

# (Un)making modernism's paths: a review of concepts

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The centennial of the Modern Art Week, an event recognized by canonical critics as a founding milestone of Brazilian modernism, becomes an opportune moment for the production of a critical review of the movement and the concepts that supported it. Nationalism, colonialism, anthropophagy, identity, in dialogue with their opposites such as cosmopolitanism, anthropoemy and alterity, constitute a kind of conceptual field that reveals the dialogue between contemporary discourse and modernist productions. More than an inspiration or a possible appropriation of critical modulations, the presence of some key concepts of modernism in contemporaneity should be understood as a kind of residue of the propulsive issues of Brazilian modernist thought. Moreover, it is also possible to verify that the search for national identity stands at the center of such reflections, always marked by power relations of several natures.

Considering the persistent critical debate<sup>3</sup> on the issue of Brazilian identity, characterized by a pendulum movement between the poles of model and copy, continuity and rupture, provincialism and cosmopolitanism, we are interested in observing how spatial-temporal maps are outlined yesterday and today. In analyzing this pendular movement that marks Brazilian cultural production, Paulo Arantes, taking up Antonio Candido

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and Roberto Schwarz, points out two movements that would have tried to defend Brazilian cultural autonomy, the Oswaldian Pau-Brasil movement and Tropicalism. This is how the author refers to these movements:

I can only mention briefly another case of the aesthetic evaluation of duality, also studied by Roberto Schwarz. It is the composition of the poem pau-brasil, of which, as it is known, the Tropicalist montage is basically a variant. “Its raw material is obtained through two operations: the juxtaposition of elements proper to Colonial Brazil and to bourgeois Brazil, and the elevation of the product – disjointed by definition – to the dignity of an allegory of the country” [...] (ARANTES, 1989, p. 40).<sup>1</sup>

Defending the importance of dialectics in the studies, the author is emphatic about the movements that use joy as an affirmation factor, leaving aside economic, political, and social issues:

Oswald de Andrade will give a positive answer to the dilemmas of duality. What the colonial complex had internalized as backwardness and disgrace, pau-brasil would convert into a reason for euphoria, since the vanguard would pair our primitivism with the culture of the central countries. (ARANTES, 1989, p. 40).<sup>2</sup>

The dialectical movement proposed by Paulo Arantes allows us to perform another critical examination that is based on the study of the permanence of concepts and issues that cross the history of Brazilian modernism under the light of studies similar to those of sociologist Boaventura de Souza Santos (2009), in

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1 Posso apenas referir de passagem um outro caso de avaliação estética da dualidade, igualmente estudado por Roberto Schwarz. Trata-se da composição do poema pau-brasil, do qual no fundo é variante, como se sabe, a montagem tropicalista. “A sua matéria-prima se obtém mediante duas operações: a justaposição de elementos próprios ao Brasil-Colônia e ao Brasil burguês, e a elevação do produto — desconjuntado por definição — à dignidade de alegoria do país” [...] (ARANTES, 1989, p. 40).

2 Oswald de Andrade dará uma resposta positiva aos dilemas da dualidade. O que o complexo colonial interiorizara como atraso e desgraça, o desrecalque pau-brasil converterá em motivo de euforia, já que a vanguarda emparelhava nosso primitivismo com a cultura dos países centrais. (ARANTES, 1989, p. 40).

order to move the abyssal lines. This means rereading modernist movements, such as the Modern Art Week, the manifestos, the magazines, taking into consideration contemporary cultural experiences, such as peripheral, feminine, and black art, among others. In his proposal to draw alternative maps of knowledge construction, Boaventura Souza Santos (2009), discusses “alternatives to the dominant epistemology”, emphasizing the importance of diversity as a representation of “an enormous enrichment of human capacities to grant intelligibility and intentionality to social experiences [...]”. The Portuguese author states, “We designate the epistemological diversity of the world as epistemologies of the South.”. He continues: “The South is here metaphorically conceived as a field of epistemic challenges that seek to repair the damage and impacts historically caused by capitalism in its colonial relationship with the world.” (SANTOS, 2009, p. 12).

