ANTHROPOPHAGY: A SINGULAR CONCEPT TO UNDERSTAND BRAZILIAN CULTURE AND PSYCHOLOGY AS SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE

Arthur Arruda Leal Ferreira
(Prof. Dr. Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro • Brazil)
Email: arleal@superig.com.br

ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to present the singularity of this concept of anthropophagy, and the effects of it: a) in the production of some vanguard movements; b) in the surpass of racial and conceptions, opening space to think about Brazilian Culture in no identitarian terms. In sequence, we propose also to use this concept in a more broad sense, searching to understand psychology as a kind of anthropophagical knowledge. The greatest difficulty a psychologist can encounter is in the attempt to define his own discipline (as someone can find trying to define Brazilian Culture). In few words the target of this work is to the present historically the concept of anthropophagy and the use of it in some present questions, as the definition of Brazilian Culture and the plurality of Psychology.

KEY-WORDS: Psychology; Brazilian Subjectivity; Anthropophagy.

Around the 1920's there were some general tendencies in the effort to define Brazilian identity: 1) There isn’t (and probably will never be) a Brazilian national identity; 2) A national identity will only develop fully in the future; 3) The identity can be defined by the values of a single ethnic group (e.g. the wild and noble natives of romantism); 4) Brazilian culture is an ethnic hybrid. It is important to stress that all these solutions are based on the concept of identity (or lack of it).

As an example of these efforts of definition, medicine and the emerging social sciences tried to understand Brazilian culture by its racial composition. For instance, Oliveira Vianna (1923), representing an eugenistic point of view, conceive the miscegenation as a dangerous process where the virtues of each one of the Brazilian races (Caucasian, Afro-brazilians and Natives) are lost in this process. Some races would have more biological virtues than the others, but in miscegenation all of them would be affected negatively (even the supposedly less valuable
ones). This eugenistic and racial point of view was surpassed by the sociological works of Gilberto Freyre in the 1930s (for instance, Freyre, 1933). He advocated the view that the Brazilian identity arose due to the cultural meeting between the Portuguese farmers and the African slaves in the colonial sugar cane farms (engenhos). Nevertheless, outside the area of academics one can also find interesting points of view concerning Brazilian identity. Varied perspectives are found in the debate between the groups that composed the Brazilian Modernist Movement in the 1920’s.

This question of a national identity was crucial in the Brazilian modernist movement, especially in its political expression. On the left side of the political spectrum, there is the Pau Brasil (brazilwood in Portuguese) movement, centered on the figure of Oswald the Andrade; and on the right, we have the Verde Amarelo (yellow green in Portuguese – the main Brazilian flag colours), which had close ties to the integralist movement (a fascist-oriented movement). The radicalism of both movements increased when Pau Brasil became Anthropophagy, and Verde Amarelo turned into Anta in the end of 1920’s. The core of this political-esthetical antagonism revolved around the Brazilian natives (the so-called "indians") as the nodal point of this supposed national identity. The native that already represented the frontier between human and non-human, the romantic hero who was connected to the noblest values of the 19th century Brazilian empire, was appropriated by the modernist movement as an image of aesthetic unconformity. For Anta (the right side one), the native represents a crucial component of the national identity, which is based on a biological, psychic and spiritual mixture with the Europeans. According to them, this mixture, which formed the basis of the Brazilian ethnicity ("national race"), shaped their present-day institutions and pointed to a messianic future where humanity would be saved by this harmonious ethnic blend. Even considering miscegenation, the Anta movement took this concept as a unity that projects its identity into the past and the future. They did not consider the process involved in miscegenation, forgetting that this process dissolves our present identities. It is in this sense that Oswald de Andrade (the leader of the anthropagic movement) takes miscegenation, as a devouring of well-established forms (the anthropophagy). According to Nunes (1990, p. 26), this concept works as a kind of anti-myth:
Thus the Tupi or Caraíba (some natives groups), far from representing the common rooted soul, connotes the psychic energies that animate and propel human development. We are certainly facing a new myth, but a myth that focusing on history in order to criticize it, finding its material even in the archetype of the natural man. Compared with the image of the sublimated Tupi as our first ancestor, according to the yellow-green movement, the anthropophagist is an anti-myth.

