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OSWALD DE ANDRADE'S
"CANNIBALIST MANIFESTO"

LESLIE BARY

Introduction

The Brazilian modernist poet Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago" (*MA*) originally appeared in the first number of *Revista de Antropofagia*, the São Paulo cultural review directed by Alcântara Machado and Raul Bopp, in May, 1928. While other important avant-garde declarations are interesting as literary documents of the period (e.g. Mário de Andrade's "Prefácio Interessantíssimo" to his 1921 collection of poetry *Paulicéia Desvairada*, and the programmatic editorial of the May 15, 1992 issue of *Klaxon*, the avant-garde magazine that was an immediate result of the "Semana de Arte Moderna" held in São Paulo in February of that year, the *MA* has retained more immediate scholarly and even popular interest as a *cultural*, as well as a purely literary manifesto. The *MA* has, especially in the last twenty years, been widely cited in Brazil as a paradigm for the creation of a modern and cosmopolitan, but still authentically national culture.

In the earlier (1924) "Manifesto da Poesia Pau-Brasil" ["Manifesto of Brazilwood Poetry"], Oswald had announced an "export-quality" poetry that would not copy imported esthetic models but find its material in Brazilian history, popular culture, and everyday life. Brazilwood poetry will provide, Oswald says here, "[t]he counter-weight of native originality to neutralize academic conformity" (1986: 187). Opposing the avant-garde notions of poetry as "invention" and "surprise" to the erudite, imitative art he associates with the colony and the Brazilian Empire (1822-1889), Oswald unites the search for national identity with the modernist esthetic project.

In this schema, Brazilian cultural production becomes both native and cosmopolitan. Brazil's "wild wilderness," far from generating second-rate copies of Continental models, will give rise to an "agile and candid" modern poetry. Brazilwood poetry thus offers a solution for Brazil's perceived cultural inferiority, and at the same time injects new life into the international cultural arena.

The playful, polemical theory of cultural "cannibalism" Oswald develops in the *MA* is a radicalization of these ideas. The *MA* challenges the dualities civilization/barbarism, modern/primitive, and original/derivative, which had informed the construction of Brazilian culture since the days of the colony. In the *MA*, Oswald subversively appropriates the colonizer's inscription of America as a savage territory which, once civilized, would be a necessarily muddy copy of Europe. The use of the cannibal metaphor permits the Brazilian subject to forge his specular colonial identity into an autonomous and original (as opposed to dependent, derivative) national culture. Oswald's anthropophagist—himself a cannibalization, not of Rousseau's idealized

savage but of Montaigne's avowed and active cannibal,—neither apes nor rejects European culture, but "devours" it, adapting its strengths and incorporating them into the native self.¹

The two manifestos are central texts in the continuing creation of Brazilian national culture and as controversial writings with much to reveal about the structure of colonialist thought and the problems of constituting an identity in the post-colonial context.

The *MA* is difficult to read and to translate because it is built on a series of joking and punning references to Brazilian history and to sometimes obscure informing works. The annotated translation I present here is intended to clarify these references, as well as to make this important text available to an English-speaking audience.

I would direct first-time readers of Oswald especially to Benedito Nunes' essay "Antropofagia ao alcance de todos," Haroldo de Campos' "Uma poética da radicalidade," and Jorge Schwartz' *Vanguarda e cosmopolitismo*. The English-language bibliography is much sparser, but Randal Johnson provides an informative introduction in "Tupy or not Tupy: Cannibalism and Nationalism in Contemporary Brazilian Literature and Culture." Haroldo de Campos' "The Rule of Anthropophagy: Europe Under the Sign of Devoration," Richard Morse's "Triangulating Two Cubists: William Carlos Williams and Oswald de Andrade," and Kenneth David Jackson's "Vanguardist Prose in Oswald de Andrade," though not written as introductions to Oswald, are accessible to the general reader as well as useful to the scholar. Johnson's three articles, as well as Neil Larsen's "Eating the Torn Halves: Modernism as *Cultura Brasileira*" will be of interest both to specialists in the period and to scholars interested in problematizing discussions of national and cultural identity in the post-colonial context.

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NOTES

¹ Other key precedents to this manifesto are Picabia's "Manifeste Cannibale" (*Dadaphone*, Paris, March 1920, 7) and the avant-garde Parisian review *Cannibale* (April-May 1920). See Benedito Nunes, "Anthropophagisme et surréalisme," *Surréalisme périphérique* (Montréal: Université de Montréal, 1984) 159-79, esp. 164-65.

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