

Tropics to Talk About: Witkacy and Oswald de Andrade

Abstract: This paper concentrates on Witkacy's Pure Form and the concept of Anthropophagy that was coined by Oswald de Andrade, and their affinity with the notions of utopia and tropicality. Tropicality is detected in the form of the imaginary construction of Witkacy regarding the South Sea Islands on the one hand, and on the other in the utopic island of Vera Cruz, reinvented by Oswald de Andrade in his mature years. The seamen of the old world first conceptualised Vera Cruz in this way in legends that alluded to the lost paradise and following this trace Oswald dreamt it could be a future paradise. Both Witkacy and de Andrade, beyond being artists, were thinkers of their specific cultures and had their theories regarding the future of mankind.

Keywords: Utopia; Lost Paradise; Pure Form; Anthropophagy

Introduction

Tropical islands as lost paradise. Paradise as utopia. Is it possible to construct utopias in the modern times? As it seems two modernist artists and thinkers, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, known as Witkacy, and Oswald de Andrade, known as Oswald, could. The former was Polish and at the beginning of his life his country did not function as a politically independent state. With a thousand-year-old history, Polish people struggled to continue to be a nation. Nationalism, however, was not to Witkacy "a cause worth fighting for" – as it was for other artists of his time. Actually, Witkacy had a critical position regarding the romantic imaginary of Poland as Christ of the Nations. In fact, he seemed particularly concerned with the future of mankind. Oswald de Andrade was a son of a colonized and explored mother-nation. He loved his country, which did not mean that it was an exclusive feeling: Oswald is considered a cosmopolitan nationalist¹. Insufficiently recognised for a long time, his reputation has been re-established recently. There are obvious biographical similarities between Witkacy and Oswald, but what is of primary importance in this article are affinities in their concepts of utopia as linked

¹ "Cosmopolitan nationalism" is how José Guilherme Merquior defines De Andrade's conception of Anthropophagy (apud Silveira, 2007, p.157), definition that I retake here to refer Oswald de Andrade as well.

with tropical paradise islands. It should be also discussed what they created from this correlation. Pessimistic with regard to the future of humankind, Witkacy pursued the utopian goal of achieving Pure Form, ecstatic-aesthetic experience for which he formulated a theory. Oswald de Andrade loved tropical life and strived to propose a brilliant future that would be based on its "tropicality".

Witkacy

Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885–1939) was a painter, novelist, playwright, photographer, creator of a philosophical system and of an aesthetic treatise, the Pure Form theory. He had composed over thirty plays – not all of which survive today, wrote three novels, one philosophical work, other critical texts, and made hundreds of drawings and paintings during his lifetime.

In the following quotation, Degler recognises the pivotal themes addressed by Witkacy and suggests they may be considered simultaneously classic and contemporary:

"There is no doubt that after 1990 the following aspects became crucial. First, the endangering of the individual by the heartless world of modern civilization. Second, the loss of individuality and of the sense of personal autonomy in a united and well-organized society. Third, the disappearance of such spiritual values and needs that endow human existence with deeper meaning. Their disappearance leads to the sterility and standardization of culture, and in the long run to the "bestialisation" of humanity. World drama does not contain many works in which these problems are shown as accurately and in such a modern form, as is the case with Witkiewicz. All these factors make him a classic, and simultaneously "our contemporary", and he will probably remain one as long as the problems that his work deals with do not cease to be valid"².

Considering the dehumanization of mankind, Witkacy argues that art could draw our attention to spiritual values that are "internally" hidden. Witkacy started to draft his first writings on what he named Theory of Pure Form before the first World War³ in Russia⁴, but he only published them after he returned to Poland, in 1919⁵. Witkacy wrote and worked hard on the concept of Pure Form:

"Throughout the 1920s, concurrent with his work as dramatist, painter, and novelist, Witkacy the critic and aesthetician was busy battling the artistic and cultural establishment and arguing for his own theory of Pure Form in painting and drama. He wrote dozens of polemic articles defending his own works and ideals for various literary weeklies and journals and developed his own

