The 1922 Rio de Janeiro International Centennial Exhibition: From Colonialism to "Anthropophagy"

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In 1922, the city of Rio de Janeiro hosted the International Centennial Exhibition (Centennial Expo), which was considered the first and only Brazilian event inspired by the so-called universal expos that started in London in 1851 and continued until today. This expo was the result of Brazil's political desire to be included in the global network, with strong commercial and ideological appeal.

1 A political proposal behind the scenes

In the past, the globalization process considered different cultural events according to political and economic power. The international reception of cultural production was completely different between European countries such as England and France and colonized countries like Brazil. In some sense, even after independence, the colonies continued to be valued only in terms of their natural resources. Therefore, the Brazilian government had a complex challenge. It was not enough to open doors to new commercial possibilities; Brazil needed to adopt a new national status of an independent and modern country. This was not an easy task. It was very difficult to create, to work, and to produce in a world-system where major economic and political impulses pointed in different directions, i.e., around canonical centers of knowledge and power.

Since the proclamation of independence by Dom Pedro II on September 7, 1822, Brazil committed to a progressive project based on urban changes and commercialization in order to transform the country into a modern nation.

In many ways, this plan has been very successful. The presence of more than thirty foreign countries at the 1922 Centennial Expo (each with a specific pavilion or representative) highlighted the potential of Brazil, which at that time was considered to be the great exponent of Latin America. A ceremonial project, initiated by the Brazilian government developed especially for the occasion, suggested establishing an order of priority among the embassies according to the criterion of interest, which resulted in the following arrangement: the United States, Mexico, Portugal, Great Britain, France, Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, Chile, Italy, China, Colombia, Czechoslovakia, Uruguay, Germany, Paraguay, Argentina, Poland, Bolivia, Ecuador, Bulgaria, Sweden and special envoys, Switzerland, Denmark, Cuba, Japan, Norway, Venezuela, and

Greece as well as delegates from Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

It is important to note the presence of the United States at the top of the list due to the Brazilian government's interest in strengthening political ties and trade relations with the country. It was at this time that the US presence in Brazil began to grow and after World War II, the "American way of life" became an everyday presence through imported goods and communication networks such as film and TV broadcasting.

However, despite the good reception of Brazil among visitors, it was not easy to create a new international image. Until then, as was the case with all other colonized countries, Brazil was outside of international circuits and considered an exotic country whose unique qualities included the exuberant nature of the Amazon forest, minerals, precious stones, and so on. These resources had been wrongfully exploited by Portuguese and other European explorers, but this was not relevant to the government. The priority was to propose the ideal requirements for a modern nation that could be identified by increasing cultural production, urbanization, and new technologies. This proposal could be seen during the exhibition of the films organized as part of the Centennial Expo. At first, the main idea was to use the movie theater as a vehicle to disseminate the new official image. However, at this time, there was no communication between those who were attempting to build a Brazilian film industry. Therefore, the examples provided to visitors were still particularly marked by the notion of exuberance and exoticism, as shown in a film called "In the Country of the Amazons," directed by Silvino Santos in 1922. In addition to the exuberance for natural resources, there was also a mood of 19th century aesthetics, inspired by the European *beaux arts*. This can be interpreted as a recurring symptom among colonized countries, which seems to include the necessity to replicate a series of images of the colonized originally put forth by the colonizers.

Homi K. Bhabha is one of the important researchers who devoted most of his career to deepening ambivalence toward the colonization process by paying particular attention to these imaginary representations and their correspondent discursive practices. Bhabha detected a phenomenon that emerges after communication is initiated between colonizers and colonized people. According to him, the most serious problem is not the intentional mimesis of the colonizer (the Indian who dressed as an Anglican or the Brazilian who built a home based on Portuguese architecture). There is another kind of symbolic exchange and the process of colonization is even more perverse when it starts to affect internal cognitive patterns, i.e., when the colonized start seeing themselves through the imagination of the colonizers. This is a sort of nationalism guided by well-known stereotypes: an exotic country, lush in natural resources, docile and receptive people, etc.

However, as Bhabha himself explained, these colonial processes have always fostered ambivalence and there were multiple cognitive networks being affected at the same time. In this sense,

there was a hybrid moment of political change when the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation of elements that are neither to one (Brazilian natives) nor the other (colonizers) but was something in-between, contesting the terms and territories of both.

