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**CIRCULARITY AND  
ANTHROPOPHAGIC  
CONSUMPTION AS A  
METAPHOR: THE BODY AS  
CURRENCY?**

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I begin this paper by using two real cases of anthropophagy, one in the European continent (Germany) in 2001, and the other in South America (Brazil) in 2012, to rethink forms of subjectivity versus circulation of information; technologies and the State's machinery setup; and constitution of "nationalisms". I will not focus on investigating them as acts of violence against individuals; rather, I will use them as a social metaphor, with their economic implications. An alibi to elucidate cultural differences concerning the State's incorporations into subjectivity, its technological and legal setup, and the body included in the circularity of capital as currency.

Anthropophagy is considered a collective ritualistic practice of America's tribal societies, whereas cannibalism, which does not have the same symbolic collective dimension, is the habit of eating human flesh. There would be, beyond the circularity of the practice, an anthropophagic sociability, in which neither the killer, nor the victim are in radical opposites (Carvalho).

Even if the artificiality of the argumentation proposed here can create exaggerations and surreal distortions, dialoging with these extremes reveals certain aspects of our current times that otherwise would remain invisible. Thus, I consider this bias as a mythical-poetic chance of re-updating anthropophagy as a self-cannibalism of the State. To the State, the body is, above all, labor energy, and in all its excess of rage, pleasure or violence, loss of capital; therefore, to think of the body as capital inscription, currency, current value legitimated by the reach of its circularity and social inclusion is not new. Nor is the possibility of thinking the body as this host of nationalisms, these flags, modeling of subjectivities, as this limit of borders.

Just the exercise of including it in the circularity of capital, no matter if it is informational or not, raises current issues, such

as the commercialization of the body or its parts and sub-products, like genetic material, organs, semen and blood. It opens space for us to ask whether the body could be donated or sold, repatriated and exhibited like an object of curiosities. Ultimately, these notes follow different pre-fixation systems of valuation of the living being whose reach goes much beyond the initial object of the argumentation.

Another perspective that is also relevant is, of course, to use these two cases as political and cultural metaphors to reverse the regression scenario in which the Americans of the new continent were framed in the 16th century by de Bry's illustrations. A scenario utilized as demonstration of inverse parameters of social development, involution and evolution, in which the development of the tribal primitive society would only accentuate barbarism, unlike the project of civilization of the old continent, which would bring improvements in terms of a more humane society. This reversal aims to make the old continent face the thought of a new savage, like a society that recognizes itself in the self-cannibalizing process.

## The anthropophagic tradition

Anthropophagy and its several repercussions in the Brazilian context – as proposed by Oswald de Andrade, in his mythical-ritualistic use to characterize the Brazilian modernism of "Semana de 22", and more recently, by Zé Celso – is a term that is clearly used as a political and cultural metaphor.

When the Brazilian people decolonizes itself from the European and American influence, it becomes what it already is: naturally anthropophagous. It eats everything. It mixes

everything. Is the anthropophagy of when the work was launched the same of today's? Why? Well, Anthropophagy is a return to the Primitive, but Technicized, Cyber. We desire the freedom of decolonizing our body from the *head* view, and learn again how to smell like dogs, see like eagles, think with our entire body, feet, sex, stomachs, everything has intelligence, animated by the anima of Civilization playing its role in another way with Nature. It's no use trying to kill the Nature within us, it's no use wanting that Nature is not also within our Civilization. The Advent of the "*Green Economy*", of the eternal return, disturbance, to what is natural, beyond good and evil. Nature is Cruel and Generous, but it can't be imprisoned in this Evangelical robotization of the human species. This is the extinction of the human species (Celso).[1]

The anthropophagic movement in Brazil utilized a case of cannibalism that had been widely disseminated in Europe in the 16th century to argue that the construction of the Brazilian culture was based on the assimilation of other cultures. The German Hans Staden survived threats of cannibalism from Indians in the coast of São Paulo because he cried when he was about to be devoured. As he proved to be weak, and for this reason he was disqualified to be assimilated, the Indians preferred not to eat him. The history of the practice of anthropophagy among the Brazilian Indians was widely disseminated in Europe through de Bry's xylographs, as a case of savagery, cultural regression – showing through the illustrations the dismemberment of the body, the separation of viscera and the hierarchical distribution of the parts to be eaten to young boys, adult men, women, and elderly women.