It is about transpositions of what the sociologist calls abyssal lines (SANTOS, 2010): literal and metaphorical lines, which separate the construction of knowledge, conferring visibility and validity to only one side. The author shows how such lines remain – marked, for example, in the colonization process –, taking new forms in the modern and contemporary world. He then affirms, in the proposition of what would be a post-abyssal thinking: “Global social injustice is thus intimately linked to global cognitive injustice [...]” (SANTOS, 2010, p. 31-32).

We are interested in adding one more term to this equation: the works of peripheral populations in their attempt for visibility and audibility, especially with movements linked to Pau-Brasil poetry and anthropophagy, such as the Periphery Modern Art

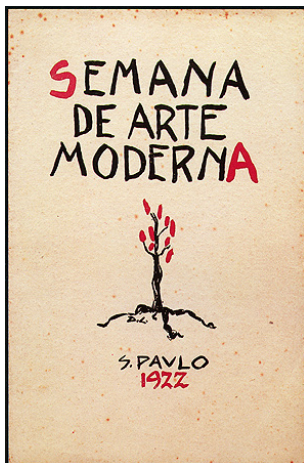
Week and Sérgio Vaz's Peripheral Anthropophagy Manifesto, both from 2007. Let us start with the photos and posters representing these movements (Figures 1-4).

**FIGURE 1 - Official photo of the 1922 Week Moder Art.**



**Source: AMARAL, Aracy A. Artes plásticas na Semana de 22, 1970.**

Figure 2 - 1922 Modern Art Week program cover.



Source: FIALDINI, Itaú Cultural, 2022.

FIGURE 3 - Periphery Modern Art Week official photo – The 2007 Week.



Source: Revista Época, Edição n. 487, 18 set. 2007.

**FIGURA 4 - Periphery Modern Art Week 2007 poster, by  
Jair Guilherme.**



Source: Revista Época, Edição 487, em 14 set. 2007.

The dialogue established between the two movements (the Periphery Modern Art Week and the Peripheral Anthropophagy Manifesto) manifests itself on several levels of anthropophagic appropriation: in copying the poster title and design, in the organizers photo, and later, as will be seen, in the manifestos retrieval. With each element, we have a reaffirmation and a displacement, a copy and a rupture. The participants' clothes as well as their skin color points to two different Brazilian eras with their contradictions. The tree, a symbol so often used to refer to the relationship between colonizing and colonized cultures, gains strength and volume in the crown, in the exposed roots, and especially in the amount of fruit.

The Periphery Modern Art Week, with explicit allusion to the 1922 Week, was held in November 2007 by a group of periphery poets, with Sergio Vaz as a highlight. The Periphery Week guiding concept is the creation of a space for dissemination of periphery artist's cultural productions within the periphery itself. As already stated, similarly to the 1922 Week, publicity material for the event is also based on a tree depiction. But the symbol appropriation the group makes adds a significant difference: instead of the dry tree with few branches, like the one created by Di Cavalcanti, the periphery artists present a leafy baobab full of fruit. The use of red to mark the fruits favors an association with blood, the ultimate symbol of the urban violence that haunts peripheries. One way or another, the poster's image dialogues directly with the meaning that the event sought to imprint on cultural manifestations of that time, understanding these marginalized spaces as hubs of a rich cultural production that receives little visibility.

