

Cybernetic Cannibalism: Why is Brazil the country of the future?

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Abstract: What is there in common between the anthropophagy manifesto written by Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade, in 1928, and the appropriation of cultural values in the 21st century? What can the cultural diversity of Brazilians – in constant evolution – offer us to analyze the remix culture in times of internet? The purpose of this article is to investigate why Brazilian culture is presented as a source of inspiration for concepts, such as that of Free Culture. Also, to research how the country was transformed into an experimental laboratory for new ways to question intellectual property in the digital era.

1. Introduction

“I asked a man what Law was. He answered me that it was the guarantee to exercise the possible. This man’s name was Galli Mathias. I ate him.” This verse, by the poet Oswald de Andrade, was published in the Anthropophagy Manifesto of 1928, six years after the Modern Art Week, a landmark in the Brazilian Modernist Movement.

I recalled this verse in the middle of a session of the 11th Cinema Festival of Rio de Janeiro, in September 2009, seen through the eyes of a Canadian. I was watching the film “Rip: A remix Manifesto”, by video-maker and web activist Brett Gaylor. The documentary is a reflection of the remix culture from 4 points of view: “1. Culture always builds on the past. 2. The past always tries to control the future. 3. Our future is becoming less free. 4. To build free societies, you must limit the control of the past.”

Brett believes that “the 20th century has been the century of propriety, of land. The 21st century was to be the century of intellectual propriety, of ideas” and apparently agrees with Mark Getty - “Intellectual propriety is the oil of the 21st century”³ – on the existence of a war of information. The director proposes a discussion about intellectual property in the internet era and suggests that Brazil is at the forefront of digital culture. Christ the Redeemer appears on the screen with open arms and Brett tells us that he heard a story here in Rio de Janeiro: “I am only interested

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³ Mark Getty is the chairman of Getty Images, one of the world's largest Intellectual Proprietors. This quote has inspired the creation of the project “[Oil of the 21st century - Perspectives on Intellectual Property](#)”.

in what is not mine. Law of Man. Law of the Cannibal.” It was Oswald de Andrade’s Anthropophagy Manifesto.

I notice a certain surprise on the part of the public present in the cinema. I and all those watching the film wriggle in our seats while trying to digest the Canadian gringo’s reasoning. The anthropophagic perspective of practices of sharing cultural values makes lots of sense and, at the first moment, I wished it had been me who had had this idea. Funk Carioca were there, a cultural display resulting from the anthropophagic practices developed among the local dj’s, and also the government “Pontos de Cultura” project, which the Ministry of Brazilian Culture inaugurated during Gilberto Gil’s⁴ administration. Starting from the other’s viewpoint of my culture, I came up with an insight. I decided to cannibalize the foreigner’s view, adopt his speech and incorporate his point of view. *I ate Brett Gaylor*. Together with Cristiano Marinho I cannibalized his thoughts. From the remix of Brett’s look with ours, blended with the Brazilian experience, we devoured this work. The start of a lengthy intellectual digestion.

2. Anthropophagy

Brazil, São Paulo, 1922. The Modern Art Week is starting, between the 13th and 18th of February, assembling the principal names from Brazilian literature and the arts as part of the commemorations for the country’s centenary of independence. The event was considered to be a landmark in the national modernist movement, because it was the first collective cultural display in favor of a new way of contemplating Brazil, freed from its condition as a colony. The modernists wished for artistic and literary renewal as opposed to the conservative language which had prevailed in the 19th century. They aspired to freedom of expression, the end to rules in the universe of the arts and to the import of foreign models. Artists shared a “futuristic ideal, requiring the overthrow of traditionalist topics in the name of a society moved by electricity, machines and speed.”⁵ The Week proved to be a rejection of any kind of “cult of the past” – and in this respect we came across the fourth Brett topic – but, the creation of new languages only occurred years later.

One of the Week’s organizers, poet Oswald de Andrade, wrote the Pau-Brasil Manifesto in 1924⁶, in which he specifies the need to acclaim native elements, primitivism, as the new principle of Brazilian poetry: “Language without archaisms, without erudition. A millionaire contribution of all mistakes. The way we speak. The way we are”. It was no accident that the poet named his first manifest after the native wood which had attracted the attention of the Portuguese colonizers. His

⁴ Gilberto Gil is one of the most emblematic Brazilian artists.

⁵ SEMANA DE ARTE MODERNA, *Encyclopedia Itau Cultural of visual arts, updated in 08/05/2009*.

