



## Cannibals, Crabs, and Carmen Miranda

How Brazilian Modernists Keep On Unsettling Modernity

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## How Brazilian Modernists Keep On Unsettling Modernity

Elisa Veini

1. I am concerned with conceptual assessments of the show, not with its spatial installation.
2. Paulo Herkenhoff, 'Introdução geral', XXIV Bienal de São Paulo: *Antropofagia e Histórias do Canibalismo*, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, 1998, p 36. Herkenhoff advances his case in a footnote, which introduces a further difference: 'When applied in the sense of a historical concept of Brazilian culture, the noun Antropofagia will appear with the first letter in upper case, *despite* Oswald's *Revista de antropofagia* having adopted a different spelling' (emphasis added). I will follow the current practice of using simply 'cannibalism' to signify the artistic strategy of the Brazilian modernists.

The 24th Biennale of São Paulo in 1998 was organised around the concept of cannibalism. Glancing through the exhibition catalogue, I felt excited. There were not only key Cannibalist works such as the big-footed *Abaporú* of Tarsila do Amaral or Hélio Oiticica's interactive colour installation *Tropicália*, but also international modern and contemporary classics like the hollow men of Giacometti, Bruce Nauman's video *Anthropology – eat me, feed me*, and Tony Oursler's devouringly and detestably shouting couples.<sup>1</sup> Was this a promise for a curatorial exercise in irony, inversion, and intertextuality in the true spirit of the Brazilian modernist movement from the 1920s? In his *Manifesto antropófago*, or Cannibalist Manifesto, one of the prominent of the group, Oswald de Andrade, had written a virtually inexhaustible programme for unbound imagination on which successive generations of artists have drawn ever since.

A good deal of my Cannibalist joy cooled down when I learned that not only did the governing and sponsoring bodies see the show in the first place as a *national* project but that Paulo Herkenhoff, the chief curator, also shared this view. He decided to use cannibalism as a means to 'observe contemporary art and history through the lens of Brazilian culture'. He ensured this interest by explicitly drawing a dividing line between cannibalism as 'the symbolic practice, whether real or metaphoric, of the devourement of the other' and *antropofagia* as 'a Brazilian cultural tradition'.<sup>2</sup> But how did the principally unsettling strategy of cannibalism become involved in such rigidly defined national meanings? This essay attempts to clarify the point and to question the reading of cannibalism as an all-assimilating cultural practice that fits into Brazil's national imagery as a harmonious society as well as to suggest another framing of modernity and cannibalism. I will argue that one needs to remain aware of the critical potential of the Cannibalist strategy and its commitment to contesting and undermining all definitions. This could make its modernist ways a critique of modernity.

## ONLY ANTHROPOPHAGY UNITES US. SOCIALLY. ECONOMICALLY. POLITICALLY<sup>3</sup>

Conceptually, the backbone of Herkenhoff's nationally vested interest is to be found in Gilberto Freyre's contribution to the making of Brazil's modern 'imaginary community'. Freyre first articulated his idea of *mestigaçem*, or of a harmonious 'racial democracy', in the 1920s, after which it was fostered to become a national ideology. The idea continues to be influential. To mention just one example which is particularly relevant with regard to Herkenhoff, cultural anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro follows the Freyrean theme of Brazil's assimilative capacity in mixing 'races' when he claims that Brazilians are a new and *unique* mixture: 'happier, because more suffering. Better, because it incorporates more humanity. More generous, because it is open to a coexistence with all the races and all the cultures and because it lives in the most beautiful and luminous part of the Earth.'<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting that Herkenhoff employs this very kind of rhetoric in order to distinguish one cannibalism from another. Brazilian modernist cannibalism becomes to be seen as an all-devouring, all-assimilating practice, which, therefore, is unique among world cultures and important for the Brazilian national consolidation. The coevalness of these two sets of ideology is illustrative. Biological arguments become fused with cultural ones and together they are seen as the main constituent of the positive ethos of the modern Brazilian nation ('national pride').