In tune with this dimension of differentiation in history, Andrade proposed both the primitive (original matriarchy) and the utopian (technological matriarchy) as a critique of the present (patriarchy). In opposition to the Anta group, this temporal axis of anthropophagy (utopian and primitive) points to the denial of any essential and unifying entity, because the most important item in this history was the anthropophagical process itself, the act of constant devouring. Quoting Andrade (1990-b, p. 47). "Only Anthropophagy unites us. Socially, economically, philosophically." This way, the Brazilian cultural identity cannot be found in any synthesis or messianic mixture, but in the very mixing, shuffling of figures, in the endless loss of any defining identity: "I only care about what is not mine" (op. cit., P. 47). So, the Brazilian is defined “not by a specifically national logos, even a multiple one, but, on the contrary, he is defined by his “phagia”, a principle that makes us never be the same, but rather an endless succession of finite singularities, always contemporary” (Rolnik 1989, p. 257).

The need to think in terms of identity, however, presents an obstacle to understanding Brazilian culture as something that exists in the anthropophagical mode. Although Brazil could be the major world producers of this mode of existence, this does not guarantee us uniqueness in this way of being. To think of anthropophagy as a kind of national monopoly is contradictory to the very peculiarity of its nomad mode of being. Just like not all anthropophagic subjectivity is Brazilian, not all Brazilian subjectivity is anthropophagic. In Brazil, there are also what Oswald de Andrade named the patriarchal mode. Therefore, anthropophagic manifestations are not so hegemonic in Brazilian culture, as they depend on certain conditions for their performance in a creative sense. According to Suely Rolnik (1995a., p. 3), it is particularly in the cultural sector, in movements such as Anthropophagia itself, Neo-concretism and Tropicalism, that such a mark is manifested.

In addition to the exposed before, the concept of anthropophagy has other aspects that make it even more attractive. Considering all its uses, it operates on a broad front, scattering the term into a heuristic polysemy. It is in this way that the primitive anthropophagic can be
manifested: the ludic, the orphic, the matriarchal, the collective, the pre-individual, the totem, the devourer, and everything else that this "endless anthropophagy" permits. This is another important issue of the concept: not be defined by any single term. In this way it becomes a sign that calls for a multiple anthropophagy, devouring cultures, subjectivities, and knowledge, always under the banner of mockery and provocation.

The concept of Anthropophagy: Multiple rules

Some mappings for the concept of anthropophagy in its openness have been proposed, notably by the same authors: Suely Rolnik (1989) and Benedito Nunes (1990). But here a new mapping of the concept will be proposed. This mapping has two axes: a trans-historical or vertical one, which connects primitivism to the utopian and empathic agenda, and the horizontal one, combining cordiality with devouring.

I. The transhistorical axis

In the first axis, the vertical, the apparent contradiction in terms (utopian and primitive) is solved by a transverse conception of history, in which, as we have seen, the present, the real, and the current are less important than the possible, the extemporaneous, and the unnatural. This is where, according to Andrade (1990) the primitive and the utopian are in conflict with the contemporary patriarchic system not only chronologically, but logically. This is done through the dialectic process of a history seen as being divided into three phases. According to Andrade, the first phase of history is characterized by a primitive matriarchy, which is still present in the American native societies (or even our own society in the past). In this kind of society governed by leisure and ludic activities, labour, laws, and exploitation don’t have any meaning or even exist. This primitive thesis is denied by the patriarchate as antithesis, which is marked by the emergence of slavery, the exploitation of the other through labour, and with this, the division into classes, the legacy of the goods through paternal rights and of an entire philosophy (the messianic one) in an effort to repair the committed earthly injustices in a transcendental coming world. By the end, the synthesis of this dialectic contradiction will take place in the future, the era of the technical matriarchy. In this future era, the values of the primitive matriarchy will return in a society deeply marked by mechanization of production, where the need to work will have been eliminated. According to Andrade (1990), this configuration will allow a creative existence
through as ludic modes of relationships as well as through leisure. It is interesting to note that Andrade took the North-American society of the 1940’s as an indicator for the coming of this technical matriarchy.

This is the historical scheme proposed by Andrade to criticize the present. Both the initial matriarchy (primitive) and the technical one (utopia), are imposed as critical virtues which would allow the existence of a society without classes, parental rights, lineages or hierarchy, a transcendental (messianic) philosophy, a monotheistic religion, a patriarchal society, and labor system.

