasil como una apariencia engañosa que escondiera antagonismos coloniales irresueltos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Canibalismo; Brasil; Oswald-de-Andrade; Revista-de-Antropofagia; Occidentalismo; contra-colonialismo; Antônio-Vieira; José-de-Anchieta.

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The Brazilian modernist *Antropofagia* (Anthropophagy) movement—developed in the late 1920s by Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954) and others in the *Revista de Antropofagia* (1928-1929) and represented by Oswald’s iconic “Manifesto Antropófago” (1928)—is a central reference in Latin American cultural history. Early on, Antônio Cândido rightly indicated that “it is difficult to say what exactly Antropofagia is, since Oswald never formulated it, although he left enough elements to see some virtual principles beneath the aphorisms” we find in his famous manifesto (1970: 84–85). Nonetheless, Antropofagia has been canonized as an avant la lettre Latin American cultural theory on consumption, and even as a postcolonial discourse. A few of those often-enigmatic surrealist aphorisms usually suffice to allege that Antropofagia offered a syncretic model for cultural encounters similar to transculturación, that it anticipated contemporary debates on hybridity, or that it attempted a cultural decolonization and “proposed” the creative consumption of European cultural capital in order to produce a national culture beyond the anxieties of influence.

Antropofagia certainly redefined the cannibal, a colonial trope associated with Brazil since the sixteenth century, inverting the negative connotations of the colonial stereotype; it also attempted to offer, from a peripheral point of view, a symbolic and mostly literary answer to the questions posed by the asynchrony of Brazilian modernity; and, cultural consumption was indeed part of the wide and quite disparate semantic spectrum of Antropofagia. However, Antropofagia was not an academic effort, a theory of identity formation through consumption, or a social emancipation program. It was a heterogeneous and contradictory aesthetic venture by a collective and diverse modernist group. Besides Andrade, there were Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1973) —true initiator of the Antropofagia movement—, Mario de Andrade (1893-1945), Raul Bopp (1898-1984), Antônio de Alcântara Machado (1901-1935), Augusto Frederico Schmidt (1906-1965), Menotti del Picchia (1892-1988), Benedito Geraldo Ferrez Gonçalves (1903-1979), Oswaldo Costa (1900-1967) and others, each with his own notion of Antropofagia.

This article examines the remarkable contribution of Oswaldo Costa, one of the most important leaders of the group and certainly the one who articulated—as no other member of the movement did, including Andrade—an Antropofagia intellectually engaged in what we will call a cannibal critique of colonial modernity and Occidentalism.

**OSWALDO COSTA, “THE GREAT FORGOTTEN ONE”**

Despite the fact that Oswaldo Costa (1900-1967) was one of the most important and lucid contributors to the *Revista de Antropofagia*, today he remains practically forgotten. The major studies on the Latin American vanguards and Brazilian Modernism barely mention him. Costa is a blurry figure even for experts of the caliber of Antônio Cândido and Maria Eugênia Boaventura. Other important critics, including Vicky Unruh and Robert Stam, even suppose—incorrectly—that Oswaldo Costa was one of Andrade’s pseudonyms.

Oswaldo Costa (who on occasion signed his name Osvaldo, with a v) was born in Belém do Pará in 1900 and died May 12, 1967 in Rio de Janeiro. In 1918 he arrived in Rio, where he studied law for a time, and began his career as a journalist writing for the *Correio da Manhã*. By the mid-1920s he took an interest in the São Paulo Modernists and in 1928 he became a founding member of the Antropofagia movement.

As is well known, the *Revista de Antropofagia* went through two distinct stages—cleverly referred to by the antropófagos as dentições (meaning “teething, cutting teeth”). Oswaldo Costa participated in the first denteção under the conservative directorship of Antônio de Alcântara Machado, but it was during the second denteção that he played a central role in the modernist radicalization of the publication. Andrade himself recognized Costa’s importance in a letter to Carlos Drummond de Andrade in March 1929, in which he refers to Costa as an “authentic Cunhambebe,” equating his leadership to that of Konyan Bebe, the famous cannibal chief of the sixteenth-century Tupinambá (figure 1).

During the second phase, Costa published numerous texts, some under his own name and some under the pseudonym Tamandaré, and he initiated the irreverent column titled “Moquém” (“The Grill”). Jayme Adour da Câmera (1898-1964), co-director of the second denticção, called him Antropofagia’s “best theoretician” (“seu maior teorizador”) (1957: 3), and Benedito Geraldo Ferraz (1903-1979), secretary of the Revista, claimed that the second denticção stayed afloat thanks to Costa, who was the true leader of the journal and whose “theoretical grilling” provided the intellectual basis for the “anthropophagic barbecue.” The prominence of this Cunhambebe theoretician is confirmed by his inclusion in the project of the “Bibliotequinha Antropofágica” (“Little Anthropophagic Library”), which was to include, among other texts: Mário de Andrade’s Macunaíma (1928), Bopp’s Cobra Norato (1931), Andrade’s Manifesto Antropófago (1928), and a piece by Costa titled Moquéns e pontas-de-flecha, an anthology that would have brought together his contributions to the Revista (Bopp, 1956: 9; 1973: 36). The project of the “Little Anthropophagic Library” fell apart when the Diário de São Paulo shut the Revista down in August 1929 and the movement disbanded amidst interpersonal quarrels as well as the crisis that followed the 1929 stock market crash, the ruin of Sao Paulo’s coffee bourgeoisie, and the rise to power of Getúlio Vargas in 1930.

When Antropofagia dispersed, Costa abandoned the literary scene, went back to Rio de Janeiro, and devoted himself to journalism and politics. During the 1930s, he participated in several antifascist activities and left-wing politics; he supported the Comité Antiguerreiro do Rio de Janeiro (Rio Anti-War Committee) and he was a member of the Communist Party’s Central Committee, in charge of communications and propaganda.

In 1934 Costa founded, along with Apparício Torelly (1895-1971) and fellow antropófago Aníbal Machado (1894-1964), the short-lived Jornal do Povo (“Journal of the People”; October 1934). In November 1935, Costa —then a journalist for A Manhã— participated in a Communist insurrection against Getúlio Vargas known as the “Revolta vermelha” (the “Red Revolt”) or “A intentona” (“the Great Attempt”), for which he was arrested and accused of rebellion in mid-1936. The authorities considered him the “intellectual secretary” of the Party. On June 4, 1937, Costa was released while charges were brought up against him; he took advantage of his liberty and went into hiding. A few days later, the Tribunal de Segurança Nacional (National Security Tribunal) sentenced him in absentia to three years and four months in prison (June 28, 1937). The police were unable to find him. By then, he had given up his alias “Ramalho” and resumed his modernist anthropophagous pseudonym “Tamandaré.” Early in 1940, after escaping a police raid and seeking refuge in the Chilean Embassy, Costa turned himself in and was condemned to five years in prison, two of which he completed in 1942. He was released and he joined the leftist journal Diretrizes.