But Herkenhoff and his critics are far from alone with this. Ruben Oliven, in his discussion of Brazilian modernity, finds a way of both criticising and affirming such a view. First, he is aware of the unsustainability of what might be called the 'out of place' argument. There, Brazil is seen to be able to assimilate foreign elements only in an unsuccessful or incomplete way. Next, Oliven asks if anything, ever, anywhere is 'in place' and if cultures, rather, are not put together from incongruent elements. So far so good. But when he then goes on to say that, once in a new environment, these unfitting particulars start to adapt and 'enter a new place', he is already committing to Freyre. Oliven follows thus: 'One of the creative aspects of the Brazilian cultural dynamics is precisely the capacity to direct what comes from outside, re-elaborate it and give it its own characteristics, transforming it into something different and new.'<sup>5</sup>

Still another framing of Brazilian modernism is useful to mention here, because it takes the discussion directly back to cannibalism. Gwen Kirkpatrick has argued that the feeling of 'belatedness' was decisive for the emergence of Latin American modernity. The awareness of Latin Americans that their own modernist projects would be evaluated as bad copies by the European and North American gatekeepers made them want to reassert their uniqueness by doing something different. And that was to become cannibalism.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the 'belatedness' theme is just another variation of the national exaltation in the *mestigaçem/cannibalism* imagery.

Cannibalism, for Kirkpatrick, was the modernists' way of doing away with their low self-esteem by 'claiming their right to assimilate whatever they pleased'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Kirkpatrick sees cannibalism as a self-conscious ambition to 'catch up' with the West. She evaluates this as an emerging

3. *Só a antropofagia nos une. Socialmente. Economicamente. Filosoficamente.* All headings are taken from the *Manifesto antropofágico* (Cannibalist Manifesto), by Oswald de Andrade, 1928, reprinted in *Third Text*, no 46, spring 1999. See also [www.agencetopo.qc.ca/carnages/manifeste.html#manifeste](http://www.agencetopo.qc.ca/carnages/manifeste.html#manifeste) (originally in *Revista de antropofagia*, no 1, year 1, May 1928).

4. Darcy Ribeiro, *O povo brasileiro. A formação e o sentido do Brasil*, Companhia das Letras, São Paulo, 1995, p 455.

5. Ruben Oliven, 'Brazil: The Modern in the Tropics', in *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, edited by Vivian Schelling, Verso, London and New York, 2000, p 54.

6. Gwen Kirkpatrick, 'Vanguards in Latin America' in Vivian Schelling, ed, *ibid*, p 180.

7. *Ibid*, p 181.



Gay parade of Northeast Brazil in Salvador, Bahia in 2002. Photo by Paul van der Stap

subaltern agency, or awareness of one's difference and uniqueness. This sounds contradictory to me. If one rejects a negative evaluation in order to show that one can do better, then this negative opinion (or its source) still serves as a point of reference and the autonomy is won only for as long as the other rejected pole exists. I will return to this point later on. It is, at present, sufficient to recapitulate the argument thus far. It is not my intention to deny that cannibalism has contributed to the articulation of the Brazilian nation as an 'imagined community' of 'a deep, horizontal comradeship'<sup>8</sup> but I am critical of the ways it is taken for granted that this intention was included in de Andrade's design of the Cannibalist project. How, then, did and do Cannibalist modernists relate to the modern Brazilian nation?

8. Benedict Anderson,  
*Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition, Verso, London and New York, 1991, p 7 and p 202.

9. *Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros.*

10. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1988, p 131.