The difficulty in founding a Brazilian culture had already been launched in the anthropophagic poetics of Oswald de Andrade, in 1928. He discussed the confrontation between the cultures of the New and Old

Worlds. *The Cannibal Manifesto*, according to Ana Maria Belluzzo (Belluzzo), was launched as an esthetic-cultural resistance strategy. In fact, the vanguard artists of 1928 were well aware of that, but it is important to emphasize that formulating, with anthropophagy, a culture of resistance means assuming the strategy of savage thought, the barbarian considered as a being in regression. The perpetuated idea of barbarism is par excellence the refusal of the Eurocentric civilization. Moreover, cannibalism is associated with a state of orality, with regression, perversion and savagery, as shown by the fantasies of the Europeans about the natives from South America. (Guasque, "A cidade como um medium em McLuhan e Flusser").

In the international sphere, many artists, directly or indirectly, work with anthropophagy or with self-cannibalism as an artistic metaphor. Among many others, we can cite *Google Will Eat Itself*, GWEI, of Ubermorgen, *Carnivore*, of the Radical Software Group, and *Macumba Antropofágica*, of Zé Celso. Many neologisms were created to update the concept of anthropophagy in view of technology, as an invention of its own culture by the appropriation of the foreign culture: technophagy (Giselle Beiguelmann), digital anthropophagy (Vanessa Ramos-Velasquez), telephagy – the fantasy of the technologically colonized as an esthetics of regression in view of the new information technologies (Yara Guasque, 2005).

My expectation – using Lazzarato's argument that "Expression ceases to be an ideological evaluation and becomes an incitement, an invitation to share a certain way of dressing, of having a body, of eating, of communicating, of living, of moving, of having gender, of speaking and so on" (Lazzarato 100-101) – is to be able to show, in these cases, how techno-informational circulation is implicit and how these bodies mirror the respective juridical States, with

their discourses indexed in flesh. Considering these two cases as voracious expressions of contemporary subjectivity, invitations to share an unusual way of experiencing the body, we find in them some reflection of the nation-state in its primitive and advanced form of self-cannibalism.

Considering the indistinctness between biological being and social being, when administrative and legislative inscriptions are rooted in the body, shaping subjectivities as Foucault argued, would primitive technologies and the technological progress of the State's machinery in its social organization be reflected on forms of anthropophagy, showing different stages of the incorporation of the State?

From the social contract to the ways of making some petty cash to purify the soul, comparing the case of anthropophagy and self-cannibalism that occurred in Germany in 2001, involving Armin Meiwes and Bernd Jürgen Brandes, and the most recent case in Brazil that was published by the press, which occurred in the State of Pernambuco (Northeastern Brazil) in 2012, first I approach unusual forms of experiencing the body and the State's inscription in the ways of dying (in fact, I believe we could already see them announced in life in the depleted survival conditions). Although they are not Dionysian celebrations, and they are not characterized as a type of political activism, these insane cases of barbarianism already show us how one country's forms of social organization are present in subjectivity, and bring revealing aspects that range from the incorporation of the State's jurisprudence to the informal economy of quick, irregular jobs.

When I openly revealed my intention of investigation during an art and technology symposium organized by the University of Brasília, I was unexpectedly reprimanded. I considered that the estrangement derived from different conceptions of "artistic" and

"poetic", and as a warning sign, as I would be entering into a territory to which I have not been qualified with analytical tools. I accepted this challenge, even though a vertiginous one, as a chance to short-circuit these universes of politics, esthetics and economy, using just the example of the pneumatophores as a procedure and not as a methodology. The university in its methodology avoids "dead-end streets", reflections that are not very objective, "loose" argumentations. The university, with its hierarchies and reproduction mechanisms, does not create deviations that are necessary for criticism, although it characterizes, according to Lazzarato, the place par excellence of knowledge production and surplus value in the informational capitalism (Lazzarato 124). It does not construct questions (unlike the example of the Indians of the Mexican Chiapas that Lazzarato points to), does not put knowledge at stake, does not open itself to the outside, "questioning, transversally, the set of power relations" (Lazzarato 129). Thus, it wastes the chance of branching and oxygenating thought, in an analogous way to the spurs of the pneumatophores in the mangrove, which branch horizontally just below the surface of the sand, releasing vertical spurs that are exposed in the air to absorb the oxygen, perform the gas exchange between the tree and the environment, and help to solidify a new soil.