Oswaldo Costa devoted most of his life to journalism as a writer and collaborator on numerous publications, including Diário de Bahia, Correio da Manhã, Correio Paulistano, Folha de São Paulo (Rio Edition), the Revista de Antropofagia, Jornal do Povo, A Manhã, and the aforementioned journal Diretrizes (of which he was promoted to director in 1945). In 1956, he founded the newspaper O Semanário, which reached a national distribution of 60,000 copies, one of the largest publications of the period in Brazil (Nelson Werneck Sodré, 1966: 409; Leonardo de Brito, 2007: 38, 39, 2011: 1-15). (figure 2) O Semanário was shut down by the military dictatorship on April 1, 1964. Costa was subjected (along with his wife Leonor) to a military investigation and the government suspended his political rights. On May 12, 1967, Costa died of a heart attack on the street. A few months later the canonization of Antropofagia would begin, as would Costa’s fall into oblivion.

“A ‘DESCIDA’ ANTROPOPHAGA”/ THE ANTHROPOPHAGIC DESCENT

Oswaldo Costa’s “A ‘Descida’ Antropophaga” appeared in the first issue of the Revista de Antropofagia, along with Andrade’s “Manifesto” (1928: 8) and could be
called, without exaggeration, the other anthropophagic manifesto. In it, Costa questions Brazil’s cultural allegiance to Europe, reads Brazilian historiography against its celebration of colonialism, and proposes the necessity of an anthropophagous cultural decolonization. (figure 3)

Costa begins his manifesto by rendering unfamiliar the meaning of “descida.” Always written in quotation marks in the text, “descida” is a word that ostensibly means “descend,” or a plummeting downward motion, but here also refers specifically to the swooping in of a cultural force. He states: “Now the ‘descent’ is a different one. […] Four centuries ago, a ‘descent’ into slavery. Today a ‘descent’ toward liberation.” (“A ‘descida’ agora é outra. […] Ha quatro séculos, a ‘descida’ para as aldeias; hoje, a ‘descida’ para a escravidão.”)

“Descida” operates in two semantic directions here: the first descida of four centuries ago corresponds to the colonization that compelled the Indians to leave their supposedly nomadic life or their villages, quit cannibalism, and assimilate into the colony (descer-se para as aldeias); that is, the relocation and reduction of the Brazilian indigenous population into colonial settlements, missions and towns from the sixteenth century through well into the nineteenth. The expeditions to bring “savages” into towns and missions and eventually into forced labor were called descimentos de indios because most of the time Indians were brought downriver, “descending” from the inland. Those “tamed” Indians were themselves known as indios descidos. But Costa’s manifesto declares that today’s descida is a different one; it is not the one that brought submission and slavery, but rather “the ‘descent’ toward liberation.” That is, the cannibals descending (as a bird of prey desce sobre a presa), swooping down over civilization, not to be subsumed by it, but rather to overcome it, to devour it, to cancel the Western condition of Brazil and begin anew.

Costa’s “descida” entails a new beginning. Hence, the humorously affirms that after the Great Flood, Antropofagia was the most serious movement to happen in the world: “God turned off everything, to start all over again. He was intelligent, […] but he had a weakness: he spared Noah. The Anthropophagic movement —the most serious thing since the Great Flood—is coming to eat Noah. NOAH SHOULD BE EATEN” (1928: 8, emphasis and capital letters in the original). According to Costa, this postdiluvian renewal requires an anthropophagic gaze—a cannibal critique—over Brazil’s supposed belonging to the West, as well as a digestive re-reading of national historiography. For Costa, Antropofagia must emphasize countercolonial resistance over colonial triumph, abdicate alterity over conversion, and the Anthropophagic “descida” over the civilizing one.

Costa sets his sights on the conception of Brazilian culture as European, questioning its Occidental(ist) colonial modernity:

The “PORTUGUESE” that still exist among us will smile through their golden teeth, laughing their civilized laugh at those [of us] who react against Culture from within. What rubbish! What we have is not European culture, but rather the experience of it. The experience of four centuries. A painful one […]. With Roman Law, the Grand Canal of Venice, [Kant’s] synthetic a priori judgments, Tobias, Nabuco and Ruy. What we do is react against the civilization that invented the catalogue, the examination of conscience, and the crime of deflowering. WE ARE JAPY ASSU. (1928: 8; capital letters in the original).

The text makes explicit the cultural discontent later referred to by Roberto Schwarz’s famous essay “Nacional por subtração” (“National by Elimination”): “We Brazilians and other Latin Americans constantly experience the artificial, inauthentic and imitative nature of our cultural life”; that is, we have a “sense of the contradiction between our national reality and the ideological prestige of the countries we see as our models” (2006: 29, 30).

Oswaldo Costa’s “A ‘Descida’ Antropophaga” in the first issue of the Revista de Antropofagia (1928: 8).
partments of philosophy—exemplifies both the awkwardness of Brazil’s inscription in the West and the intellectual complicity with colonialism among those who consider themselves European and “who still exist among us.”28 In “A ‘Descida’ Antropófaga” Costa extends this critique to the Modernists themselves and he mocks the Europeanism of none other than Anita Malfatti (1889-1964), icon of the first generation of Brazilian Modernists.29 He alludes to one or perhaps two of Malfatti’s paintings in which the painter appears to retract from the Modernist radicalism of 1922: *Canaletto (Veneza)* (Salon d’Automne, Grand Palais, Paris, 1924) and *Canal grande de Veneza* (ca. 1927).30 Likewise, in a later text titled “Revisão necessária” (“A Much Needed Correction”), Costa will refer to this particular mode of complicity as “mentalidade reinol,” a phrase that cleverly uses the colonial term for the Portuguese born in the Old World who resided in Brazil (i.e. the Portuguese from the Reino or Kingdom as opposed to those born in the colonies). Mentalidade reinol derogatively evokes a colonial mindset, an identification with the rulers and oppressors. Costa states: “the problem with our writers is that they study Brazil from a fallacious point of view, the false culture and false morality of the West. The reinol mentality, from which they have not freed themselves” (1929a: 1).31 In his “Moquêm II: Hors de œuvre,” Costa will again voice his irritation with the conservativism and Occidentalism of the Modernist revolution, declaring:

> It focused on the fortuitous, on the decorative, it limited itself to a mere revolution of the aesthetic —truly a horrible thing— when its mission was to generate the new Brazilian thought in Brazil. [...] After it, we continued to be slaves to the West, slaves to Catholicism, slaves to a rotted out European culture. [...] And our history continued to be written with [the assistance of] the missionaries’ tall tales [...]. We did not create a new [way of] thinking. The old imported thinking persisted. Eaten away by the beetle that is the West. The big mistake of the Modernists was precisely this. A preoccupation that was exclusively aesthetic. [...] A false art. A fallacious history. [...] They did not understand the crusades, the wars, the economic struggles [...]. They accepted a bunch of idiotic formulas as truth: that this is civilization and that is progress (Tamandaré, 1929c: 5).32

Modernism, as seen by Costa (here using his pseudonym), did not just respond to ontological Eurocentrism; it bent to its will, submitting to the history of the victors and the “idiotic formulas” of civilization and progress. Costa disrupts those dichotomous concepts and the “fallacious” historiography that supports them.33

In “A ‘Descida’ Antropófaga,” the phrase “WE ARE JAPY ASSU” (ironic and emphatic in all capital letters) reiterates Costa’s complaint against cultural servility. Japy Assu is a cacique who welcomed the colonizers and he mocks the un Consummated triumph of civilization. Against the colonial obsequiousness that to be JAPY ASSU represents, Costa puts forth a different response to the colonizer: a cannibal resistance (i.e. to be Tupi, so to speak).