### **ROUTES. ROUTES. ROUTES. ROUTES. ROUTES. ROUTES. ROUTES<sup>9</sup>**

There is little doubt that cannibalism has been the modernists' catchphrase for the re-elaboration of *all kinds* of cultural elements, not only those of European modernism but equally those of popular culture. But, in my view, it is reductive to see herein a will to forge a new image of an all-assimilating and therefore unique national culture. Rather, I choose to regard cannibalism as an artistic strategy that reflected on the national culture and society. Furthermore, to my understanding this relationship depended on the specific social, cultural, and political contexts of each period. What is at stake here, then, is not an ability (Oliven) or a desire to achieve a national version of modernity (Kirkpatrick), but a *strategy* that questions such desire by ironising its purifying and harmonising tendency. All through the line, the Cannibalist practice results in taking 'pleasure in cultural impurities'.<sup>10</sup> This

cannibalism does not assimilate whatever it comes across, or do away with tensions, but rather it knows perfectly well where to bite and how to remain conscious of differences, contradictions and discrepancies.

### THE NINETEEN-TWENTIES

By the time de Andrade first articulated his programme for ‘export poetry’ in *Manifesto do pau-brasil* (1925), and soon thereafter his major Cannibalist programme in *Manifesto antropófago* (1928), the Brazilian elite had succeeded in forging in the centre of the capital city, Rio de Janeiro, a façade of nineteenth-century Paris. The project had been led by architects who had worked on Haussmann’s Parisian master plan. This unreal city was detached from the rest of the country. The ideals were European: French culture presented the exemplary civilisation. The mainly rural and regionally oriented Brazil and its popular cultures were neglected as backward and underdeveloped.

In the meanwhile, a very different vision of Brazilian culture and society was developing in São Paulo, the first modern metropolis of the country. There, de Andrade and his fellow modernists shared with the visiting French avant-gardes not only an admiration for the popular cultures of interior Brazil – hence: *pau-brasil*, the brazilwood from which the country has derived its name – including the north-eastern backlands, but they also had the same taste for modernisation and its products.<sup>11</sup> This involved a twofold strategy: they embraced modernisation, the culture industry and commercialisation, but rejected the dualistic ideology that went with the products. Cannibalism emerged in the manifesto as a strategy of inverting the set-up façades of Brazilian civilisation: in its revaluation of the man-eating myth, it decided on savagery. Therein, it was akin to European avant-gardist surrealism, which enriched artistic imagery with psychoanalysis, world cultures, and hallucinogenic drugs. The Cannibalist devouring has its counterpart in the Surrealist dream logic and also in Dadaism, which unsettled language with onomatopoeics and associations solely based on sound.

More interesting than to ask who was influencing whom and where the whole avant-gardist lot originated, I think, is to view the Brazilian Cannibalist modernism and the European Surrealist and Dadaist avant-gardes as twin movements or parallel streams that were each developing in their own particular context, while ideas – and artists – travelled back and forth between Europe and Latin America. De Andrade’s famous phrase, ‘national is universal’, would seem to resonate with this double-sense. Local cultures were seen as being as valuable a source as international currents. By being transnational, the Cannibalists came to redefine the scope of Brazilian arts but they were not involved in formulating a national ideology. Instead, their outspoken artistic strategy was a means to reflect on the prevailing thinking about the nation and the practices that followed from such thinking. Cannibalism did not earn much support among the elites, because the cannibalists were not supporting the way elites saw the nation. And as for the people behind the popular cultures they so much admired, the avant-gardist experience was incongruent with the social reality of the poor. In a certain sense, the Cannibalist time was still to come.

11. Nicolau Sevcenko, ‘Peregrinations, Visions and the City: From Canudos to Brasília, the Backlands become the City and the City becomes the Backlands’, in Vivian Schelling, ed, op cit, pp 75–107.