² Degler, Janusz. *In the sphere of reception, revisions and inspirations. Witkacy and the world*. Translated by Tomasz Wisniewski, p. 125, <http://www.tekstualia.pl/index.php/pl/index-plus/index-plus-ii> (16. September 2013)

³ Gerould, Daniel, (ed. trans). *The Witkiewicz Reader*, London: Quartet Books. 1992:82.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵ We concentrate our efforts here to reflect about the relation between Pure Form and the Tropics, but it is important to say that there were other essential experiences for the composition of his theory, like to be in the First World War, in the Russian Revolution of 1917 and his familiarity with Polish and European art and artists. All these are experiences are depicted in "The Witkiewicz Reader"(Gerould, 1992).

aesthetic theory in "New Forms in Painting" in 1919, "Aesthetic sketches" in 1922, and "An Introduction to the Theory of Pure Form in the Theatre" in 1913"⁶.

From the socio-political perspective, Witkacy did not believe in a utopian future of mankind and he claimed that those who assume such a perspective wanted to see things through "rose-coloured glasses"⁷. The ideal searched for in "Art as the Pure Form" was the only possible utopia⁸ and the ideal sought was to reconnect artist and spectator to the "Mystery of Existence". Witkacy believed this connection was a strong one when art was closer to religion, which happened in different moments in the history of mankind.

In 1914, Witkacy travelled to the South Sea Islands. Among other things, this trip profoundly influenced not only his thinking about differences between cultures of diverse peoples, but also his viewpoint on the relativity of laws and of morality that depends on each culture. All this is visible in his tropical plays and in the development of the Pure Form Theory. As Gerould puts it,

"In novels, plays, essays, and letters, Witkacy portrayed the experience of the tropics as a vision of mysterious power to which he would be a slave until the end of his days. What the future playwright saw during the two-week stopover in Ceylon inevitably influenced his ideas on art and theatre"⁹.

Oswald-de-Andrade

A playwright, novelist, poet, and Brazilian culture thinker, Oswald de Andrade (1890–1954) was a son of rich coffee producers. He was given an opportunity to mingle with modernist artists in Europe. Joined with Brazilian modernist friends, he criticised, among other things: the academicism of neoclassical artists in Brazil; the Brazilian artists who studied in Europe and wanted to copy what they saw there; the Parnassian poets "possessed" by the cult of language. Oswald and his circle believed that to face the effervescence of a city like São Paulo, of growing industrialization and that represented Brazil's future, it would be necessary to reply with an art of local colours, reverential to our primitive side, but in a different way to the one proposed by the romantic indianist José de Alencar (1829–1877)¹⁰.

Even though initially Brazil appeared as a marvellous wonder to European conquerors, in the twentieth century its identity was reshaped by some modernists, among them Oswald de Andrade. He contributed to the Modern Art Week of 1922 and explored

⁶ Witkiewicz, Stanisław Ignacy. *The Mother & Other Unsavoury Plays Including The Shoemakers and They*. Edited and translated by Daniel Gerould and C.S. Durer, New York: Applause, 1993: 40.

⁷ Gerould, *The Witkiewicz Reader*, 111.

⁸ For Witkacy it was not possible to return to a paradisiacal life, a Rousseauian savage one, and his different literary pieces are true dystopias. For further details see: (Gerould, 1992: pp.108–109).

⁹ Gerould, *The Witkiewicz Reader*, 75.

¹⁰ Both authors and cultural thinkers, Alencar and de Andrade, defended a Brazilian literature. Nature, indians and a national language were pillars at Alencar's works and continued as important symbols in the modernism advocated by de Andrade. Nevertheless, de Andrade didn't refuse foreign references but rather figured out an utopia – to take ownership of these references and then turn them into Brazilian ones.

the potential of the notion of Anthropophagy. To Oswald, Anthropophagy was both a poetic and a philosophical construction that metaphorically depicted Brazil's destiny among other nations. He invoked modernists of his time to serve on the mission of reinvention of the tropics.