To Haraway, the combination between universities and industry – in the close collaboration offered by recent university research to industrial laboratories – prevents the exercise of sharp criticism. "Will the universities that depend on these huge partnerships (industry versus university) still be home to critics of the same economic system? It is not purity that is the loss, but criticism, itself a mixed-up hybrid activity, part intellect and part emotion, part detachment and part involvement" (Haraway apud. Myerson 55).

## The body as a nation

The metaphor of the body as currency implies circulation, within a system of valuation and pre-fixation of equivalences. The body viewed as a working tool is integrated into the capital system. Thus, the approach to the body as a nation, which we might associate with a territory to be protected and delimited, can be summarized as this aspect of currency in circulation, which incorporates an entire social investment and state apparatus. Exploring the idea of the body as a nation, or the representative of a nation, facilitates the recognition of these investments through education, health care and other social mechanisms. Their goal is to increase these bodies' production and working capacity, which starts to be through the pre-fixation of variables of valuation systems, an index of capital and of "nation". These mechanisms of modeling and, simultaneously, of training and control, are the ones that will define subjectivities and the valuation of these bodies and of life. Although it has not been a clearly assumed proposition in the tradition of anthropophagic thought, the body, when it shows that it is incapable for work, would not incorporate the progressive and technological apparatus, thus resisting to the State's violence.

But how can one update anthropophagy as the esthetics of regression with the new information technologies? We believe that this cannot be done by the foreigner being devoured by the barbarian of the anthropophagic poetics. It is in the laziness and in the obtuse and introverted nature of the character Macunaíma, of Mario de Andrade, who refuses to incorporate the rhythm of progress and the meaning of work, that we found a possible answer. After all, technical progress, as well put by Levi-Strauss (Levi-Strauss), depends on the exploitation of man by man. And the shrewdness of Macunaíma

is his pretense of being non-functional. (Guasque, "A cidade como um medium em McLuhan e Flusser").

It is difficult to determine if it was language, or education for production means, that shaped us – to McLuhan, language shapes socially as much as does production: "linguistic media shape social development, as much as does the means of production" (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 49). Education targeted at production was one of the instruments to create this nation-state, and it was subsequently improved by the print media. To some authors, this is quite an elitist view, as it focuses on written language to the detriment of others, like audio-visual language, for radio and television are also shaping instruments. To Ernst Gellner (apud. Schlesinger), the nation-state would have been a result of industrialization and of the complex division of labor, which needs people with homogenized education.

In recent years, the Internet, which comprehends all the previous languages and represents a high investment, has put into practice its communication barriers that have become more complex, and which play the same role of the previous media regarding the formation of nationalisms, including some and excluding others. The Internet no longer is a social space understood as territoriality, fixed or not – arenas, places, as the beginning of the Internet had made us believe -, but a social system that also modifies us. "Physiologically, man in the normal use of technology (or his variously extended body) is perpetually modified by it and in turn finds ever new ways of modifying his technology" (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 49).

As a social system, the Internet integrates itself even more easily into other systems like the legal, the political, and the financial ones due to the facility of data communication among them. "National space is constructed within a definite social space.

In the present context of a world system of nation-states the relevant confines for the reproduction of national identity are territorial and juridico-political givens” (Schlesinger 173).

The demarcation of a nation used to be related to primitive typologies such as language, body and blood with their genetic characteristics, and currency. According to Schlesinger, regarding specifically the European community, with its diverse memories, languages and consanguinities, if one wants to speak about a collectivity or something that shelters the notion of nationalism of this mosaic created in 1992, one needs to wonder first: “Unity of what kind, for whom and on what terms?” (Schlesinger 188). As consanguinity no longer defines a nation, how would the State, with the mobility of the contemporary scenario and the alleged “openness” of the frontiers, shape subjectivities through technology? Even though there is no clear limit anymore, nor clearly delimited frontiers – but “marked gaps, communicative barriers” (MacKenzie, W. J. M. apud. Schlesinger 156) —, nationalism has been replaced by other frontiers and clashes that are no less intimidating.

As the body implies circularity, how can we distinguish the social and collective body from the individual one? Would there be a correlation between these two bodies and the body without organs that is culturally indoctrinated and the visceral body? Would dismemberment, in the case of anthropophagy and self-cannibalism, be an attempt to reconstruct a new social body, with affinities a la Hans Bellmer? A different stage of agglutination and social interaction that would not happen through the previous idea of nation of the social body?