## FROM THE LATE SIXTIES ONWARDS

In the 1960s, an emerging cultural wave leaned heavily on the ideas of de Andrade and the modernist experience of his group. Caetano Veloso recalls how in 1967 the 'fake Bahian' diva Carmen Miranda inspired the birth of the Tropicalist movement. She represented to him and his companions the ambivalences of the 1960s and the preceding decade: she was a source of a secret pride as well as that of shame, she was grotesque in her stylised *baiana* dress which ridiculed the Afro-Brazilian culture, and she had made a big career in the US, something what had not happened with many Latin American artists so far. Carmen Miranda was a source of discomfort in her combination of vulgarity and elegance, local culture and its Hollywoodisation.<sup>12</sup> When choosing Carmen Miranda as one of its main protagonists, the Tropicalists were drawing on the earlier modernist strategy of Cannibalisation. *Tropicália ou panis et circencis* (1968), the first recorded manifestation of the new movement, owes its name to Oiticica's installation that had a red brazilwood colour – perhaps a wink at Yves Klein's shocking blue. 'Carmen Miranda da-da dada' is the closing line on the record, which combines the American musical with Catholic Church chants, tango, Viennese waltzes, and Afro-Brazilian rhythms, among others. According to Veloso, Dada 'was the unaestheticised unconscious, the nonexplanation of the inexplicable'.<sup>13</sup> That the acoustic Dada poetics, rather than the visual plays of Surrealism, should attract the Tropicalists is understandable, because the Tropicalist group practised mainly music and performative arts.

The social and political climate again played a decisive role. The military-run state had an iron idea of what Brazil was or should be. This included, among other things, a selective valuation of popular culture. The *mestigaçem* idea had become normative, and it cost little effort to establish a national cultural canon based on samba, football, and carnival. At the same time, Brazil was boasting of its economic growth and industrialisation. This face of a festive, progressive nation concealed an increasing repression of civil and political rights and a climate of fear, while social inequality and regionally uneven development persisted as severely as ever before.

The critical contents of the Tropicalist lyrics were often only implicit but, even so, they earned the Tropicalist musicians Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso expulsion from the country. At the other end of the political spectrum, the Left fell under suspicion of Tropicalism for its use of electric guitars, instruments of the imperialist enemy.<sup>14</sup> The Tropicalists responded to the pressure to take sides by refusing any clearly defined style or rhythm, while provocatively employing various oppressed or neglected musical traditions.<sup>15</sup> In a parallel way, their intertextual play with words and meanings undermined the possibility of fixed positions.

A line from a song by Tom Zé, another Tropicalist of the first hour, is illustrative.<sup>16</sup> *Com quantos kilos de medo se faz uma tradição?* ('How many kilos of fear are needed to make a tradition?') can be read at least in three different ways. In a first reading, the military government is an agent imposing its 'pure' culture or tradition by arousing fear. The line includes a clear hint at the technocratic mindset

12. Caetano Veloso, 'Carmen Mirandadada', in *Brazilian Popular Music & Globalization*, edited by Charles A Perrone and Christopher Dunn, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2001, pp 39–45.

13. Ibid, p 44.

14. Christopher Dunn, 'Tropicália, Counterculture, and the Diasporic Imagination in Brazil', in *Brazilian Popular Music & Globalization*, ibid, p 78.

15. John J Harvey, 'Cannibals, Mutants, and Hipsters: The Tropicalist Revival', in *Brazilian Popular Music & Globalization*, ibid, pp 109–10, p 76.

16. 'Senhor Cidadão', on *Se o caso é chorar*, 1972.

of the regime: in their quantifying frenzy, even fear becomes counted in kilos. In a second reading, people want to preserve (or make) their own tradition in the face of an oppressive and censoring government. What they fear is violent repression. This might be a reference to the Tropicalist support of the emerging cultural and political visibility of Afro-Brazilians. In a third reading, and perhaps the most interesting of all, Zé is himself asking how far he has to go in order to be allowed to make his own ‘tradition’. Here, ‘tradition’ can refer to the Tropicalist elaborations on the Cannibalist modernism of the earlier decades. The cannibalist ironising strategy is also employed in dismantling fear by spelling the word *medo*, as it is pronounced, thus with an ê. Hence, Zé refuses to be caught by fear or the authorities.

### AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

17. Tom Zé, ‘Prezada senhora governadora do Maranhão’, *Caros amigos*, 2001, no. 47, p 7.
18. Larry Crook, ‘Turned-Around Beat: *Maracatu de Baque Virado* and Chico Science’, in *Brazilian Popular Music & Globalization*, *ibid*, p 233. Manguebeat website: <http://elogica.br.inter.net/mlyra/mangue.html>
19. Perrone and Dunn, *ibid*, p 29.
20. Christopher Dunn, ‘Tropicália, Counterculture, and the Diasporic Imagination in Brazil’, in *Brazilian Popular Music & Globalization*, *ibid*, p 88.
21. Frederick Moehn, ‘“Good Blood in the Veins of This Brazilian Rio”, or a Cannibalist Transnationalism’, in *Brazilian Popular Music & Globalization*, *ibid*, p 262.
22. Chico Science died in a car accident in 1997. Originally, the complete name of the group was Chico Science & Nação Zumbi.

In an open letter addressed to Roseana Sarney, who was then the governor of the north-eastern state of Maranhão, Zé complains about the present ‘folklorisation’ of the regional culture that aims at fabricating a clean, commercial, and easily consumable product. In his own musical upbringing, Zé writes, the decisive person was the head of his university who contracted Europeans to teach in order to let the young Bahians absorb various kinds of artistic influences and not restrict them to the Brazilian – or just Bahian – scene.<sup>17</sup>

Zé’s lamentation resonates with the current Recife-based Mangue movement that shares the earlier Cannibalist-modernists’ commitment to fusionism and resistance to reductionist definitions. Available readings on the movement’s musical arm, Manguebeat, clearly struggle with the difficulty of labelling. Refuge is sought in awkward listings like the following:

Artists identified with the northeast’s cultural roots but refused to remain ‘premodern’ and thus also identified with global youth culture, cyberspace, and international pop. . . . The mangue beat movement explicitly sought to forge a new musical aesthetic by mixing US popular music forms (funk, rock, metal, punk, rap, and hip-hop) and world-beat influences with a variety of musical traditions from northeastern Brazil, especially the percussion-heavy Afro-Pernambucan Carnival tradition known as *maracatu de baque virado*, or the turned-around beat.<sup>18</sup>

Other critics just run out of breath and keep it to ‘fusing’,<sup>19</sup> or remind the reader of the affinities with the Tropicalists, 1970s counterculture, and Afro-diasporic music.<sup>20</sup> Nação Zumbi, the leading band of the movement, uses the stylistic autodefinition *afrociberdelia*, thus combining Afro-Brazilian music with cyberpunk. Nação Zumbi’s counterpart to the Tropicalists’ ‘discovery’ of electric guitars is the use of computerised tunes, a preference included in the movement’s name. ‘Beat’ in its Brazilian pronunciation can refer to computer data bits.<sup>21</sup> Not quite accidentally, the lead singer of Nação Zumbi was called Chico Science, ‘small science’.<sup>22</sup>



Gay parade of Northeast Brazil in Salvador, Bahia in 2002. Photo by Paul van der Stap

23. *Caranguejos com Cérebro*.

Crab fishing is also one of the numerous ways in which the north-eastern poor try to earn some income. The selling mostly takes place directly on the street.

24. *É de se admirar a boa /*

*educação do motor do Brasília / E que as vezes eu acho que / minha fome / É uma ficção da verdadeira, 'Antromangue Brasília', Rádio SAMBA, 2001.*

As for the first part of the name, the booklet that goes with the CD 'da lama ao caos' (1995) declares the ecological richness of the *mangue*, or the river swamps of Recife, an area threatened by industrialisation and pollution. Nação Zumbi identifies with crabs that live in the swamps: they call themselves 'crabs with brains'.<sup>23</sup> Nação Zumbi directs its afrocyberdelics against the neo-liberalist state politics but embraces the global music scene. Socially, the band feels close to the excluded urban youth of the shantytowns. Here too the name is telling: 'Born Zumbi'. Zumbi was the legendary leader of Palmares, the seventeenth-century short-lived, autonomous state of black slaves in Pernambuco. He serves as one of the major symbols of the contemporary Afro-Brazilian movement. Zumbi is also the name of a lower-class area in Recife. Both associations may count.