⁶ The Pau-Brasil Manifesto was published in the journal “Correio da Manhã”, in March 18th of that year.

ideal was “to reconcile native culture with renewed intellectual culture, the forest with the school, in a hybrid composition which would ratify ethnic miscegenation of the Brazilian people and which could adjust, in a spontaneous balance of history itself, “the best of our lyrical tradition” with “the best of our modern demonstration” (Nunes, 1990). The *Pau-Brasil* poem offers a new perspective – “seeing with free eyes” – characterized by the return to pure sense, where the universal is contained in the regional: “To be regional and pure in its own time.”

Oswald published his Anthropophagic Manifest in 1928 in *Anthropophagy Magazine*⁷. In this, savage thought governs his perception of Brazilian civilization. “Only Anthropophagy unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically.” The poet recalls the cultural formation of Brazil in an allegorical way, starting with anthropophagy (from the Greek *anthropos*, "man" and *phagein*, "to eat") or cannibalism.



Hans Staden, (with a beard, in the middle at the back) a German sailor who made two voyages to Brazil in the 16th century, watches natives practicing anthropophagy. Engraving by Theodore de Bry 1562.

Anthropophagy occurs among Brazilian native tribes in a ritualistic way. It is a tactic to appropriate the qualities of the one who is being eaten, the enemy captured in combat. By means of anthropophagy, Andrade asserts Brazil’s vocation for cultural cannibalism: our roots must lie in the meeting, in the miscegenation between primitive cultures (Amerindian and African) and European, not a question of extermination or annihilation of one by the other. “Tupy or not *tupy*, that is the question⁸.” When the Italian Massimo Canevacci (1996) discovers Brazilian artistic leaders, he is

surprised by the anthropophagic proposal: “this wasn’t ‘savage’ or ‘symbolic’ hunger for human flesh but rather a guided, sensitive and delicate appetite, tending to choose tasty parts of the body, to digest the other in a creative way and not an indifferent, indigestible guzzling”. The Anthropophagy Vanguard proposes a critical devouring of the other, incorporating the difference. Oswald believed that only anthropophagy could choose what was admirable in the civilized world in a process that he called the Caraiba Revolution a cultural *mash-up*, out of which arises the hybrid of the savage and the white man, the *technological barbarian*.

⁷ The *Anthropophagy Magazine* had ten numbers published during 1928 and 1929.

⁸ The first “Tupy” is the name of an indigenous tribe, while the second, in italics, is a play on the sound of the word: in Portuguese it sounds like “*to be*”, recalling Shakespeare’s famous line.

3. Cultural Syncretism or the Esthetics of Remix Brazil

Brazil has been in a constant state of hybridization since its discovery 509 years ago. Brazilian cultural diversity is an ethnic melting pot in which different cultures bubble, all of them having arrived here with European, Asiatic and African immigrants in search of a New World. Brazil is made up of the Diaspora of multiple nationalities. A Diaspora which Canevacci (1996) calls “the mother of syncretism”, considered by him to be a “proposal of a new hybrid anthropology, such as the use of innovative, narrative modules, such as the exploration of the co-presence of multiple languages (...), such as a creative, propositional conflict at the level of new, trans-communicative environments”.

Syncretism is to Canevacci as Remix is to Lawrence Lessig: “We could describe it using modern computer terminology as kind of read-write culture. It’s a culture where people participate in the creation and in the re-creation of their culture. In that sense it is read-write” states Lessig⁹. And so we come to the anthropophagic philosophy of Andrade: “Scripts. Scripts. Scripts. Scripts. Scripts. Scripts. Scripts. The Caraiba instinct.”

With the technological evolution and the emergence of a networked society, the electronic Caraiba instinct raises the potential to practice cultural appropriation in a digital anthropophagic process from which a mutant culture emerges. This is the esthetics of Brazilian remix, a mirror of its cultural formation: “Whether it is Bossa Nova, or Axe - the music of Bahia – or Funk, which is Brazil’s current electronic music. All of it is a reflection of the culture developed in this mixture called Brazil. The novelty is precisely that you are mixing these things which have been done. More and more, this is the future of music and the human race.” (Malboro, 2009)¹⁰.

4. The cannibal esthetics of Carioca Funk

In the city of Rio de Janeiro, Carioca Funk – both as a musical genre and cultural movement – is found at dances produced by enormous sound teams with the distorted, bass sound waves of car radios in the streets, on the stalls of street hawkers, on the front pages of newspapers, at bus and van stops, in the slum, in the sound track of the soap opera, adapted to the chants of soccer fans, in many samba theme songs, and in the rhythmic beat of samba school drum sections. Carioca Funk works like a kind of urban chronicle almost always copied, intrusive and polemical. Hermano Vianna, anthropologist who made the first study of funk dances in Rio de Janeiro at the end of the 80’s, sums it up this way:

⁹ In a speech given to TED: Ideas worth spreading, 2007

¹⁰ In an interview given to the documentary Rip: A remix manifesto, 2009.