Costa’s *cannibal critique* of Brazilian modernity is enacted by historic examples of defiance to colonialism and also by his pernicious anthropophagic quotation from the colonial archive:

> Against colonial servility, the *tacape* of the *Inheiguára* “people of great determination and courage, and utterly averse to servitude” (Vieira), [and] the rosette-less heroism of the Caraíbas “who fought the landing of Diogo de Lepe, charging against his vessels and reducing the number of his crew” (Santa Rosa - História do Rio Amazonas). Let no one be fooled. Peace between the *American man* and European civilization is a *Nheengathiba* peace treaty (1928; 8; emphasis mine).34

The proposal to resist, to act against (*reagir contra*) civilization and the Westernization of Brazil could easily be confused with the celebrated formulation “national by subtraction”—the elimination of the foreign—coined by the aforementioned Schwarz, who viewed quite skeptically these purgative responses to both the anxieties of foreign influence and to the angst produced by a sense of the peripheral “underdeveloped” condition of national culture. Yet Costa does not exclude. Instead, he incorporates and resignifies, as in the case of the citation in French of d’Abbeville on the servility of Japy Assu. Costa’s response to the colonial condition is *cannibal resistance*, represented on the one hand by the *tacape* (an indigenous weapon) and on the other by the deceitful *Nheengathiba* peace treaty (as I will explain below). The challenge to colonialism that Costa proposes is not purgative; it is defined instead by the notion of *devoração* or anthropophagic citation. Thus, Costa ventures a digestive decolonizing thought to defy the Eurocentric notions of civilization and progress that ideologically structure Brazilian nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**“AGAINST COLONIAL SERVILITY, THE TACAPE OF THE INHEIGUÁRA”**

When Costa says, “Against colonial servility, the *tacape* of the *Inheiguára,*” he symbolically invokes indigenous countercolonial struggles, thereby reformulating Antropofagia as a kind of resistance to and incorporation of the West. The *tacape* was an indigenous weapon, an oar-shaped piece of wood used in war and in the sacrifice of prisoners.35 As evidenced by its presence in the iconographic images and ethnographic travelogues of the era, the tacape was indelibly associated with the imaginary of cannibalism among the indigenous of Brazil. It shows up
in the wood engravings included in Hans Staden’s 1557 *Warhaftige History*, an iconic tale of the capture of Europeans by cannibals (figure 4).

Against colonial servility, Costa takes up the *tacape*—metonymic sign of the cannibal—and then goes on to anthrophophagously cite the Jesuit Antônio Vieira (1608-1697), who between 1653 and 1661 preached among the Indians in the territories that today comprise the states of Maranhão and Amazonas and initiated the spiritual conquest in the lowlands of the Tocantins River. Costa “faithfully” transcribes a letter Vieira wrote to the King, dated February 11, 1660, in which the priest mentions the courage of the indomitable Inheiguáras: “‘people of great determination and courage, and utterly averse to subjugation’ (Vieira).” Vieira was not praising the Inheiguáras as Costa’s quote would suggest; in context, the Jesuit was stating the difficulty of the campaign against them that Father Manuel Nunes had led for eight months in 1658, along with 450 allied Indians and 45 Portuguese soldiers. Vieira states, “‘the rebel’ Inheiguáras (rebellados), were “hunted, tracked down, surrounded, forced into submission, and most were taken [as slaves]’ (“buscados, achados, cercados, rendidos, e tomados quasi todos”; Vieira, 1854 [1660], 1: 79). Costa cites Vieira against Vieira; he alludes not to the victory over the savages but to the resistance and valor of the rebels. He reads against the grain of a triumphant Western imperial history and reopens the defeat of the “hunted, tracked down, surrounded” and enslaved Inheiguáras. In contrast to his contemporaries’ nationalist homages to European culture and colonization, Costa’s *Antropofagia* cannibalizes the historical archive. I do not mean to suggest that Costa was carrying out a Benjaminian reading of history *avant la lettre*, but that he did advance a critique—a *cannibal critique*—of the historical and symbolic colonialism of the national archive.38

Costa also devours the *História do Rio Amazonas* (1926) (History of the Amazon River) of the historian and geographer Henrique Américo Santa Rosa. Santa Rosa, an engineer by training and, like Costa, from the northern state of Pará, became one of the first historians of the Amazonia to approach the region from the point of view of the geopolitics of the Brazilian State. The early twentieth-century academic trend of geopolitics studied physical and human geography to directly inform the state’s civilizing and modernizing policies as well as the expansion of territorial domain.39 Santa Rosa is the historian-geographer of what Raymundo Moraes in his introduction to the *História* calls the “Far West brasileiro” (Santa Rosa, 1926: iii). Santa Rosa’s geo-history outlines the geographical space as well as the unfinished epic process of “civilization and progress” of the Amazonian region (i.e. its colonization), which began in the sixteenth century and which the modern nation-state was supposed to complete in the twentieth. As we know, both projects, sixteenth century colonialism and the internal neocolonialism of the twentieth, were faced with the “indigenous problem.” In Santa Rosa’s treatise, the indigenous—generally referred to as dispersed “tribes,” “hordes” (hordas), “hostile bands” (hostes bravias), and “savages” (selvagens) (1926: 72-75, 96)—are presented as just another challenge to the civilizing process, along with other happenstances of a difficult but promising geography.

Costa’s quote pertains to a fragment in which Santa Rosa recounts how the Maranhão Indians fiercely battled the Spanish conquistador Diego de Lepe (1460-1515) upon his arrival in Brazil in 1500, killing eleven of his men. Costa appropriates and resignifies Santa Rosa’s account of the event and deploys it against the neocolonialist geopolitics of the *História do Rio Amazonas* by invoking subaltern courage:

Against colonial servility, [...] the rosette-less heroism of the Caraíba ‘who fought the landing of Diogo de Lepe, charging against his vessels and reducing the number of his crew’ (Santa Rosa - *História do Rio Amazonas*).40

The rosette here refers to the Legion of Honor medalion. Costa zooms in on the resistance of the Caraíbas, and on their unrecognized valor, their courage that was never awarded a *Légion d’honneur* medal; that is, Costa...
simultaneously points out the anonymous indigenous heroism and its relegation to the dustbin of History.