Pastiche and appropriation, these are concepts that can be used to interpret the event, because, as Sérgio Vaz explains, the group that came together to idealize and carry out the Week had as its main guideline the political and artistic stance taken by the São Paulo intellectuals of 1922: "eat the canned art produced by the market that is shoved down our throats, and vomit a new version of it, only this time in periphery's version. Without exoticism, but full of engagement." (VAZ, 2008, p. 235). The anthropophagic sense is still present and emerges as a guiding act of the artists' stance, but the dialogue they aim to establish is different. For the Cooperifa poets, it is not the relationship between national and cosmopolitan cultures that emerges as an element of debate of the artistic production. On the contrary, the focus becomes local

and has a specific address: the marginalized neighborhoods, the slums and housing settlements. Anthropophagy will guide the contact of this peripheral artist, coming from these areas, with the art produced in economy, academia, culture, and politics centers.

Along with the event proposal and anthropophagy as a guiding concept for their actions, Sérgio Vaz also produced the Peripheral Anthropophagy Manifesto. Similar to documents prepared by vanguard groups, the text signed by the Cooperifa coordinator is also based on an assertive tone directed in two movements: for and against.

The Oswaldian anthropophagy is now re-edited, but repeated in difference. In the Manifesto peripheral version, it is not possible to interrogate: “Tupi or not tupi - This is the question [...]”. This is because it is not a point of debate to venture into questioning the language and the accommodation of ideas and aesthetic proposals on national soil. Sérgio Vaz, however, pays a kind of tribute to this passage from the Manifesto signed by Oswald when he writes: “Miami for them? Love me for us!”. The game that the author establishes is similar to the movement created by Oswald; both use principles of a cultural translation to reinforce aspects they defend in their manifestos.

Imagetic elements from Pau-Brasil poetry are empowered in this peripheral Manifesto, such as, for example, both “O Carnaval. O Sertão e a Favela. Pau-Brasil. Bárbaro e nosso”, as well as “País de dores anônimas”. (ANDRADE, 1974). The poem *falação*, a synthesis poem of the Pau-Brasil Poetry Manifesto (18/03/1924), describes thus the country that, in the later moment, stages the passage from noise to the peripheral word, concretizing a political act, as Rancière (2018) defines it, marked by dissensus.



In the same direction, Sérgio Vaz points out his criticism of the consumption of a pasteurized and canned culture and art, without engagement. In the text *Caminhos de um poeta cidadão* (Paths of a citizen poet), published as a preface to Sérgio Vaz's book *Literatura, pão e poesia*, the critic Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda says:

I strongly suggest a comparative study of the two manifestos and anthropophagic instincts registered therein. The researcher, besides finding plenty of subject to dwell on, will delight in mirroring and speculating on these two symptomatic moments of the 20th century and the 21st century, respectively. (HOLLANDA, 2011, p. 12).<sup>3</sup>

The critic's view is punctual and highlights the singularity of the moments in which the respective manifestos were produced. Sérgio Vaz's anthropophagic instinct, which arises in the periphery and feeds off the center, starts to be understood as a direct reflection of contemporary conditions. The manifesto signed by the periphery poet echoes a tone of violence, of confrontation, but does not leave out music and dance:

In favor of a suburb that cries out for art and culture, and university for diversity. Agogôs and tambourines accompanied by violins, only after class. Against art sponsored by those who corrupt freedom of choice. Against art made to destroy the critical sense, emotion and sensibility that comes from multiple choice. Art that liberates cannot come from the hand that enslaves.

In favor of the drumming in the kitchen, which is born in the kitchen and is not wanted by the *sinhá*. Of peripheral poetry that sprouts at the bar door. (VAZ, 2007).<sup>4</sup>

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3 "Sugiro com ênfase um estudo comparativo dos dois manifestos e instintos antropofágicos ali registrados. O pesquisador, além de encontrar muito assunto para se debruçar, vai se deliciar espelhando e especulando sobre esses dois momentos sintomáticos do século XX e do século XXI, respectivamente."

4 "A favor de um subúrbio que clama por arte e cultura, e universidade para a diversidade. Agogôs e tamborins acompanhados de

New spaces are being built, making room for saraus, publishers, and slams that today fill the streets of Brazilian cities.