According to Silveira, the Brazilian modernism dialogued with the romantic movement¹¹, which had developed four decades before and was an attempt at rediscovering and re-evaluation of national identity. By metaphorising the cannibalistic act that was observed among certain Indian people in the early conquest of Brazil, Oswald perceived the Anthropophagy not only as a poetic act but also as a mythic-philosophical theory. According to the former perspective, Anthropophagy was defined as a poetic procedure of joining artistic material of varied origins: both Brazilian and European, both popular and erudite, both rural and urban, both archaic and technological. All these elements had to be swallowed and transformed into something genuinely Brazilian and only then should be exported. If until that time the country produced only raw material, Oswald argued that other than exotic aspects of Brazil should be exported¹². Feeling scorned and forgotten, in his mature years, Oswald returned to Anthropophagy in order to reaffirm it as a *Weltanschauung* and to retake the ideal of Brazil as a lost paradise to be reinvented.

Pure Form and the Tropics

In 1914, on the eve of the First World War, Witkacy lost his fiancée Jadwiga Janczewska – as a result of a serious relationship crisis she committed suicide¹³. Feeling responsible for this desperate act, Witkacy thought seriously of following her steps but his childhood friend, Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942), who was soon to become a famous anthropologist, invited him to join in the scientific expedition to the South Sea Islands as a painter and photographer¹⁴. Although the experience lasted only two weeks, it turned out intensive enough to impregnate Witkacy for his whole life. This is visible in his tropical plays such as: *The Pragmatists*, *Miss Tootli Pootli*, *Mr. Price or the Tropical Madness and Metaphysics of a Two Headed-Calf*.

The tropics provoked contradictory feelings in Witkacy. On the one hand, there was a fascination, on the other the intensity of the experience led to suffering. In a letter to the parents of the late fiancée, Witkacy reports that he regretted so much the fact that

¹¹ Silveira, Éder. *Tupi or not tupi: nação e nacionalidade em José de Alencar e Oswald de Andrade*. UFRS. Porto Alegre, novembro de 2007. Programa de Pós Graduação em História. Doctoral thesis available online on, <<https://lume.ufrgs.br/handle/10183/12093>>, accessed on 09-02-2019, 152.

¹² In the future, there would be different heirs of the anthropophagic conception in Brazilian art. One of the most famous and representative was the band *Nação Zumbi*, which the leader was Chico Science (1966–1997). He has helped found the out of the axis mangubeat movement in the nineties. The expression articulate two words: mangue, a fantastic biodiverse ecosystem created by the mixture pond, sea and marsh that exists in Brazilian northwest; and beat, that can mean pulse, tempo, rhythm. Actually the musical references of his band were either a miscellaneous, gathering typical and ritual Brazilian musical genres like maracatu and embolada with international genres as rock, hip hop and electronic music. The result is a not typical Brazilian product of exportation with lyrics that depicts a wonderful but colonized country.

¹³ Gerould, *The Witkiewicz Reader*, 86.

¹⁴ Kowalczyk, Janusz R. *Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy)*. Article available online on <https://culture.pl/en/artist/stanislaw-ignacy-witkiewicz-witkacy>

he could not share with Janczewska the stunning beauty and wonders of the Tropics, adding that this experience increased his pain caused by her absence. In a letter to his father, Witkacy commented on the absurdity of witnessing such great beauty in her absence and mentioned he felt incapable of being an artist when "looking at the inconceivable beauty of the world"¹⁵. "All this is too much for me mentally and spiritually. Everything is poison which brings close thoughts of death"¹⁶.