2 Rethinking the genealogy of power

Another interpretation was proposed by the Canadian philosopher Brian Massumi. Bhabha and Massumi have different theoretical approaches but they both address similar questions. Bhabha is influenced by the research of Michel Foucault on the genealogy of power, where certain issues are discussed from a psychoanalytic point of view, among other references proposed by scholars such as Edward Said and Jacques Derrida. On the other hand, Massumi is more connected to authors such as Gilles Deleuze, Gilbert Simondon, and Baruch Spinoza. However, in some sense, all of these authors are interested in a better understanding of the plasticity of culture, leaving behind the idea of *a priori* cultural models.

A good example is the book *The Power at the End of Economy* (2015). In this work, Massumi claimed there is a broader sense, recognized as a *macropolitical level*, where the spaces in-between actions are invisible. However, at the same time, there are always *micropolitical modes of activities*, which Massumi identifies as an "affective-event-contagion level." These micropolitical actions have the potential to exceed macropolitical aims.

To better understand this hypothesis, it is important to note that Massumi's ideas were based on the recognition that the notion of *self* (and *self-identity*) cannot be reduced to a *substantive* notion, meaning that it is related to nationality, language, and territory. In his framework, the idea of self-identity can be considered a "movement that connotes a vector of life into a zone of potential." Therefore, in addition to the actions of power, there will always be an infra-individual level that promotes a kind of resistance to the micro level of affection.

This can be seen in major events such as international expos that deal with very specific objectives regarding commercial integration and political actions but still affect the country's image on multiple levels. As Massumi pointed out, even when the proposal is to integrate movements that constitute alleged macropolitics (in this case, the project of constitution of modernity), there is always a micro level condition that indicates new creation paths. Perhaps this is also a fundamental aspect of the great expos and one of the less visible legacies that results from the most explicit political and economic goals but gradually becomes fundamental in the promotion of cultural resistance.

In the specific case of the Centennial Expo, for example, a series of debates took place during the event (outside the scope of the pavilions) that suggested a sort of micropolitical network to discuss the repercussions of the notions of race, nationalism, and the eugenics that gen-

erated the greatest controversy. To better understand this particular situation, the context must be explained.

Historically, before 1920, Rio de Janeiro was widely known as the "city of death" due to recurrent epidemics of yellow fever. Therefore, the government initiated a local project related to the Centennial Expo. The aim was to transform not only the country's image but also the image of Rio de Janeiro to that of a "wonderful city." In order to achieve this goal, a hygiene campaign was started, building a healthy image of the "take care of the race."

In 1923, shortly after the Centennial Expo, the *Brazilian League of Mental Hygiene* was created in Rio de Janeiro. This association was led by psychiatrist Gustavo Reidel, who was attuned to the eugenic vision of Dr. Renato Kehl, who had worked for some time in Sao Paulo defending the need for a program that addressed "mental prophylaxis for criminals and the disabled." Apart from these pathological issues, it was also noted that there was an urgent need to take care of the black slaves brought from Africa who could "contaminate" Brazil with new diseases. Races such as mestizos (a mix of white and Indian races), Indians, mulattos (a mixed black and white races) and cafuzos (a mix of black mestizos and Indians) were also important topics of discussion because according Reidel and Kehl, they hindered the progress of the nation. The new nationalist assumptions would be supported by the need to "whiten" the population, using the European model as a benchmark. In addition, there was also social segregation from the poor who lived in precarious conditions, especially in the inner cities and rural areas. During the 1920s, Dr. Miguel Pereira considered the degeneration of the race to be a health problem and a result of bad racial combinations.

In a way, these trends subtly reverberated during the Centennial Expo. A great example was the presence of the Jeca Tatu character in the Palace of Festivals, which was part of the exhibition. This character, created by the writer Monteiro Lobato, represented the "degeneration of the inhabitants of the interior" and his presence at the exhibition was designed to prevent the proliferation of this image, which was linked to the past of the underdeveloped country rather than the new phase of modernity.