“The funk dance is quite a rich example of how cultural elements from various sources, ‘authentic’ or not (‘artificial’ or not, ‘imposed by the culture industry’ or not) can combine in unusual ways, generating fresh life styles and driving out the apocalyptic hypothesis (Eco, 1979) of cultural homogeneity for mankind. (1990)

From researcher Simone Sá’s standpoint, carioca funk is the true Brazilian popular electronic music. Sá sees the genre as a cultural phenomenon which is based on appropriations and hybridization, and suggests three points in time to understand it:

“The first is its appearance in the suburbs of the city of Rio de Janeiro at the end of the 70’s under the influence of the Miami Bass. The second is the moment of development of the carioca style, with words in Portuguese and Brazilian production, with a special mention of *DJ Marlboro*. And the third is the consecration of the genre on the experimental electronic music circuit, starting from its association with *electroclash*.” (Sá, 2007)

This process of cannibalization of the genre in Rio de Janeiro came about gradually. In the first instance, the songs played at the dances were only foreign ones. Little by little, the first tracks with vocals in Portuguese appeared, full of codes and slang. The culture and the reality of the Rio de Janeiro outskirts echoed over backgrounds and melodies extracted from the songs of the Miami Bass, in dances throughout the suburbs and slums of the city.

In 89, the first phonographic register of funk produced in Rio was recorded, with the release of DJ Marlboro’s record, “Funk Brazil”. Even though it was a national production, most of the songs on the record kept reused basic rhythms and melodies, based on songs of international artists.

The production of funk during the nineties experimented with words in Portuguese over reprocessed backgrounds of international songs when, in 98, producer and DJ Luciano Oliveira created a new background which would come to ‘nationalize’ funk in instrumental terms consolidating a new esthetic standard, specific to funk produced in Rio de Janeiro: the “*Tamborzão*”. Performed with samples of parts of percussion instruments such as *conga* and *atabaque* drums, this new background simulated drumbeats played in the liturgical ceremonies of Afro-Brazilian religions and capoeira meetings. And so a new musical genre is born with its own identity: Carioca Funk.

The next step in this cannibalization of Carioca Funk would be a profusion of new producers and dj’s during the last decade. Journalist Silvio Essinger traced the history of this phenomenon:

“The democratization of information technology helped Funk a lot. With a reasonably equipped computer, anyone could become a producer – all that was needed was a program like Sound Forge to cut and modify the sound tracks which would be used and another like Acid to paste them and, bit by bit, make music. (...) The result is that the musical possibilities of Funk became infinite, limitless” (2005).

Indeed, along with the popularization of musical recording technology, came an explosion of home studios and a multiplication of producers. Anybody with a personal computer and internet access was able to produce and distribute his own music. Carioca DJ’s created blogs and sites on which they made their productions available for fresh mixing, and thus spawned an ongoing process

of hybridization.

On DJ Wilder's blog (<http://willderdj.blogspot.com>), for example, we can find a variety of audio-editing softwares, links to Funk communities in social networks, web-radios, an agenda of events and an infinity of files for downloading. Among these files, besides tracks produced by himself and other DJ's, there are softwares for sound editing and musical production and a large amount of sound tracks known by DJ's as "points".

"Point", not only means "track" to these DJ's, but is also understood as a *loop* – a sound sequence made to be repeated, something like the rhythmic unit of a track of electronic music. They can be short sentences or even spoken words, sung melodies, complete refrains, "packages" of *samples* with drum parts and various sounds, electronic beats. Just like "Tamborzão", the terminology goes back to Afro-Brazilian religions, to the "*umbanda* point", music sung in religious patios (known as "terreiros"), repeated almost like mantras, to evoke and venerate spiritual entities.

Together these "points" end up forming vast data banks which represent authentic vocabularies, sound alphabets which may be used and recombined to produce new works, illustrating a process which Lev Manovich (2005) calls "collaborative remixability", where "the information and media we've organized and shared can be recombined and built on to create new forms, concepts, ideas, mashups and services". For the author, in the context of remixability, the role of the receiver in the communication process is reconfigured. Reception becomes a "temporary station". Information arrives, is transformed, mixed with other data and prior information and the result of this combination is retransmitted to the network and to the process of feedback. When a funk producer begins to share open tracks and their respective constituent parts, he is sharing not only random creations with everyone on the network, but also infinite possibilities of a new way to write.