Literature from the streets waking up on the sidewalks. The Periphery united, at the center of all things. Against racism, intolerance, and the social injustices of which the art in force does not speak.

We need to suck a new kind of artist out of art: the artist-citizen. One that in his art does not revolutionize the world, but also does not condone the mediocrity that imbecilizes people deprived of opportunities. An artist at the service of the community, of the country. Who, armed with the truth, exercises the revolution by himself.

Against the Sunday art that defecates in our living room and hypnotizes us in the armchair lap.

Against the barbarism that is the lack of libraries, cinemas, museums, theaters, and spaces for access to cultural production.<sup>5</sup>

The colonizer is now indoors, but continues to cast his visible or invisible strings: “Against the vampires of public funds and private art. The Art that liberates cannot come from the hand that enslaves. For a Periphery that unites us through love, pain and color. IT’S ALL OURS!”. In the Manifesto it is possible to identify the desire to understand popular culture, or rather, peripheral culture, on the part of these authors from the margin. A dreamy, perhaps utopian, perception of the revolutionary power of the culture predominates, when they see themselves as producers of an autonomous art, uncontaminated

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violinos, só depois da aula. Contra a arte patrocinada pelos que corrompem a liberdade de opção. Contra a arte fabricada para destruir o senso crítico, a emoção e a sensibilidade que nasce da múltipla escolha. A Arte que liberta não pode vir da mão que escraviza. A favor do batuque da cozinha que nasce na cozinha e sinhá não quer. Da poesia periférica que brota na porta do bar.”

5 “Da Literatura das ruas despertando nas calçadas. A Periferia unida, no centro de todas as coisas. Contra o racismo, a intolerância e as injustiças sociais das quais a arte vigente não fala. É preciso sugar da arte um novo tipo de artista: o artista-cidadão. Aquele que na sua arte não revoluciona o mundo, mas também não compactua com a mediocridade que imbeciliza um povo desprovido de oportunidades. Um artista a serviço da comunidade, do país. Que, armado da verdade, por si só exercita a revolução. Contra a arte domingueira que defeca em nossa sala e nos hipnotiza no colo da poltrona. Contra a barbárie que é a falta de bibliotecas, cinemas, museus, teatros e espaços para o acesso à produção cultural.”

“Contra os vampiros das verbas públicas e arte privada. A Arte que liberta não pode vir da mão que escraviza. Por uma Periferia que nos une pelo amor, pela dor e pela cor. É TUDO NOSSO!”.

by hegemonic structures. Moreover, writing, the literary making, takes on a political feature of direct intervention in social and cultural reality. “Art that liberates cannot come from the hand that enslaves [...]”, this sentence, present twice in the Manifesto, reaffirms the clear intent to elaborate an engaged art and, mainly, one outside spaces of predominance of the political forces that threw these peripheral poets to the margins.

It is worth resorting once again to Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda, when, in her cited text, she calls attention to this social segment role in the historical series of Brazilian literature: “The mongrel poet, as Sérgio Vaz calls himself, masterfully recognized the political power of the safe acquisition and instrumentalization of the word and turns this discovery into a daily and obstinate social inclusion activism.” (HOLLANDA, 2011, p. 12).

The gesture made by Sérgio Vaz can also be identified in the rapper Emicida's project, when he performed at the Teatro Municipal de São Paulo and released the album AmarElo. According to Roberta Maria Ferreira Alves' reading, in her paper See you in' “Amarelo”, which opens our dossier, the same stage that received the event consecrated by the today canonical historiography as an inaugural act of modernism, suffers a resignified occupation when receiving the black artist from São Paulo suburbs concert. In a unique historical night, unusual dialogues were established between erudite and popular art; between the elite space and the suburbs population. In Roberta Alves' reading, in that same space, we saw a São Paulo, normally excluding, staged by people representing diversity, producing and consuming a hybrid national art. Hybridity also pointed by the appropriation of Sujeito de sorte song lines, by Belchior (SUJEITO, 1976):