In 1932, already married with Jadwiga Witkiewiczowa (1893–1968), the woman that would be his wife for 16 years, Witkacy wrote to her saying that his visit to the Tropics¹⁷ was an alternative to escape, as he understood times were unpredictable¹⁸: "I don't see the future clearly. [...] Maybe go to the Tropics in some capacity or other and disappear there. If I could make it as a court painter. That scoundrel Malinowski might try to help arrange it."¹⁹. There are also parts of a 1914 letter²⁰ to his father in which Witkacy speaks about intoxicating lust and colours of the South Sea Islands, to be found both in the nature and people²¹:

"They give the impression of being animals. Wonderful people. In colour ranging from red chocolate to black bronze. [...] Every blade of grass, every stone has its own individual character and doesn't remind us of anything we know. [...] A rich Sinhalese planter is going with us and he's explaining things to us. Diabolical vistas. Meadows flooded with water in the midst of forests. Strange olive-green calami. In little ponds, purple-violet water lilies. The vegetation madder and madder, and the people more and more gaudily but wonderfully dressed (violet, yellow and purple, sometimes emerald green), which along with the chocolate and bronze bodies, and the strange plants in the background, creates a diabolical effect. [...] Everything is choked by the frenzy of luxuriant vegetation. Trees with leaves in unheard-of shapes, from huge voluminous ones to different designs fringed with minute jagged edges. [...] The trees are covered with flowers going from purple and orange vermillion to violet and red and white. [...]"²².

From this report, it is possible to figure out Witkacy's impressions regarding the Tropics. The richness of colours and forms, the presence of an immediate and unavoidable sensuality, as if the grey world of boredom of a standardized and repetitive society could not get away from aphasia when torn and invaded by the dynamism of the colours-sounds-movements, as waking up from a dream to what was indeed real. Tropical features could be witnessed even in the art-worship of the place.

¹⁵ Gerould, *The Witkiewicz Reader*, 88–90.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 88–90.

¹⁷ It is interesting that the husband of the character of the mother in the play *The Mother* by Witkacy, has escaped as a scoundrel to Paraná, in Brazil.

¹⁸ The creation of works like *Gyubal Wahazar*, in 1921, already demonstrated how Witkacy in a sense predicted totalitarian systems against the individual freedom. The Revolution of 1917 in Russia was an experience that contributed to his forecast for phenomena like Nazism and Stalinism.

¹⁹ Gerould, *The Witkiewicz Reader*, 1992, p. 76.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 88–90.

²¹ Even not agreeing with the exploration of the peoples of the colonies, Witkacy uses the expression "animals" to refer what these peoples seemed to him.

²² Gerould, *The Witkiewicz Reader*, 88–90.

Considering the period Witkacy spent in the South Sea Islands, Gerould concludes that Witkacy and Malinowski probably witnessed a *Perahara* festival: “they would have seen the renowned Kandyan dancers in rehearsal and learned of the magical animism of the Sinhalese myths and rituals”²³. In this way, Witkacy anticipated, perhaps, some of the issues that ten years later became central to Antonin Artaud’s (1896–1948) concept of the Theatre of Cruelty²⁴. Artaud had experienced rituals in Mexico and witnessed Bali dancers in Paris, and both greatly influenced his understanding of theatre. In the case of Witkacy, the experience of his short stay in the South Sea Islands – a place isolated for long time from Western civilization – contributed to developing the Pure Form theory.

Individuality in the Multiplicity

Witkacy defines the Pure Form as a composition of plurality of sensorial elements intrinsic to the language of art. The masterpiece is created by the artist, the one that has idiosyncratic metaphysical feelings that were developed in the dealing with “Existence” and with the “Mystery of Existence”. The tension between the artistic elements – sensorial ones – produced by the metaphysical feelings of the artist can turn the work of art into an autonomous one.

Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf is one of tropical plays written by Witkacy. Among the themes considered in the play there appear: the bankruptcy of a civilization with questionable and false values; the knock down of science as the absolute truth; the emptiness of meaning of life and the absence of sacred rites in civilized life. But the main theme is perhaps the reductive rationalism. In the preface to the play, Gerould observes that parallels are made between civilization and savagery²⁵.

Witkacy’s plays are not linear and his plots make us confused about the correct shape of the narrative. Yet, it is possible to say that *Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf* tells a story of a sixteen year old white adolescent who becomes a mature man. In general, those who surround him intend to impose on him the role of someone resembling a powerful colony explorer. Other characters in the play include: the protagonist’s mother Leocadia; his father, the Governor of the place; his uncle, the bacteriologist Mikulini; the colonizer Parvis; the owner of Kalgoorlie Gold Express, Rivers; the one who exports mineral goods and the King Aparura, wiser friend of Patricianello and a kind of his spiritual father.