Nação Zumbi employs the Cannibalist strategy for expressing social and political disillusionment but total desperation and apathy are avoided by irony. In the song texts progress is said to be yesterday's news, while everyday violence will not stop and TV is experienced as more real than real life. So too the persistent idea of Brazilian harmony and justice is often criticised. 'One has to admire the good manners of the motor of Brasília/and sometimes I think that my hunger is a fiction of reality'.<sup>24</sup> The 'motor of Brasília' is the Brazilian government on its capitol hill in Brasília. So much for progress: crabs move sideways.

## WHAT HINDERED TRUTH WAS CLOTHING, THE IMPERMEABLE ELEMENT BETWEEN THE INTERIOR AND THE EXTERIOR WORLD<sup>25</sup>

The examples discussed in the previous section demonstrate the Cannibalist capacity to write different versions of modernity by ironic inversions of its dominant elements. This strategy affirms Canclini's view of modernity as 'an open and uncertain movement' that embodies its own contradictions.<sup>26</sup> Cannibalists unsettle what political preferences conceal but, instead of refusing to be part of the system, they admit participating in it. But they do it in their own way. This section attempts to reframe in a more theoretical fashion the Cannibalist way of being part of modernity. The concepts of subaltern identity and dissidence are particularly valuable for this discussion.

According to Kirkpatrick:

... the narrative of modernity implies ties to an Enlightenment subjectivity – individual ability, creativity, freedom, liberty, and problem-solving through reason. Within this context of global modernity, the Latin American case can only be seen as deficient, since its particular processes of modernisation are not viewed as paradigmatic but as marginal, uneven, or even failed copies of the paradigm.<sup>27</sup>

Kirkpatrick describes the canonisation of the Brazilian modernists of the 1920s within the paradigm of universalised modernity. They have been nationally promoted as representatives of the European, Enlightenment-derived sort of modernity at the cost of other Brazilian artists and writers who have been forgotten, because they do not fit into that paradigm. Kirkpatrick's call for a revaluation of the marginalised, often regionalist authors sounds sympathetic but I think one should ask first if the celebrated ones are being celebrated for the right reasons. Does the very idea of Enlightenment permit a different reading?

'To be one of the colonised', writes Edward Said in his essay on the emergence of postcolonial theory, 'is potentially to be a great many different, but inferior, things, in many different places, at many different times'.<sup>28</sup> According to Said, postcolonial theory often does away with this persisting inferiority by quasi-integrating the former colonised into the dominant discourse as its 'interlocutors'. To Said, this is as if somebody making noise at the doorstep would be let in only if he promises to keep his mouth shut. 'This kind of scrubbed, disinfected interlocutor is a laboratory creation'.<sup>29</sup> What he finds so mistaken is the contention that a real crisis can be domesticated and that the shout will turn into a whisper if only one is paid some attention. The possibility that discussion ran short long ago is ignored.

- 25. *O que atrapalhava a verdade era a roupa, o impermeável entre o mundo interior e o mundo exterior.*
- 26. Nestor Canclini, 'Contradictory Modernities and Globalisation in Latin America', in V. Schelling, ed., *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, op cit, p 48.
- 27. Gwen Kirkpatrick, op cit, p 181.
- 28. Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000, p 295.
- 29. Ibid, p 298.

Both Kirkpatrick and Said locate the subaltern within the dilemma of the postcolonial interlocutor who becomes faced with the impossible choice between silence or cooptation. The subaltern arts take as their starting-point the rejection of established and culturally authorised identities. Kirkpatrick does not question this rejection but Said does. For him, the postcolonial identity movements were often unable to fulfil their programme, exactly because they had entrusted themselves to a polarising strategy.