For Costa, Brazil is not conceptualized as a residue of bygone colonialism, but rather as a contentious element of past and present colonial violence and exploitation; and certainly also a place where political, social, and cultural defiance have always been taking place —despite the tradition of national historiography to obliterate it. Costa chews up and de-authorizes the Occidentalism that informed both the sixteenth-century Jesuit and the twentieth-century geographer. In his rendering, countercolonial rebelliousness stands out as a fundamental element of national history. The textual incorporation of Vieira and Santa Rosa amounts, then, to a countercolonial cannibal critique of the national archive that accentuates oppositionality and resistance against the nation’s ontological subordination to a supposedly victorious Western modernity. Costa’s antagonistic reading of history, figuratively represented by the cannibal trope, corresponds to what we can call a digestive mode of thinking and reading defined not by subtraction but by critical incorporation; an example of what Walter Mignolo aptly calls border thinking, a “double critique” and an epistemic rupture, “in which the imaginary of the modern world system cracks” (2000: 23, 67-70). Costa’s critique of colonial modernity implies a reading/thinking from two traditions, and at the same time from neither of them: from modernity and against it, both consuming and contesting neocolonial historiography from within the pages of a modernist periodical, all the while savoring the erased resistance of the Caraíbas of the sixteenth century.

Other texts by Oswaldo Costa provide grist to the same countercolonial-modernist mill. In “Moquém I: Aperitivo” —in the fourth issue of the second denticção of the Revista— Costa inaugurates his column “Moquém” (“The Grill”) by roasting the recently published Retrato do Brasil: ensaio sobre a tristeza brasileira (1928). The author, Paulo Prado (1869-1943), was a member of São Paulo’s coffee aristocracy and a patron of Modernism since 1922. After Costa’s derisive negative review, Prado stopped speaking to him and also to Oswald de Andrade, whom he blamed (Aracy Amaral, 2003: 302). Retrato do Brasil is, Costa claims, dismal (“ruim”) and Prado is a “pious” and “romantic” artist who believes in “the eternalità” (“eternidade della”). Pointing out the colonial violence of Brazilian Modernity, this experience for Costa is a painful one.41

The difference between having and experiencing Western modernity from the periphery underscores both the ever-present issue of colonialism and the existence of asynchronous temporalities within Brazil. In this sense, Costa is entering into the cultural critique of colonial Modernity vis-à-vis the occluded peripheral projects of defiant alternative modernities —just as Enrique Dussel will later do with his notion of transmodernity [1999]. In other words, Costa fractures the alleged equivalence between the West and modernity and de-centers the colonial reason of Brazilian modernity. The European (or Euro-panized) America is the appearance of a colonial triumph behind which lies a “savages eating the Catechism” (“o selvagem comendo a catechese”), a cannibal who, far from being assimilated, resists by eating:

Let no one be fooled. Peace between the American man and European civilization is a Nheengahiba peace treaty. It can be read in [João Francisco] Lisbôa: “that osten- tatioucous peace with the Nheengahiba was nothing but a true imposture, [under which] the barbarians continue with their habitual savage lifestyle and customs, as de- voted to cannibalism as they were before [the treaty], and utterly oblivious to the Gospel’s light.” […] As one can see, it is very easy to be a cannibal. One just has to do away with the imposture (1928: 8).42

“Let no one be fooled,” Costa chides, for “peace between the American man and European civilization is a Nheengahiba peace treaty”; that is to say, America’s belonging to the West is deceptive. As evidence, Costa presents a fragment of the 1853 biography “The Life of Father Antônio Vieira in Brasil” (“Vida do padre Antônio Vieira no Brasil” 1853) by the Brazilian historian João Francisco Lisbôa (1812-1863). Lisbôa recounts the rebellion of the colonists against the Society of Jesus that re-
sulted in the expulsion of the Jesuits from Maranhão in 1661. By 1659, he says, the colonists were complaining about the “futility of the results obtained by the missions” in their negotiations to appease the Indians (“nullidade dos resultados colhidos pelas missões”), giving the example of the “ostentatious peace with the Nheengahiba” (1901 [1853], 469). That peace treaty, known as the “Acordo do rio Mapuí” (“Agreement of the Mapuí River” 1659), was negotiated by Vieira to pacify the Nheengahibas of the Island of Marajo (between the Tocatins and Pará Rivers). The Nheengahibas and other indigenous groups had allied with the Dutch against the Portuguese. The Jesuit managed to get the Nheengahibas, until then rebellious and “unconquerable,” to agree “to be vassals to the King of Portugal and to maintain a perpetual and inviolable peace,” to live in the settlements, and to not ally with the Dutch against the Portuguese (Vieira, 1: 81-91). In “De antropofagia,” another text from the second denu- ticação, Costa refers to this achievement as “Father Antônio Vieiera’s diplomatic scam” (“malandragem diplomática do padre Antônio Vieira”) (1929d: 9).

In “A ‘Descida’…” Costa calls attention to the failure of this treaty by citing Lisbôa, for whom that peace turned out to be as “ostentatious” (“apparatosa”) as it was inane: a “true imposture” because the cannibals continued to be cannibals. That the cultural inscription, the “peace” between the American man and European civilization, would be “Nheengahiba” means that the colonial conflict persists below the surface and that the civilizing triumph is neither complete nor definitive. Costa celebrates the continuity of the barbarianism that persists below the deceptiveness of the treaty. The paz nheengahiba of Latin American colonial modernity is perfidious: it hides a conflict, an obstinate barbarian remainder, an alter-modernity so to speak. As Silviano Santiago would eloquently explain, “Latin America places itself on the map of Western civilization thanks to a vigorous and destructive deviation from the norm, which transforms those given and immutable elements that Europeans exported to the New World” (1978: 18). According to Costa, our belonging to the West is conflictive and perfidious; our cloak of Euro-Western modernity hides a cannibal; clearly, Costa’s distinction between being and appearance (imposture) is essentialist and modern. Culture is both Nheengahiba rebelliousness and the servility of Japy Assu — resistance and assimilation, Tupi and not Tupi.

VERSES IN THE SAND

One of the most suggestive paragraphs of Costa’s “A ‘Descida’…” reiterates the topoi of the fragility and imposture of the colonial project:

These were the consequences of the sorry verses that [Father] Anchieta wrote in the sand [on the beach] of Ithanhæn: Ornerances of the Kingdom, grammar, and Da Vinci’s Supper in the dining room. And there was nobody yet to eat Anchieta! (Costa, 1928: 8).

The paragraph mentions the poetic work of José de Anchieta (1534-1597) and elliptically alludes to the peace treaty with the Tamoio-Tupinambá that would become known as the 1563 Armistice of Iperoig, drawn up a century before the treaty Vieira negotiated with the Nheengahiba.