The characters discuss who is going to take care of the education of the 16-year-old Patricianello. His mother and the bacteriologist (the spectator soon realises

²³ Gerould, *The Witkiewicz Reader*, 75.

²⁴ Camargo, Robson Corrêa de. “A Forma Pura no Teatro. Teatralização do Mundo segundo Witkacy (1885-1939): Universidade Federal de Goiás” Karpa 5.1–5.2 (2012), <https://www.academia.edu/7791137/Camargo_Robson_Corr%C3%AAa_de_A_FORMA_PURA_NO_TEATRO._Teatraliza%C3%A7%C3%A3o_do_Mundo_segundo_Witkacy_1885-1939>

²⁵ Gerould, Daniel, “Introduction: Tropical Madness – Witkacy’s Journey to the East”. In: Witkiewicz, Stanislaw Ignacy. *Mr. Price, or Tropical Madness and Metaphysics of a two headed-calf*. London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 6, 7

it is the biological father of Patricianello), want to turn him into a criminal in order to guarantee wealth and power for themselves. Parvis, on the other hand, is eager to turn Patricianello into a Nietzschean superman. Then, King Aparura does not allow Parvis to use physical violence with Patricianello.

Patricianello finds himself stuck between two worlds: that of Aparura King (pure, ingenuous, and naive) and the civilized world where several tricks await him. In order to survive in the civilized jungle, he needs to quickly comprehend all the rules of game he is involved in.

The theme of a good Rousseauian savage, the one that is degenerated when confronted with civilization, seems to develop. The readers/spectators come into contact, through this exercise of parallel perception, with what would be civilized in the wild and with what would be "wild" in the civilized. There is a moment, for example, when the "savage" King Aparura is called a "monkey" by a civilized human²⁶, but he answers back by calling the civilized ones slaves of their "own vileness"²⁷.

In this ritual passage to adulthood, Patricianello perceives himself as torn between the two options. His question is whether to be or not to be. On the one hand, he may escape to the forests so as to become a good savage, and on the other, he may be civilized by entering into the social game of corruption. Patricianello sometimes thinks about the non-existence and blames his mother and his possible father Mikulini for his existence. He is tempted to assume that it would be better to him to be a beetle.

Patricianello becomes still for some moments. He stops in shock. This passage to adulthood is not easy to anyone, but again there is parallelism. The "savage" people have rituals that allow them to transgress from one order to another. For example, some indigenous people in Brazil who celebrate a prolonged rite of passage between infancy and adulthood – girls being isolated when they first menstruate, or boys that have their hands tied in order to be obliged to endure the pain of many bites of ants. But in these rituals the entire tribe participates, so it is a liminal experience for the group. One question is whether Patricianello has sufficient preparation to be an adult and another whether those civilized people have really turned into adults.

Patricianello is insecure about being an adult. He feels abandoned and lonely. But in the society where he was born, everybody feels this way so he has no other role models. King Aparura is an important friend, but he is an object of ridicule almost all the time by the child's relatives and the civilized people. Patricianello has only moments to understand that his nominal – not necessarily biological – father has died. In this way, solid elements of his world disintegrate.

If there are sacred rites, probably they became empty. There is no longer justification to sustain them. So the mother makes a melodramatic scene before her dead husband, the governor, but when she is threatened by her nephew's whip, she abandons

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁷ Ibid., 4.

the performance as if nothing happened. It may be seen as pretentious and set in opposition to the purity of the “savages”.

In the play, there are numerous examples of parallelism between the civilized and the “savage”. For example, in opposition to the gentleness and kindness of King Aparura with Patricianello, the “civilized” Parvis lives literally with a whip in his hands. Besides, he kills his own father, hits his aunt and ex-lover Leocadia, wants to transform Patricianello into a strong man with a rigid education system of whipping and by repeating psychic affirmative sentences, believing these procedures will turn Patricianello into a Nietzschean super male.