Of course, there was no unanimity regarding these positions and therefore, during the exhibition, numerous discussions proliferated that rejected this tendency of the unique model of race and social status. At the same time, there was economic tension in rural areas, especially in the coffee sector in the interior of the state of São Paulo. There was also a political movement to consolidate the anarchist and communist communities that were growing throughout the country. All of these movements and their reactions impacted the city in more than a symbolic way. A good example was the demolition of Monte Castelo (Castle Hill) in Rio de Janeiro to open up space for the construction of more exhibition pavilions. According to the mayor, Carlos Sampaio, the aim of this demolition project was to "root out the rotten tooth or remove the mon-

strous wart" that spoiled the face of the beautiful city of Rio de Janeiro.

These events that took place simultaneously during the exhibition can be interpreted as a sort of palimpsest. The first layer was, without a doubt, the official proposal to increase modernity but within the other layers, one could identify problems and images that attested to the fragility of the official proposal. It was not enough to promote this clean and fictional image of the body, the city, and the nation.

3 The 1922 *Week of Modern Art* as a Micropolitical Action

Although the city of São Paulo was one of the "targets" of the nationalist and national hygiene policy, it could also be considered what Massumi called a "zone of potential." The *Week of Modern Art*, which took place in São Paulo from February 11–18, 1922, is a good example.

Despite the ideological pressure for progress and modernity, this event was not aimed at any commercial target or international policy. It was organized by the poet Oswald de Andrade and a group of *avant-garde* artists working in various artistic fields (visual arts, literature, theater, music, etc.).[1] The primary goal of the event was actually to criticize the notion of identity politics, which could be considered a critical path away from the goals of the Centennial Expo.

The *Week of Modern Art* itself had little impact at the time but deployed in initiatives that have left key brands such as the *Anthropophagical Manifest* (*Manifesto Antropófago*) and *Pau-Brazil Poetry*, both written by the Oswald de Andrade, and *Macunaíma* by Mario de Andrade. The proposal was to use the "cannibal logic" of Brazilian Indians as a metaphor to mark the Brazilian appetite to devour foreign cultures (from both outside of Brazil such as European cultures and inside such as the Ameríndia culture and that of African Americans), digesting all according to their own peculiarities.

In this cultural soup, it is possible to identify the remains of French Surrealism, a trace of Nietzschean proposals, and murmurs of Walt Whitman's poetry, which were important references for artists and especially writers who were interested in exploring different processes of creation outside the scope of the most prestigious aesthetic models. For example, always in good spirits, Oswald de Andrade created a series of parodies including a translation of the Hamlet dilemma "to be or not to be," which became "Tupi or not Tupi."[2]

We can observe many differences between the Centennial Expo in Rio de Janeiro and the

1 Some of the most notable participants were painters such as Anita Malfatti, Di Cavalcanti, Vicente do Rego Monteiro, Inácio da Costa Ferreira, and Victor Brecheret; writers such as Oswald de Andrade, Mario de Andrade, Sergio Milliet, Plinio Salgado, Menotti del Picchia, Ronald de Carvalho, Guilherme de Almeida, and Alvaro Moreira; musicians such as Heitor Villa-Lobos, Guiomar Novais, and Ernani Braga, among many others.

Modern Art Week in São Paulo. As mentioned above, the former was primarily focused on seeking a sort of "nationalism for export," guided by foreign models of modernity and civilization in order to assert a new world image of Brazil as an independent nation. On the other hand, the *Week of Modern Art* took place in the São Paulo context, which was completely different. At that time, São Paulo was not a center of power like Rio de Janeiro. Additionally, it reflected the mood of a city that was not a beach town and not open to the ocean. We can say São Paulo had a more introspective profile that would change over time leading it to become the largest financial center in the country.

4 Looking for Singularities in Brazilian Culture(s)

Despite important differences, there was a common aspect between the Centennial Expo and the *Week of Modern Art*: defining Brazilian culture. Of course, there was a very distinct understanding of culture and nationalism related to macro and micropolitical levels.

As stated above, the Centennial Expo was based on substantialist settings such as territory, language, and nation and was focused on expectations for the international view of Brazil, reinforcing the myth of an exuberant and exotic nation even when the main objectives were to transform the country into a modern nation. The project to increase modernity, as in other cultures, was based on patterns established by notions of progress, new technologies, and international markets rather than on local needs.