In 1563 Jesuit missionaries Anchieta and Manoel da Nóbrega (1517-1570) wandered into hostile indigenous territory to pacify the Tamoio cannibals who —in confederation with several other tribes and allied with the French— were threatening to expel the Portuguese from São Vicente. The Indians received Anchieta and Nóbrega, but although interested in a possible agreement, they were prepared to continue the war. From June 21 to September 14, 1563, Anchieta had to stay in Iperoig (Ubatuaba) as a hostage of the Tamoio-Tupinambá, while Nóbrega returned to São Vicente with the chief Cunhambebe (son of the aforementioned Cunhambebe) to come to an agreement on the terms of the armistice (Hemming, 2007: 197-204). During his captivity, Anchieta “wrote in the sand” the verses that Costa calls “ruimzizinhos” (“sorry” or awful verses): De Beata Virgine Dei Matre Maria (1663). According to Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, Anchieta wanted to “occupy his imagination” and distance himself from the fear of being eaten by cannibals or seduced by their naked women (1889: 552); another form of being devoured. Lacking paper, Anchieta supposedly wrote his 5,902 verses to the Virgin in the sand and then memorized them to save them from the elements. This episode in Anchieta’s life is surely a hagiographic legend; one that made it into the colonial-national imagination as we can see in a well-known painting (1901) by Benedito Calixto de Jesus (1853-1927), famous for his nationalistic historical landscapes and scenes that idealized colonization (figure 5). In Calixto’s painting, Anchieta appears on a dreamy beach filled with stanzas written in the sand, immersed in the completion or correction of a verse, as a crowd of curious seagulls surround him and two indigenous men look on from a distance. It is unlikely that the Jesuit would have

O poema de Anchieta, 1901 (Oil on canvas 68x96 cm.). Benedito Calixto de Jesus (1853-1927) Colégio São Luis, São Paulo. Courtesy of the Museu de Arte Sacra dos Jesuítas.
written the poem in the sand and then rewritten it from memory. The verses were more likely composed after his liberation as payment on a promise to the Virgin. In the dedication of his poetic work, Anchieta explains the diplomatic-colonial circumstances of its composition: “Here you have them, Holy Mother, the verses that I once promised you, when, surrounded by ferocious enemies, my presence tamed the brave Tamoios and, defenseless, I negotiated the peace.”

Costa makes fun of Anchieta’s “versos ruimzizinhos” and he thus tacitly mocks the Iperoig Armistice to which those verses allude, i.e. the treaty that makes the founding of Rio de Janeiro (1565) possible and ultimately paves the way for the Portuguese colonization and Westernization of Brazil. Costa fractures the colonial-nationalistic pathos that became a common place in Brazilian history and that Calixto’s painting exalts. Rumzizinhos is the emphatic diminutive of ruim, meaning bad, so Costa is stating that the glorious verses to the Virgin are awful; the informal suffix gives the word an even more derisive tint that is lost in translation. So the verses do not even reach the bar for simply bad poetry, and yet they unleash a series of fateful consequences that Costa enumerates through metonymic references to the establishment of the political-juridical, cultural, and religious order of colonial Brazil: “Ordinances of the Kingdom, grammar, and Da Vinci’s Supper in the dining room.” In other words, following Anchieta’s verses came the imposition of Portuguese sovereignty and legislative codes (Ordenações do Reino), metropolitan disciplinary norms over language (gramática), and Catholicism—alluded to in the image of a copy of The Last Supper hanging in the family dining room.

This last image in the series, a local reproduction of the mural L’Última Cena (1495-1498), announces Modernism’s preoccupation with the question of the supposed inferiority of the copy. There are several famous examples of Brazilian bourgeois families commissioning important painters such as José Maria dos Reis Júnior (1903-1985) to create these reproductions for their dining rooms (figure 6); middle class or low-income families hung less expensive lithographs. In any case, what does it mean to hang, in an ordinary Brazilian dining room, a copy of an image of another dining room that is sacred and classic, the reproduction of an original work of art contemporary to the “Discovery” of the “New World”? On the one hand, it is a sign of the spiritual conquest of the Americas. On the other, the original universal Supper is consumed in the vernacular supper, such that the sign of the triumph of Christianity at the same time points to its subjugation to the “savage eating the Catechism.” Although probably unknown to Costa, an eloquent example of such decentering local consumption of the universal can be found in the work of painter Lídia Baís (1900-1985), contemporaneous to the Antropofagia movement: in her Última ceia de Jesus Cristo (“Last Supper of Jesus Crist”; ca. 1929), she inserts her own self-portrait next to the figure of Jesus Christ (figure 7).

Costa associates the Catholic anthropo-theophagy with the daily meal and both forms of literal consumption with the complex vicissitudes of symbolic consumption. Peripheral Occidentalism is always paradoxical. Let us recall that The Last Supper represents both the institution of the Eucharist (which is the invitation to repeat in its plenitude an “original” cannibal supper)
and the announcement of Judas’s betrayal (which is indeed the central theme of Da Vinci’s mural). The reproduction of Da Vinci’s painting in a Brazilian dining room is in and of itself a sign of cultural perfidy and of the tense space in-between which—as Silviano Santiago would say—the hierarchy between the original and the copy is destabilized by anthropophagic appropriation.

“FOUR CENTURIES OF BEEF. THE HORROR!”

Costa’s “A ‘Descida’ Antropophaga” ends with the surrealist phrase “Four centuries of beef. The Horror!” (“Quatro séculos de carne de vacca! Que horror!”). While the quotidian phrase “que horror” might be translated as an idiomatic expression of surprise or disbelief, by invoking the phrase ironically in reference to an economic and dietary staple of the nation, the phrase also comes across as literal. Notably, the author uses the expression carne de vaca instead of the more common carne de boi. “Carne de vaca” carries a negative connotation, as vaca (literally cow, the adult female of cattle) is cheaper and considered of inferior quality. Furthermore, in Portuguese vaca is a familiar trope for a person or thing that is continuously exploited (milked), and the word is also commonly deployed as a misogynist slur (i.e., slut, loose woman). So the literal evocation of “cow meat” here refers derisively to the meat from bovines—which not incidentally is one of the largest sectors of the Brazilian export economy. Hence the phrase functions as what Fernando Coronil would call a “complex metaphorical construct”: beef is a commodity steeped in colonial and neocolonial history and also a trope, signified by the productive relations of capitalism on the periphery; the phrase “carne de vacca” evokes a critical stance toward this context. The abjection provoked by the beef seems to be a symptom of modern discontent with Brazilian colonial modernity.

In Brazil, the introduction of cattle and the consumption of beef coincides with the beginning of Portuguese colonization: in the mid-1530s, the first heads of cattle were imported from the archipelago of Cabo Verde to São Vicente to meet the needs of the nascent sugar economy (Mariante and Cavalcante, 2000: 50-52). Colonialism Westernizes, reduces, and replaces cannibals with beef eaters. Cows are signs of progress.