II. The empathic axis

This axis, which Oswald characterized as the "Weltanschauung of matriarchal culture" (1990-e, p. 159), is marked by a counterpoint aggressive - cordiality, which will be the main course of the concept of anthropophagy. Although the primitive and the utopian pave the way for the extemporaneous critic of the present, in this axis it is determined positively the process of the otherness, of devouring and being devoured by another. Here are served the most interesting benefits of taking a Brazilian subjectivity marked by an incessant phagia of well established figures. Oswald de Andrade thus characterizes this Weltanschauung:

The cordial man has, however, within himself his own opposition. He knows how to be cordial as he knows how to be ferocious. He understands life as a devouring act and symbolizes in the cannibalistic rite that is a communion. On the other side, this devouring brings with itself the immanence of danger. And it produces the social solidarity that is defined in otherness ... The dangers of the world; the conviction of the absence of any supraterrestrial help produces the cordial man, which is the primitive, as well as his derivatives in Brazil. (Op.cit., P. 159)

According to Nunes (1990., P. 20), the aggressive act of cannibalizing reminds us of the Nietzschean Reubentier, a digestive image used in “Gay Science”, in order to account for the moral health of man as a beast of prey, so that "he assimilates and digests without trace of resentment or spurious guilty conscience inner conflicts and the resistance of the outside world." While pure aggression, pure devouring without the assimilation of the devoured, the cannibalistic instinct could still be assimilated to the Nietzschean concept of will to power, "the primordial force of its ethos, an ambiguous force that turns the human being either into a generous rebel or a
cruel warrior" (Nunes, 1990, pp. 22-23).

In the empathic axis, devouring or being devoured does not matter; more decisive are the dissolution of the figures and shapes, the miscegenation between the same and the other, an intense otherness, an intense sense of the other, to experience the other in oneself. This description characterizes the Brazilian cordial man of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, who is marked by the herd instinct and the consequent loneliness and terror of individuation, in whom Oswald de Andrade (1990-e pp. 157 to 159) is clearly inspired. Primitive cordiality is always emotionally inclined towards the other, it is never confused with the ruled and deeply artificial courtesy of the “civilized”. In anthropophagy, the other is also assimilated and accommodated into the same (using a Piagetian vocabulary), unlike what happens at the aggressive pole. Quoting Andrade (1990-b, pp. 47 and 51): "I am only interested in what is not mine… Absorption of the sacred enemy. To turn it into a totem. The human adventure. The earthly purpose ".

**A final question: the definition of psychology**

The concept of anthropophagy is not only interesting to define a culture by its process of assimilation and differentiation, but it can also be used to examine the construction process of specific sciences. Let us take psychology, for example: if we try to conceive of it in an epistemological framework, we will have great difficulty considering its plurality of projects (just like the supposed races in Brazil). Just like the efforts to define the Brazilian identity, we can find four tendencies in the epistemological alternatives to evaluate psychology. First, we can accept the lack of a single rationality in psychology; second, we can wait for a future unity of the field; third, we can define it according to one of its versions, ignoring all others; and fourth, we can try to arrive at an eclectic definition by mixing all versions. As we saw, all these solutions are based on the concept of identity (or lack of it), not even considering the very process of identity formation.

As the anthropophagic movement suggests, we will seek to step beyond the simple affirmation of psychology’s multiplicity, and rather wish to recognize a certain way to hybridize, which can be characterized as being anthropophagic (even undesired). Even without a deep and intense description we can see the main psychological projects in a constant move to digest the images of other knowledges (science, technology, instruments) and social practices (how to educate, to teach, to govern), generating new subjectivities and new modes of existence (the
psychoanalyzed man, the constructivist child) through the "power of being science". It is a mixed science such as no other science can be, it continuously recombines the human with the natural, the objective with the subjective. Under the stern, disapproving gaze of the various normalizing epistemologies, psychology would operate inside this whole anthropophagic carnival with its appetite for knowledge and social utility.

By validating this positive, active, and utopian anthropophagy, psychology can become a cutting-edge knowledge, operating in the mode of a machine of assimilate and change concepts and practices with no possibility of a final product, horizon or final port. And in this erring, this wandering, we sail can slowly over the waves of existence. Finally, appropriating the sheakspearian dilemma from Oswald de Andrade ("Tupi or not Tupi"?), we can provoke: “Psi or not Psi” (and how)? That is the question.

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