## The cases – the fecundation of the machine world

In another paper, I approached the concept of social machine proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, and McLuhan’s seminal reflections in *Understanding Media, the Extension of Man*, to think about new forms of urbanity created by the gravitational attraction of intersubjectivities (Guasque, *The City as a Medium in McLuhan and Flusser*). I dealt with the indistinctness between machine and organic being that is implicit in the concept of social machine to reflect on the symbiotic relationship State versus organic being – as a double bias that is formed, on the one hand, by the State’s machinery setup, and on the other hand, by the technological extensions of the body -, and how it affects subjectivity. In the present paper, I want to question how the fecundation of the being and of the machine and their integrated systems (political, financial and legal) result in self-cannibalism, and whether self-cannibalism derives from the stage of the body as currency, and whether it reflects the extensions of the State in the constitution of the subjectivity of this technologized body/nation.

The extensions that are considered here as being capable of introjecting this nation-state, more than the territorial one, are the technological and conceptual extensions, such as the legal norms. If previously we could talk about the Internet as a social space with emphasis on a type of territoriality other than the geographic one, now we talk about a social system. The result of this is that there is no disparity between body and nation-state, because when the body is incorporated by the system, and precisely because it is a two-way process at the end, it introjects this very system. Exactly as McLuhan had already shown us: “Man

becomes, as it were, the sex organs of the machine world, as the bee of the plant world, enabling it to fecundate and to evolve ever new forms” (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 46).

It is necessary to say that the cases reported here were not practiced by immigrants, by “non-documented individuals” of the contemporary scenario of violence, despite the internal migratory movement of the Brazilian Northeast region.

Considering them as collective cases, could we understand them today as pre-industrial and post-industrial anthropophagy cases? Several components fit into these cases of anthropophagy and self-cannibalism, from those that are simpler to identify to the ones that are more complex: enticement; concealment of facts and of corpse; calculation and planning; consensual docility in the erotic-masochistic game; records of barbarism from the new and old continents in the massive media; utilization of means of communication, either the Internet or randomly distributed flyers; audiovisual record intended to be subsequently used; norms of cultures, from pre-industrial up to those that are more technologically advanced; legal systems; information systems; formal and informal economy systems; labor division norms and survival strategies; formal and informal education; and even regional, worker and international cuisine.

In the first case, which occurred in the European continent, and which was truly anthropophagy and self-cannibalism, what scares us is the “regressive orality state” that is so characteristic of Theodor de Bry’s illustrations (16th century), which showed to the Europeans the American continent as if it were in a stage of regression and barbarism. In this case, we have individuals with higher education, identified by name and profession, capable of arguing for their own defense, included in the high-connectivity digital

world, who use this connectivity to reach death successfully, who had chosen in detail, and with written consent, the form of death and of dismemberment of body parts, and who used, in all the preparatory stages, multimedia documentation, registering, by means of an inventory, the preparation of dishes with body parts according to the international cuisine, perhaps to use this material as publicity. Would such an inventory be more than a staging of violence – would it be self-exhibitionism highly tuned with the capitalist media, created with the purpose of subjectively affecting the audience, directly or indirectly?

In the recent case of the city of Garanhuns, State of Pernambuco (Northeastern Brazil), the pagan anthropophagy scene from the period when America was discovered is not repeated, as the ritual now happens in the name of God with the old world’s culture truly assimilated. Jorge Negromonte, with the help of two women, enticed girls coming from small towns, attracted by the offer of work as housemaids. The victims, “people to be purified”, were chosen by the trio through the analysis of the numbers of Brazil’s General Registry identification document (R.G.), issued by the Public Security Department (SSP). In a process that is similar to a lottery, the document’s numbers should coincide with 666 or with an approximate number, resulting from the combination of all the numbers of other documents. The trio viewed the anthropophagic act as a “mission”, after some time of conviviality, and the remains of the bodies became pastry, a quick and irregular job, sold and put into circulation, like currency. In this second case, we have individuals without formal university education searching for a means to survive, excluded, in many senses, from an information system, viewed as mad or ignorant, whose names the massive media quickly forgets, although they broadcast their faces widely on television.

In the case of Pernambuco, the offer of jobs already signaled a strategy that discards framing the action as being the result of an impulsive act, despite the irrationality. The author even registered in a notary's office the book in which he confesses his first crime. Although he had bought a video camera, he did not use audio-visual documentation – in the German case, because it is much more in tune with the international capitalist media, it was widely used in the means of communication.