A possible way of grasping ‘difference’ differently might be to follow Michel Foucault’s reading of Enlightenment as a dissident project. Foucault sees Enlightenment not as a paradigm but as an attitude. The Kantian call for critical thinking means for him a constant departure in order not to forget difference and not to let oneself become defined by a certain position or label.<sup>30</sup>

This project of resistance differs from the dominant reading of Enlightenment in two important ways relevant here. First, it calls for a non-polarising dissidence. Second, and consequently, it does not place the dissident outside the system but within it. By not letting oneself be defined, a constant start is made. The existing order and its terms are neither being assumed nor completely rejected. Said’s description of the postcolonial project echoes this: ‘To challenge therefore was to re-read and re-examine, not simply to distort or reject’.<sup>31</sup> This is also what de Andrade claims in his Manifesto: he plays with history, terminology, moral evaluations, and all the rest that has fixed culture in such or such a way. A closer look at the headline of this section may clarify the point: *What hindered truth was clothing, the impermeable element between the interior and the exterior world.* The ‘impermeable element’, clothing, can be read as that which conceals one’s ‘true self’: civilisation, moral and sexual prohibitions, Europeanised Brazil, modernity as alienation, and so forth. There is also an association with Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, a work that influenced Cannibalist thinking as is cited elsewhere in the manifesto. In the light of the Cannibalist performance, doing away with ‘the impermeable element’ has validity in the political, social, and cultural contexts as well.

The borderline between the ‘civilised’ coastal Brazil and its hinterlands and that between the southern industrialised region and the rural north-east is now transgressed, and so are the borders between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture, ‘authentic’ and ‘fake’, ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’, or, more importantly, ‘national’ and ‘international’. The figure of the truth that is unclothed reads also as ‘the naked truth’ that can ironically refer to positivist science, or to *any* one-and-only truth.

At the same time, this provides the clue to the appropriation of cannibalism for national ends. When the Cannibalist critique becomes taken for the harmonious national ideal, the self-conscious utopia of the modernists is confused with a pretended reality. Nationalists cannot read behind the Cannibalist grimace and entirely miss the gags.

### **TUPY, OR NOT TUPY: THAT IS THE QUESTION<sup>32</sup>**

30. Michel Foucault, ‘What is Enlightenment?’ in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by P Rabinow, Pantheon Books, New York, 1984, pp 32–50.

31. Edward Said, op cit, p xxix.

32. English in the original.

33. Instead of referring only to the Tupi-Guarani peoples.

The Cannibalist way of transgressing fixed meanings does not do away with real borders but gives them another dimension. What used to be a forbidden area is now trespassed. Deliberate misreading is a strategy of transgression that is cultivated by all three generations of modernists. They make joyous use of the notions of Brazil as a backward, uncivilised country and of Brazilian modernism as ‘belated’ or a ‘defect’. The best-known ‘misreading’ in the Cannibalist manifesto is the Shakespearean ‘Tupy, or not tupy’. ‘Tupi’ has been a generic term for Brazilian indigenous peoples.<sup>33</sup> The legendary man-eaters also

34. De Andrade alludes to traditional vestiges of power by attributing his turned-around history of Brazil to a cleric who then gets eaten by the savages.
35. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1997.

appear to have consumed Oswald de Andrade's alter ego, the Bishop of Sardinha, at the end of the manifesto.<sup>34</sup>

Oswald de Andrade's erratic writing finds echoes in the Tropicalist theatre of misplaced allegories and instruments that have gone out of tune. It also finds a counterpart in Nação Zumbi's curious 'misreadings' of global mainstream pop and the north-eastern *música sertaneja* of Luis Gonzaga.

'We never had grammars', de Andrade willingly explains. His seven-times repeated 'Routes' makes James Clifford's suggestion plausible that cultures are made on travels between places, or ideas.<sup>35</sup> What counts is not the reaching of point B from point A but the movement itself, the consciousness of travelling through different landscapes while maintaining nothing but a questioning attitude. The dissident modernist routes criss-cross the landscape of Brazilian imagery of itself and of the West. In their dislike of route-planners and over-eager critics, the Cannibalist modernists pitch signposts along the way to just enough wrong directions.