At the moment when Costa writes, the cattle industry is one of the major economic forces driving neocolonial development in Brazil. The widespread process of agricultural modernization that began in the 1890s had transformed the Brazilian economy. With the emergence of the refrigeration industry in Brazil in the 1910s, beef exports surged and Brazil was on its way to becoming the top beef exporter in the world. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Brazil had nearly 23 million heads of cattle and only 17 million inhabitants. Modernization in those early decades spurred the growth of both figures. By 1920, there were just over 34 million cows as the population reached 30.5 million (IBGE, 2000: 221; 1990: 320). Brazilian modernism commonly expresses an exaggerated enthusiasm for industrial development within a still predominantly agricultural economy. We can actually appreciate some of this odd asynchronic modernist zest vis-à-vis agrarian capitalist development in the inadvertently literary words of Brazilian veterinarian Fernand Ruffier who—in his 1917 lecture at the Conferencia Nacional Pecunaria [National Conference on Livestock Farming]—grasps for poetic eloquence to describe...
Expressly rejects Primitivism and Romantic longing:...
received of as an epiphénomon or defective copy of Europe. Cannibalism, Costa argues, responds to the colonial dilemma of historical pseudomorphosis: “How? By eating.” In other words, faced with the “discontent” of the colonial problem, dissolving the difference between what is one’s own and what is foreign.55

Costa finds in cannibalism—precisely the trope that is inseparable from the othering of America and the axis of colonialism’s discursive machine—an Other modernity: cannibal modernity. Thus it is in Oswaldo Costa—and not so much in Oswald de Andrade—that we can catch sight of a decolonizing thought within Antropofagia, a cultural “emancipation” through consumption. I do not believe that Costa’s Antropofagia puts forth a “triumphalist interpretation of our backwardness” (“interpretação triunfalista de nosso atraso”), as Schwarz says of Andrade’s Modernism of the 1920s. In Costa, we find, rather, a utopian cannibal critique of colonial modernity articulated from the asynchronous and anomalous national experience of said modernity.

Costa’s Antropofagia is certainly culturalist, advanced from within the lettered city; nevertheless, it represents—through its insistent counter-colonialism—a contrast with many of his contemporaries’ rhetorical answers to the dialectics of neocolonial cultural dependency. Furthermore, Costa poses a serious challenge to the frivolity and political vacuity of several articulations of Antropofagia today, when it becomes a corporate slogan, triumphantly declaring the supposed cannibal identity of a globalized Brazil without acknowledging the excluded, the Sem Terra (the Landless), the Brazil of unbelievable favelas—the Brazil in which colonialism persists.56 If Antropofagia has become a sort of a jack of all trades, it is because with its canonization as a quasi-postmodern theory of consumption it has been emptied of politics, ignoring actual countercolonial formulations such as Oswaldo Costa’s, in which the political imagination of a transmodern utopia comes to the fore.

Costa represents an alternative voice that has been unfairly ignored by critics of Brazilian Modernism and marginalized from national cultural history. Not only did Costa cleverly address the still unresolved conflict of being part of Western colonial modernity, he delved into the conflicting experience of peripheral Occidentalism. Costa also advanced, as no other antropofagista did, a decolonizing thought that dared to challenge the Eurocentric monologue of the colonial (and certainly, as he put it, “idiotic”) formulas that still define the modern myths of civilization and progress.

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For Joshua Lund and David Solodkow, Cannibals.

Translated by Juliet Lynd

NOTES

1 “É difícil dizer no que consiste exatamente a Antropofagia, que Oswald nunca formulou, embora tenha deixado elementos suficientes para vermos embaixo dos aforismos alguns princípios virtuais, que a integram numa linha constante [...]: a descrição do choque de culturas”. All translations are ours unless otherwise noted.

2 Antropofagia has been associated with emancipatory reinscription and postcolonial “mimicry” (‘a la Homi Bhabha), and it is often referred to as an anti-colonial proposal or an attempt at decolonization and cultural emancipation from colonialism and Eurocentrism (see for example Rodríguez-Núñez, 2003: 1095-1109; Giuseppe Cocco, 2008: 57-74; Else Vieira, 1999: 95-113). Eduardo Viveiros de Castro maintains that Antropofagia is “the most original meta-cultural theory ever produced in Latin America to the present day and the only anti-colonial contribution that we have produced” (Viveiros de Castro, 2008: 25). In Lúcia Sá’s estimation, “Andrade transformed Tupi ritualistic cannibalism into a statement of postcolonial cultural appropriation” (2004: xx). Likewise, Lesley Wylie notes that for Antropofagia, cannibalism is a process much like the recycling, criolization and parody of imperial tropes “to produce the founding fictions of the postcolonial nation,” and she argues that these strategies “resemble techniques in postcolonial writing outside the Americas. Bhabha for instance” (2009: 16, 17). Roberto Fernández-Retamar corrects his 1971 essay Caliban to include Andrade in his list of the Calibans of his intellectual genealogy: “in 1971 I was not yet aware of his work [...]. When I began to familiarize myself with the work of this Brazilian, I incorporated him into my own writing” (“en 1971 yo desconocía aún su obra [...]. Cuando empecé a familiarizarme con la faena..."
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Oswaldo Costa, Antropofagia, and the Cannibal Critique of Colonial Modernity • 13

As I have argued elsewhere, “The majority of critics have placed Antropofagia in the paradigm of synthesis and they compare it—although not always explicitly—to what Fernando Ortiz called transculturation (1940). […] Both Antropofagia and transculturation served as model metaphors of integration between the national vernacular culture, modernizing impulses, and “external” influences (as in Angel Rama’s ars combinato- rio); both tropes have functioned as discursive tools of identifi- cation and cultural self-perception within modernity; and both defined the role of the intellectual as a modernizing cultural agent or mediator (antropófago, transculturator, cultural trans- lator, etc.)” (Jáuregui, 2008: 429). Haroldo de Campos, for ex- ample, maintains that with Antropofagia one thinks the national dialogically as “transculturation; better yet, a ‘transvalorization’” (“transculturação; melhor ainda, uma ‘transvaloração’”) (1981: 11; 1987: 45-53). For Augusto de Campos, Antropofagia consti- tutes “the only original Brazilian philosophy and, in some ways, the most radical of the literary movements we have pro- duced” (“a única filosofia original brasileira e, sob alguns aspectos, o mais radical dos movimentos literários que produzimos”) (1978: 124). Silviano Santiago sees in Antropofagia a kind of deauthorization of the hierarchical distinction between the “original” and the copy and between the center and the periphery (1978: 20, 26). Eloisa Barbosa and Lia Whyler argue that Antropofagia is a Latin American theory of translation (1998: 326-332).

The modernist task, as Andrade put it in an earlier manifesto, was to synchronize the outdated clock (“Acertar o relógio”) of national culture (literature and the arts) without surrendering Brazilian cultural specificity (“Manifesto de Poesia Pau Brasil”) (“Manifesto of Brazilian Poetry”) 1924). For Antropofagia the synchronizing mechanism was cultural cannibalism, as the cannibal represented both incorporation of the foreign but also the affirmative resistance of local difference.