In spite of the communicative and symbolic dimension, which is imposed against a social norm of religious nature, these cases are repulsive acts, mainly due to the banality with which the bodies are viewed. And as religious transgression, an act against the civilization project.

Although these cases show cruelty and brutality, they cannot be framed as compulsive violence. Even though none of the forms of violence that are legally practiced by the State can be framed as cannibalism – which is clearly a cultural aberration, a decline in the civilized civil conduct –, nothing is farther from impulsiveness and nothing that the contemporary State has not already exercised in an abstract form.

Among so many details, it is noteworthy, in the comparison of these two cases, the employment scheme, the culture, and the reach of the legal system. But we also cannot talk about coercive technique or use of a tool as a conscious political resource, which would be understood as a political act like in cases of terrorism.

## The body as currency

Currency implies quotation, a system of valuation and equivalences, and circulation. The quick, irregular job, just like the bargain,

needs a physical clash, face-to-face synchronous communication, which is impossible in the circulation of digital money. Enticement by the Internet, in turn, shows this distancing and the peculiar abstraction of the circulation of digital money.

Even focusing only on the circulation system of which money is part, distributing, exchanging, selling and donating are not equivalent to each other. Only exchanging and selling delimit a valuation system of equivalences. The recent debate about the monetization of genetic material brings again to the surface the issue of the body as currency. Traditionally, blood cannot be traded; it is donated. But the costs of blood banks, which are places that host and distribute blood and other sub-products, charge fees with peculiarities according to the jurisdiction of each country. In these examples, like in the case of blood donation or sale, we can analyze the legal borders.

The body, already used to its extensions like clothes, housing and the city, enabled by previous technologies, when it is inserted, in recent years, in the nervous system of digital technologies, it is translated into an information system (McLuhan, *Os meios de comunicação como extensões do homem* 77). Work, money and the body itself integrate the system of circulation of information and of programmed knowledge. Work is no longer physical work; rather, it is programmed knowledge, and production is computerized knowledge production. According to McLuhan, as work is replaced by sheer movement and circulation of information, money, as a store of work, gradually merges with the informational forms of credit and credit card (McLuhan, *Os meios de comunicação como extensões do homem* 161).

Automation, which is electronic, does not represent physical work so much as programmed knowledge. As work is replaced by the sheer movement of information, money as



a store of work merges with the informational forms of credit and credit card. From coin to paper currency, and from currency to credit card there is a steady progression toward commercial exchange as the movement of information itself (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 137).

Like the body, money is also translated into an information system. The possibility of broadcasting electronic information made the current money system become obsolete. Money as a vast social metaphor builds relations of valuation and equivalences of products and works. The developed societies started to deal with computerized money, which depends on more complex and abstract organisms, like financial institutions that operate in quotation and the stock market. The underdeveloped nations still have the exchange relationship, in which a product can be negotiated for another one, giving place, as it usually happens, to bargain, which needs a face-to-face clash.

## Recoding the social memory of the new savage?

McLuhan predicted that we would return to a tribal relationship with the space's contraction, now interconnected by the speed of information circulation that makes it emerge simultaneously in distant points. From nomads to sedentary individuals and from sedentariness we return to being nomads, now globally connected via computers, which has deeply affected production. But he did not predict the self-cannibalism of the financial and legal systems of advanced societies, and he also did not focus on the point of view of the thought of a new savage.

After three thousand years of specialist explosion and of increasing specialism and alienation in the technological extensions of

our bodies, our world has become compressional by dramatic reversal. As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electric speed in bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 5).

With globalization, we would expect a system of equivalence between currencies and work investment. The exhaustion of the pre-capitalist system would inevitably force its own reinvention, according to Terranova: "However, in Marxist terms once the formal subsumption of pre-capitalist pockets is exhausted, we enter the age of 'real subsumption' – a qualitatively new phase in the evolution of capital, whereby the latter must reinvent itself in order to survive" (30). Nevertheless, to this author, productivity cannot be measured in equitable terms by working hours, nor by the abstract value of correspondences as intended by the economy, because historical subjectivities, differences in needs, and desires have weights on this valuation.

This productivity cannot be measured either through the working hour or through the abstraction of exchanged value:

*'the quantity of [working] time can be the same... but in the same unit of measure we find lived historical subjectivities which are totally different'. (Terranova 30).*

Would we be too bold if we thought about anthropophagy and self-cannibalism as the reinvention of a social currency?

## Notes

[1] All the quotations, except those written originally in English, were translated into English for the purposes of this paper.

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