To Freud a parricide was necessary to establish a society, but once it has been done the taboo turns into totem and its symbolization would turn unnecessary the repetition of the actual act. When Parvis kills the father, he is, perhaps, more cruel than what the Victorians call “savage” people. Who is “savage” then? Some facts in the life of Witkacy may justify his vision of what could be actually called “savage” acts. Witkacy was involved in killing enemies in the First World War and saw many corpses and people dying during the 1917 Revolution. He could literally experience what human beings are capable of doing for ideals, values and power.

In the play, Witkacy criticizes what could be described as civilized products, such as the empiricism and all scientific “-isms” that pretend to be the truth in a particular moment. He denounces them, for example, through the character of Mikulini. The bacteriologist confesses the fake nature of serums that are supposed to combat the tropical madness – a disease that, unlike local people, Europeans may contract when in the Tropics. He says that these serums are placebo. Taking this into consideration we may say that a kind of magic seems to be necessary to make his scientific laboratory serum work. All this demonstrates how dangerous scientific beliefs may become.

Stuart describes how the concept of the Pure Form is echoed in *Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf*. Witkacy transfigures here the magical-religious beliefs of communities of the South Sea Islands. They become artistic elements that construct an internal logic of the composition. Stuart states:

“If we take him at his word, then, we can only assume that some kind of rules or principles are at work – and must try to discover what they are. If we examine these aspects of the play closely, we find a kind of logic at work, but of a decidedly Witkacian variety. As we have seen, Witkiewicz regarded magic as a primitive form of religion which must, therefore, have had its origin in “metaphysical feelings”. It is not surprising then that he would use such beliefs in a play meant to evoke such feelings. He would not attempt, of course, to explain those beliefs, but to extract those qualities which he felt would convey this sense of the strangeness of existence. Witkacy often works by a process of association through which ideas and events emerge and change without the benefit of causal relationships. The themes which Witkacy has borrowed from Malinowski – death and magic, the kinship of killing and curing, the murder-sacrifice of relatives, the incarnation of powerful and mysterious forces as humans or as animal, and death as an “eating away” of one’s insides by strange forces – all converge at a single point – the mother’s death

– and are joined at that point to the Frog. Throughout the play totemism is posited as a general religious principle which is apparently superior to the more sophisticated notions held by the Europeans. In the mother's death scene totemism becomes linked to the mysterious forces of life and death which had been developed earlier in the play"²⁸.

Witkacy and Malinowski separated in their views on the Tropics. There were more than one motivation for that²⁹, but one of clear importance was their philosophical disagreement "on the implications of what they saw during the trip. Witkacy placed the origins of religious feelings in an ontologically based metaphysical anxiety and accused Malinowski of reducing such feelings to real-life emotions (Gerould, 1992, p. 76). Witkacy states:

"[...] it is by no means a correct assertion that any kind of state of strong emotional tension is in a position to be transmuted into a ... religious feeling ... The pseudo-scientific nature of such a view, its claim not to give anything more than a description of definitely existing states (hunger, sexual desire, fear, and so on) falsifies fundamentally the entire situation [...]" (apud Baker, 1973, p.82).

In a posterior period, Witkacy continues his indignant protest: "[...]it is just this supposedly scientific position which leads in a quite direct way to the creation of the most baneful metaphysics, since it is false to boot". For Baker, the purpose of each one was completely divergent: "Malinowski was more interested in the way religion functioned in a society than in its ultimate source: Religious faith establishes, fixes, and enhances all valuable mental attitudes [...]" (Baker, 1973, p.82). Were Malinowski theories "antisocial" and "both narrow as a conception of life and also expressed the narrowness of his own feelings", like Witkiewicz senior stated in a letter for the son in 1902, soon after he visited his best friend in England? Malinowski would be considered a great anthropologist and his work would be worldwide famous, but it is not to be forgotten that Witkacy, on the other hand, developed a diverse sensibility of an exuberant multi-artist and was as a thinker in different fields.