On the other hand, the experience in São Paulo turned out to be a preliminary attempt to create a singular and subjective strategy known as *anthropophagy*. It became a type of rhizomatic net that was recovered many times in different circumstances such as during the concrete poetry movement of the 1950s; the visual arts experiments of Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica; and the Tropicalismo musical movement of the 1960s.[3]

Through these distinct political versions of cultural cannibalism, identity was not be considered something static or monolithic but a moving or dynamic cognitive network of thoughts, perceptions, and actions. As the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro explained in his book *Cannibal Metaphysics* (2015), the roots of Brazilian culture are not European but are

2 Tupi is the linguistic family of the Tupi-Guarani tribe, which was one of the largest tribes in Brazil, spanning 13 states, before becoming nearly extinct from successive attacks.

3 It is important to point out that they all addressed the same issues proposed by the anthropophagical perspective, which involves: (1) a political attitude to deal with life (looking for zones of potential); (2) the recognition of the singularity and the diversity of experience, avoiding the tendency to transform everything in *a priori* categories; and (3) the desire to explore the perceptions of the body, not only rational thoughts, by rethinking the boundaries of knowledge.

primarily connected to "Amerindian perspectivism" and a form of "multinaturalism." As a result of this cosmology from the Amazon, nature cannot be separated from culture. Instead of either natural or cultural productions, there are multiple perspectives. In other words, when we see something through a different perspective, it means we can deal with new realities (and not only new interpretations of a universal reality). Therefore, the anthropophagic strategy can be considered a subversive methodology to criticize the view of the colonizer by translating the imaginary stereotypes of the colonized through a multitude of ideas, feelings, and images. This point of view can create a multinaturalism of bodies and experiences.

5 Dealing with the Colonial Discourse

An important statement of the colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of "fixity" in the ideological construction of *otherness*. However, as a sign of cultural and historical difference, it seems to be a paradoxical mode of representation. According to Bhabha, it connotes an unchanging order as well as a disorder at the same time. Like all the stereotypes, which are the main focus of the major discursive strategy of the colonizers, this ideological construction of *otherness* vacillates between what is always "in place," it is already known, and something that needs a representation that can be interpreted as a process of subjectification.

Even if the forces of power attempt to reduce all processes to prior political normativity, there is always an articulation of differences. The main point is to avoid the notion of essential identity as observed by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* of the late 1970s and to avoid the dangers of a unique history as noted by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. When we try to encapsulate a complex culture in a single essence or history, we start working with stereotypes, the primary points of subjectification from colonial discourse for both the colonizers and the colonized.

Looking at the Centennial Expo and the 1922 *Week of Modern Art* from a contemporary viewpoint, it is possible to recognize the ambivalences that have been proposed by different authors since the late 1970s. In some sense, the tension between the two experiences showed, *avant la lettre*, a complex scenario that became more and more explicit in the next millennium.

As the Brazilian curator and researcher Suely Rolnik proposed in her essay "Politics of Flexible Subjectivity: The Event Work of Lygia Clark" (2008), there are four types of producers that emerge from our past experiences: the creators, the consulting professionals (of the business and marketing world), the consumers, and the human self-presentation specialists (personal trainers, personal stylists, plastic surgeons, interior designers etc.).

All of the producers listed above are closely connected to the imagination and construction of an image. A showroom-type of flexible subjectivity is embodied in their connection. There-

fore, it is still visible among contemporary experiences, for those trying to create a rigid identity in order to be included in the global market and those operating at the micropolitical level, looking for flexible ways to deal with art and life. Between them, there are several territories of ambivalence. If we understand art as the opening to "*becoming-other*," artists and curators always deal with a degree of instability that comes with new possibilities of communication, from invisible levels of perception to explicit discourse.

Thinking about the context of the symposium "Expos and Human History," I would like to conclude this brief presentation on these Brazilian events by quoting philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 172):

> Artists are like philosophers. What little health they possess is often fragile, not because of their illnesses or neuroses but because they have seen something in life that is too much for anyone, too much for themselves, and that has put on them the quiet mark of death. But this something is also the source of breath that supports them through the illness of the lived, what Nietzsche called health.

Maybe this "primary sickness" studied by Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Guattari can be interpreted as a sort of radical tendency to *become-other* or to deal with *otherness* through perception (Greiner 2015). If it is true, even when artists and curators are dealing with a multitude of political and ideological issues, they can still help us to think about our history, as evidenced by the great expos.

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