During this process there is no claim to authorship or intellectual ownership. The DJ's do not require nor do they give credit for composition and they ignore copyrights or Lessig's concept of copyleft. There is no economic transaction in the Funk creative process. Everything is free there, with no pre-defined order, no legal requirement. Anyone can acquire the files and do whatever they want with them. The punk spirit of "do-it-yourself" for anyone who wants to create a track.

On the one hand, the creative process of funk has a collaborative trait, devoid of any authorship regulation and, on the other, the distribution of funk also presents its own decentralized model. It occurs regardless of the recording companies or the media and sales of cd's do not drive the business. Authorship is irrelevant since the major source of income for DJ's comes from their live performances at dances.

With the emergence of funk in Rio de Janeiro, the Getulio Vargas Foundation, through the FGV Opinião (Nucleus of Applied Social Research of the Center for Research and Documentation

of Contemporary and Brazilian History), made a survey (2008) in order to “understand and map the social relations which lend support to the production of Funk, most of all in the metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro and also to observe the socioeconomic and cultural impacts on the agents involved in the production of Funk as well as the activities of these same agents as producers of this musical genre.” Furthermore, it sought to raise socioeconomic data on the segments which make up the so-called production chain: DJ’s, MC’s, owners of sound systems, producers, researchers, journalists, businessmen and assessors who act directly or indirectly in the Funk market. Within the intricacies of this network, there is no place for big recording companies nor for major vehicles of communication.

The report “Make-up of the Funk Market in Rio de Janeiro” (2008), concluded that funk moves over R\$ 10 million a month in the State of Rio, with DJ’s earning around 2 thousand a month, among countless other bits of information such as the earnings of street hawkers, the prices of dance tickets, etc. In an article published in the Folha de São Paulo newspaper of the 20th of January 2009 on this survey, Hermano Vianna commented:

"This entire market has been created in the last two decades, without any help from the culture industry establishment", (...). "I know of no other example of such a clear market upset in contemporary pop culture. Funk now has clear numbers which show that it is an important economic activity and, as such, must be taken seriously by the authorities.

5. Sharing Culture

Beyond Carioca Funk there are other cultural modes of expression in different combinations, compositions or mixtures. Brazil is comprised of multiple, interconnecting cultures. Of intra-cultures. Given its complexity, our vision is of a labyrinthine country with countless meeting points, cultural syncretisms. Canevacci (1996) considers this to be Brazil’s gift: “The syncretism which ran through several Diasporas is a gift which the Brazil of today (in spite of its many pains) can offer to a world which is both globalized and localized. To a world of cultures.” The Brazilian melting-pot exhales a stronger flavor than that of the sum of its individual ingredients.

Since 2003, when the *Cultura Para Todos* Seminar was held, Brazilian cultural diversity began to be thought of as a national treasure. This event assembled producers, artists, intellectuals, managers, investors and others interested in the debate on public policies. The process to draw up the Plan of National Culture, PNC, started (<http://www.cultura.gov.br/pnc>). In 2005, between September and December, the 1st National Conference on Culture was held. At this time over 400 rounds of debates were held at municipal and state levels, as well as a national plenary session. The resolutions drawn up at the meetings made up the project for the PNC law which was approved in 2006. Since then its general guidelines have been under development in congresses, seminars,

public discussions and debates via internet, with business and civil society taking part. The position of the government regarding the PNC is that this will:

“(…) strengthen the capacity of the Brazilian people to carry out long-term actions that exalt our diversity. This will also ensure, in an efficient and long-lasting manner, that the State is responsible for formulating and implementing policies to make access to cultural production and fruition universal, thus helping to overcome the country’s inequalities.”

Therefore, the Brazilian Government has determined that access to and appreciation of our cultural diversity is a strategy for Brazilian development. The Plan presents seven “concepts and values”. We will highlight one of them, very important for this work:

“Brazilian society creates and energizes its culture, in spite of the omission or authoritarian interference of the State and of specific market logic. It is not up to governments or companies to conduct the production of culture, whether it be erudite or popular, by imposing hierarchies and value systems on it. To prevent this from happening, the State should permanently recognize and support practices, information and social technologies developed countrywide, promoting the right to emancipation, self-determination and liberty of individuals and groups.”

Why is the appreciation of Brazilian cultural diversity vital for the development of Brazil? What are the esthetic possibilities of a country which offers such a vast cultural complexity? What innovations emerge from the anthropophagic practices of cultural appropriation in the country? How does syncretism manifest itself in the context of digital culture? Can Brazilian anthropophagy be considered a new vision of the world? These are just a few of the questions which arise, stimulated by the title of this work, and which launch a thorough investigation.

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