Witkacy, in his own way, was among European avant-garde artists and movements which valued magical and instinctive components of human existence – even because the progress spread by the Enlightenment would have led to a world-wide war. Throughout his life, Witkacy struggled with pragmatic and reductionist rational perspectives, as well as with a cause-and-effect-logic-thought. His protest against the utility of art, which is present, for example, in "New Forms of Painting"³⁰, would be aligned with this.

The tropical play *Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf* shows characters as if they have been launched in a game. Like most of humanity, they act without really asking who are they, why are they where they are and doing what they are doing. They only strive to follow social norms and maintain the status quo (albeit bypassing legality as well).

²⁸ Baker, 1973, pp. 85–86.

²⁹ The fact that they had had an affair when young could be one of them.

³⁰ See Gerould, 1992, p. 148.

As victims of an instrumental rationality, they are no longer accountable for their own existences and often seem to have their lines dictated.

Witkacy seems to find in the Tropics the proof that the committed civilizational path had deviated human being of dedicating itself to what, in his vision, could be more existentially instigating. The Pure Form, the ecstatic and ritual experience of true art would still be a last possibility of enchantment living in a modern civilization:

"[...] I think that the social significance of the theater could be infinitely enhanced if it ceased being a place for taking a fresh look at life, for teaching and for exposing 'views', and instead became a true temple for experiencing pure metaphysical feelings [...]" (Witkiewicz by Gerould, 1992: p.148).

Anthropophagy: a Weltanschauung

Beyond his activities as an artist, Oswald is considered to be an important thinker about Brazilian culture. Even though his attitudes were of nationalistic character, he was against the integralist/fascist artistic movement, because it was part of what Harold de Campos would later refer to as "regressive utopia", in which "restauration" was the main idea³¹. However, some people – such as Manuel Bandeira – ridiculed Oswald for this form of nationalism. According to José Guilherme Merquior, what he really proposed was a "cosmopolitan nationalism"³² that would allow for mixing the national and the universal cultures³³.

In 1923, De Andrade delivered a lecture at the Sorbonne on his concept of national identity. For Silveira, the "Pau-Brasil Manifesto", with the impulse of returning to the primitive, would be the first conception of his poetic nationality³⁴. In 1928, the "Anthropophagic Manifesto" was released, which was more acerbic and explicit than the "Pau-Brasil". It proposed an interpretation of the national culture that was initiated by modernists and influenced Gilberto Freyre and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in their vision of Brazil³⁵.

The anthropophagical conception would have, then, aesthetic and cultural character. Inspired by cannibalism of some indigenous Brazilian tribes, the practice is to gain the strength and the intelligence of the enemy through digestion. Anthropophagical art should not isolate itself to preserve national purism, but swallow numerous artistic currents so as to digest them and transform them into genuine Brazilian art.

According to De Andrade, catechization in the moment of colonization of Brazil and of its indigenous people, caused the appropriation of the indigenous languages to economic and political domination. On the other hand, the literary and textual culture

³¹ Silveira, 2007, p. 207.

³² apud Silveira, 2007, p. 158

³³ apud Silveira, 2007, p. 177

³⁴ apud Silveira, 2007, p. 171

³⁵ apud Silveira, 2007, p. 182.

brought with it a protocol and bureaucratic feeling, oppressing the originality and spontaneity of the indigenous people. This kind of conversion to the Portuguese language brought with it the concepts of sin and guilt when confronted with cannibalism, incest, and other “strange” practices that were perceived by Oswald as “natural”. He would insist that patriarchy with its features and values (such as: the family, the aristocracy, the class struggle and Christian morality) were harmful to Brazil. When De Andrade says “I’d wish the indigenous people had stripped the Portuguese”, he suggests the detachment of all of these civilized paraphernalia and weights and layers, from this “truth” of the missionary people. De Andrade’s defense of “a language without archaisms, natural and neo-logical”, accompanied by the change of the behaviour and of the values imposed by patriarchy, could regenerate a “golden age” “without complexes” (strong reference of Freudian terminology), and “without penitentiaries”³⁶, alive and happy³⁷.