Cultural consumption was not “proposed” in Andrade’s “Mani- festo” though: it was elaborated elsewhere. For example, in an interview on May 18, 1928, contemporaneous to the “Manifesto,” Andrade notes: “We should assimilate all of the stillborn aesthetic tendencies of Europe, assimilate them, elaborate on them, in our subconscious, and produce a new thing, our thing” (“Deviamos assimilar todas as natimortas tendências estéticas de Europa, assimilá-las, elaborá-las, em nosso subconsciente, e produzirmos coisa nova, coisa nossa”: 1990d: 44). In the second issue of the Revista, Andrade states: “This editorial note: ‘Anc­ intermittent need to acute the gathering of the dominant discourses of the modern/ colonial world system. This discursive field produces not only the invention of barbaric peripheries (Africa, America, etc.), but also of the West itself as a privileged space-time construction. Occidentalism accounts for the configuration of Europe and later of the United States as geopolitical hegemonic entities; according to this discursive field, the history of the rest of the world must be synchronized to the history of the West. Furthermore, Occidentalism selectively claims the civilizing mission for the West, brands the signifier of race as a key to classify humanity, and opposes civilization to a humanity that is archaic, pre-rational, and degenerate (Mignolo, 2000).

Referring to the first denúncia of the Revista de Antropofagia, Oswald de Andrade notes: “There was no renovation, there was orthodoxy. Alcântara did not understand the meaning of the movement. He thought it was just a prank and for months he published amusing futilities. Evidently I was wrong to have him invited to direct the Revista.” This situation had changed by the second denúncia: “Now things are quite different”—Os- wald writes to Drummond—“Raul Bopp and Oswaldo Costa, reliable and authentic Cunhambebes, are running [the Revista]” (“não houve transformação e sim ortodoxia. O Alcântara não entendeu o sentido do movimento. Ele pensou que era troça e por meses publicou futilidades alegres. Evidentemente eu fui errado ao convocar para dirigir a revista. Agora ele é outro. Estão à frente Raul Bopp e Oswaldo Costa, cunhambebes autênticos e leais”; Drummond and Andrade, 1986: 101).

The full quote reads: “Short, dark, clean-shaven, the editorial writer for the Correio Paulistano [i.e. Costa]阊 whom everyone deliberations; he was very objective and when he spoke in the editorial committee he settled any question that was on the table for discussion. It was he who articulated the [editorial] deci- sions and formulated a serious critique [in the Revista], as if it were a well-established publication […]. Oswaldo Costa is the one who laid the foundation of the anthropophagic barbecue in
fazemos é reagir contra a civilização que inventou o catalogo, o
séculos. Dolorosa e páo. Com Direito Romano, canal de Veneza,
cultura, estamos dentro da cultura. Que besteira. O que temos
comer Noé. "Deus
length of perception, making them anew, as if we were seeing
ject objects "strange" or "unfamiliar," increasing the difficulty and
lovsky indicated, the technique of art is to make familiar ob-
zation or of the signifier "Descida." As Victor Shk-
ostranenie (literaly Peters) as "POR
mascots (literally Peters) as "PEROS"
(Refugees) as "POR
exame de consciência e o crime de defloramento. SOMOS
JAPY ASSU." We translate PEROS (literally Peters) as "POR
27 "[B]rasileiros e latino-americanos fazemos constantemente a
experiência de caráter postico, inautêntico, imitado da vida cul-
tural que levamos […] sentimento da contradição entre a reali-
dade nacional e o prestigio ideológico dos países que nos
servem de modelo."
28 Note Costa’s mockery of jurists like Joaquim Nabusco, Tobias
Barreto and Ruy Barbosa as well as of the Kantian a priori syn-
thetic judgment.
29 In 1917 several young writers had defended Malfatti’s work
against the conservative attacks of critic Bento Monteiro Loba-
to (1882-1948). This debate fostered a certain group spirit
among the young Modernists and encouraged the desire for cul-
tural synchrony with European Modernity that would later
come to fruition in the 1922 Semana de Arte Moderna.
30 In “A Descida” Antropófaga, Costa refers to these paintings
probably without having seen them and having heard about
them only second hand (from Mario de Andrade). In September
1928 Malfatti returned to São Paulo and showed both
paintings in her solo exhibition in February 1929.
31 “[O] mal dos nossos escritores é estudar o Brasil do ponto de
vista falso, da falsa cultura e da falsa moral do ocidente. A men-
talidade reinól, de que não se libertaram.”
32 “[F]icou no acidental, no acaso, existiu-se a uma simples
revolução estética—cosa horribil—quando sua função era criar
no Brasil o pensamento novo brasileiro. […] Continuemos, ainda
depois, escravos de Occidente, escravos do catolicismo, escravos
dela europeia cansado de pôrde. […] A nossa historia continu-ão a ser escrita como as patranhas dos padres […] Pensamento
no novo não creamos. Continuou o pensamento velho de impor-
tação. Comido pela broca do Ocidente. O grande erro dos mod-
emistas foi esse. A preocupação estética exclusiva. […] Eles não
compreenderam que todo era preciso vir abaxo. A falsa arte. A
falsa [historia]. […] Não compreenderam as cruzadas, as guerras,
as lutas econômicas. […] Aceitaram uma porção de fórmulas idi-
otas: que isto é civilização; e aquilo é progresso.”
33 On the contrary, Oswald de Andrade usually embraced those
formulas (the myth of progress, in particular) in the 1920s as
well as in his later essays on Antropofagia written in the 1940s
and 1950s.
34 As I have discussed elsewhere, Romantic Indianism exalted the
postcolonial Indian collaborator (i.e. José de Alencar’s Indian
protagonists Inacema or Peri), while the Modernist Neo-Indianism
symbolically identified with the defiant Indian (Jáuregui, 2008:
415).
35 The speech is documented by the Capuchin missionary Claude
d’Abbeville in his Histoire de la mission des pères capucins en l’île de Maragnan et terre circonvoisins (1967). “This venerable old
man Japi-açu was remarkably attentive to the aforementioned
speech, as were all of the other Indians present, and he respond-
ed thus: ‘I am extremely pleased to see you and I will never go
back on my word. I’m so surprised, however, that you Fathers
do not desire women. Have you descended from Heaven? Are
you born to a man and a woman? What? Are you not mortal like
us? From whence do you come that not only do you not take
women like the other Frenchmen who have done business with
us for the last forty-some years; but you also now impede your
friends from helping themselves to our daughters, which for us
would be a great honor, for they could have children?’ (“Ce
venerable vieillard Japi Ouassou fut merveilleusement attentif,
d’Abbeville et terres circonvoisins” We translate
JAPI ASSU.” We translate

PEROS que ainda existem entre nós há de sorrir por seus

PEROS que ainda existem entre nós há de sorrir por seus

PEROS que ainda existem entre nós há de sorrir por seus
les emepchez maintenant de se servir de nos filles: ce que nous estimions a grand honneur et grandheur, pouvans en avoir des enfant”’”, Claude d’Abbeville, “Histoire de la Mission des Pères Capucins en l’Isle de Maragnan et terres circonvoicines”; quoted in Costa, 1928: 8).

36 “Contra o servilismo colonial, o tacape inheiguára, ‘gente de grande resolução e valor e totalmente impaciente de sujeição’ (Vieira), o heróico sem roseta de Comendador dos carahybas, ‘que se opuseram a que Diogo de Lepe desembarcasse, instindo contra as caravelas e reduzindo o numero de seus tripulantes’ (Santa Rosa - ‘Historia do Rio Amazonas’). Ninguém se iluda. A paz do homem americano com a civilização européia é a paz nheengahiba.”

37 This weapon is also known as iserwa pemme.

38 By referring to Costa’s challenge to the national archive, I am not implying or assuming the existence of a constant, static, already-present repository, I am pointing out a hegemonic series of narratives and images that, according to Costa, support and reenact colonialism and the false distinction between civilization and barbarism, obscuring countercolonial resistance. In other words, Costa quotes / reads / deverts hegemonic historical texts and the fractures of their colonial teleology. Certainly, by re-reading classics of Brazilian history, such as father Vieira’s letters, Costa does not move into alternative forms of non-hegemonic epistemic systems or—as Diana Taylor calls them—repertoires of embodied knowledge. Costa’s is a cannibal reader, but one who nonetheless sits at the table of the Lettered City.

39 According to Cardoso Moraes: “In Pará the works of Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) circulated along with those of older authors such as Friedrich Humboldt (1769-1859) and Carl Ritter (1779-1859), who at the time were considered pioneers of German geopolitics, later taken up by Karl Haushofer (1869-1946). It is worth noting that both geography and political science as practiced at the time in Germany and Switzerland turned toward a reading of the State as a fundamental political agent in the definition of space, territory, and the natural resources of the nation. In other words, it is possible to affirm that Geopolitics was consolidated, in the first decades of the twentieth century, as a study in strategy, manipulation, and action of the so-called Nation States” (“Circulava no Pará, os trabalhos de Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) e autores mais antigos como Friedrich Humboldt (1769-1859) e Carl Ritter (1779-1859), nomes então apontados como os pioneiros nos da geopolítica alemã, que mais tarde seria retomada por Karl Haushofer (1869-1946). Importante notar que tanto a geografia como a ciência política que se praticava então na Alemanha e na Suécia voltavam-se para a leitura do Estado como agente político fundamental na definição do espaço, do território e dos recursos naturais de uma nação. Em outras palavras, é possível afirmar que Geopolítica foi consolidada, nos primeiros décadas do século XX, como o estudo da estratégia, da manipulação, da ação dos chamados Estados Nacionais” (Cardoso Moraes, 2011: 1).

40 Costa quotes this text from Santa Rosa’s ‘Historia do Rio Amazonas’ (1926: 75).

41 As indicated elsewhere, “territorial devastation, slavery, genocide, plundering, and exploitation name just some of the most immediate and notorious consequences of colonial expansion. Social and class relations were shaped by what Sergio Baguí called the ‘ominous presence of the colonial reality’” (Moraña, Dussel and Jáuregui 2008: 2).


43 In a letter dated February 11, 1660, the “pacifying” Jesuit wrote to the King, referencing the treaty: “By this means, the Crown and your Majesty’s estates prospered, because those who con sider the success of this enterprise, with their eyes not only on heaven but also on earth, are certain that on this day the con quest of the Maranhão Region was completed, because with the Nheengahibas as enemies, Pará would fall to any foreign nation that would unite with them; and with the Nheengahibas as vassals and as friends, Pará is safe, and impenetrable to any alien power” (“por este meio acresceram a coroa e estados de vossa magestade, porque os que consideram a felicidade desta em preza, não só com os olhos no céu, senão também na terra, tem por certo que neste dia se acabou de conquistar o Estado do Maranhão, porque com os nheengahibas por inimigos seria o Pará de qualquer nação estrangeira que se confederasse com elles; e com os nheengahibas por vassalos e por amigos, fica o Pará seguro, e impenetrável a todo o poder estranho”); A. Vieira 1854-1855 [1660]: 1: 90).

44 “A América Latina institui seu lugar no mapa da civilização ocidental graças ao movimento de desvio da norma, ativo e destruidor, que transfigura os elementos feitos e imutáveis que os europeus exportavam para o Novo Mundo.”

45 “Foram estas as consequências dos versos ruimzinhos que Anchieta escreveu na areia de Ithahanah: Ordenações do Reino, gramática e ceia de Thursday no día de jantar. E não houve ainda quem comesse Anchieta!”


47 By the turn of the twentieth century, beef was a common source of protein for the urban middle classes and the elites, but for the popular classes, beef, or at least fresh beef, remained an expensive luxury.

48 I have borrowed from Coronil’s remarkable analysis of the use of commodities as material metaphors in Fernando Ortiz’s Contrapunteo.

49 “National frozen- and chilled-beef exports increased dramatically, from a negligible 1.5 tonnes in 1914 to over 65,000 tonnes by 1917. [...] By 1919 the industry was established and would become a significant economic sector over the following decades” (Robert Wilcox 2013: 76). Brazil soon becomes one of the major beef suppliers within the international division of labor. For a detailed historical account of this economic transformation and the emergence and modernization of the beef industry in Brazil see Joana Medrado Nascimento (2013).

50 “30.000.000 de bois são uma coisa estupenda, um reservatório inesgotável, uma maravilha dos nossos dias, um...” I leave the rest to the reader, but suffice to say that on this day, and that if it had been sunny out that day, the reverse would have happened (Andrade, 1978: 177).

51 “Penso que não se deve confundir volta ao estado natural (o que se quer) com volta ao estado primitivo (o que não interessa). O que se quer é simplicidade e não um novo codigo de simplicidade. Naturalidade, não manuais de bom tom. Contra a beleza canônica, a beleza natural - feia, bruta, agreste, bárbara, illógica. Instinto contra o verniz. O selvagem sem as missangas da cathecese. O selvagem comendo a cathecese.”

52 Costa swore of “‘falso moro’” (“false African” “‘preconceito racionalista’”), and he affirmed “‘National frozen- and chilled-beef exports increased dramatically, from a negligible 1.5 tonnes in 1914 to over 65,000 tonnes by 1917. [...] By 1919 the industry was established and would become a significant economic sector over the following decades” (Robert Wilcox 2013: 76). Brazil soon becomes one of the major beef suppliers within the international division of labor. For a detailed historical account of this economic transformation and the emergence and modernization of the beef industry in Brazil see Joana Medrado Nascimento (2013).

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54 “Brasil ocidentalizado é, por tanto, um caso de pseudomorfose histórica (Consuelo de Spengler). Só a antropofagia consegue resolvê-lo. Como: comendo-o” (Costa, 1929a: 1).
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