The symbolic vision of Oswald de Andrade nowadays can be recognised not only in art – there are many important Brazilian artistic groups and artists that recognise themselves as his *heirs*³⁸, but either in culture – the Griot Pedagogy³⁹ can be seen as an interesting example of anthropofagy. Created in Bahia (Brazil), it promotes the interaction between ancestral knowledge of oral tradition and formal sciences for the elaboration of an integrated and pluri-rational knowledge. Perspective of thought with African origins, fosters dialogue between different ethnic groups, different ages, school and community, focusing on identity strengthening and the celebration of life. When facing racist, heteropatriarcal, neoliberal and colonialist paradigms present in Brazil, it emphasizes the education as a process of creating, and not of only consuming culture. It is not an education to train labor to a ready and monolithic social model, but to create a different society, fairer and happier. Ancestral knowledge is not taken only as a content, in an instrumental usage, symbolically disqualified with simplification of complex requirements and with drastic reduction of experiences, but it is assumed as a theoretical-epistemological framework, which means to learn and practice a totally different world vision.

Conclusion

Both Witkacy and De Andrade criticized the art of their period and civilization. Modernists, they dealt with the reality of being artists from peripheral countries. Each one

³⁶ The expressions in quotation marks are from *Pau-Brasil Manifesto* (page 6), *Anthropophagic Manifesto* (pages 14, 16, 19) and *The March of Utopia* (page 214). All these texts are on the book *Do Pau-Brasil à Antropofagia e às utopias. Obras completas de Oswald de Andrade*.

³⁷ According to Funai (National Indian Foundation) data, the indigenous population fell from 3 million in 1500, before the arrival of Europeans in the territory that would be called Brazil, to seventy thousand people in 1957. In addition to the extermination of millions, there was the erasure of many indigenous peoples, which 500 years ago would have totaled a thousand different.

³⁸ The list is long, but I can’t let to quote here, beyond Manguêbeat Movement, Hélio Oiticica, José Celso Martinez Corrêa, Caetano Veloso, Glauber Rocha, Teatro Oficina.

³⁹ Griot is a French term for memory keepers represented by historians, poets, storytellers, singers or musicians in West Africa. The word naming the Pedagogy Griot in Brazil reveals not a subaltern behaviour, but the desire of horizontally giving, exchanging, apprehending.

experienced the Tropics in a period that old world artists opened their eyes to the possibilities, strength, potency of the art of the colonies, intimately related to worship. Both struggled for the art each one produced and faced society using theoretic but uncivil texts to defend their poetic.

Even though after the First World War Poland gained independence after 123 years of partition, Witkacy preferred the Formists to more nationally oriented artists of the Young Poland. Oswald de Andrade supported romantic nationalism in a nation formally emancipated only for one century, but he opted for “cosmopolitan nationalism”.

Both Witkacy and De Andrade were not well received by broader social circles of their times. Their fame and influence increased after their deaths. Nowadays, Witkacy is well recognised not only for his disrespect towards communism, but also for the reason that his ideas are apocalyptically echoed in the capitalistic world. As a thinker, a novelist and a playwright, Witkacy assumed that civilization and mankind would be mechanised, automatized and monolithic. Besides, comfortable life would make art and philosophy unnecessary. It is possible to say that after the fall of the Berlin wall, globalization and capitalism work to homogenize mankind with the help of entertainment-aesthetic in mass culture and internet.

Similarly to Witkacy's ideas, De Andrade's work is more actual at present than ever. If De Andrade died uncertain whether his compatriots would ever recognise his value, today it is possible to perceive his visionary thought in griot pedagogy, among other Brazilian counter-hegemonic thought and actions that answer with life to systems of death. From a confessedly peripheral perspective, he is anti-colonialist, but born in solar and exuberant Tropics, playfully invites for a banquet in Brazil-mother-centre: “Tupi or not tupi, that's the question”⁴⁰.

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⁴⁰ Sentence present in *Anthropofagic Manifesto*.

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