I've been bleeding too much, I've been crying like a  
dog  
Last year I died, but this year I won't die

I've bled so much, I've cried like a dog  
Last year I died, but this year I don't die  
Last year I died, but this year I don't die  
Last year I died, but this year I won't die.  
(SUJEITO, 1976).<sup>6</sup>

In the transit that we have been pointing out, we propose a critical exercise that is based on revisiting some concepts forged in modernism, by thinking 1922 as a catalyzing date for different issues mobilized by this debate. The papers gathered here make a very peculiar path about this reflection, proposing to review moments that, corroborating or breaking with some of these concepts, further the discussion of traces of Brazilian national identity. In this sense, examining echoes of the 1922 Week, Vinícius André Minhoto da Costa proposes a re-reading of Tropicalism through what he calls its synthesis songs, *Alegria*, *Alegria and Baby*, in an inverse movement to that proposed by Roberto Schwarz, revisited by Paulo Arantes, defending Tropicalism incorporative character, which would aggregate “the country existing contrasts as naturally being part of its national culture, [and also] adding them to the pop world innovations, thus thickening the general jelly.”

The paper *From the myth of mister benevolente to mulatization: the Black in Oswald De Andrade's aesthetic-political thought*, signed by Mário Fernandes Rodrigues and Roberto Alexandre do Carmo Said, establishes a critical view on black studies by problematizing the complex thought developed by Oswald de Andrade. The authors indicate that, by building a triumphalist view of the Brazilian colonial and slave-owning past after the 1922 Modern Art Week, Oswald de Andrade anticipated arguments that would be used by defenders of

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<sup>6</sup> “Tenho sangrado demais, tenho chorado pra cachorro / Ano passado eu morri, mas esse ano eu não morro / Tenho sangrado demais, tenho chorado pra cachorro / Ano passado eu morri, mas esse ano eu não morro / Ano passado eu morri, mas esse ano eu não morro / Ano passado eu morri, mas esse ano eu não morro.”

racial democracy, a fallacy that would be challenged by a new generation of intellectuals uncommitted to the nation traditional structures. Similarly, Bruno Lima, in his paper *The construction of an aesthetically and ideologically imagined Brazil*, uses Benedict Anderson's thought to carry out a critical path based on the questioning of inauthentic and fake character of some crystallized images of our national identity.

Electing one of the magazines of the time as their object of study, Rafael Guimarães and Telma Borges da Silva work with the specular movement metaphor, which means reflecting and refracting, at the same time, traces of people and events. They analyze, in *Between Lights and Refractions: Mário "klaxista" de Andrade*, the early modernists relationship with Klaxon magazine and with the then Brazilian society.

Also working with one of the periodicals of then, in *Colonial indigestion* in a few poems in the **Revista de Antropofagia**, Rodrigo Octávio Cardoso discusses anthropophagy opposite: anthropoemia, a concept linked to the act of expelling, as implicit by the word indigestion. The problematic relational situation of Brazilian cultural production in the role of seeking its place "in the concert of nations"<sup>7</sup> is still thus being developed in several directions, as already foreseen in the production of critical texts during the second half of the 20th century.

Not by chance, in this opening of crossroads, Luís Felipe Abreu uses, already in his title, the expression coined by Silviano Santiago to deal with the dichotomy between colonizers and colonized, cosmopolitanism and provincialism. In *The in-between of the ex-appropriation: dispossession and property in false scriptures*, the author crosses the Brazil borders, combining the concept in dialogue with others linked to the universal process of appropriation. This process, as was his purpose, allows the

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<sup>7</sup> Expression used by Silviano Santiago.

reader to “read cross-cultural poetic texts” by understanding “appropriation and imitation as movements of a theft that lays bare the precarious performance of possessing [...]”.<sup>8</sup>

As we can see, the map widens both geographically and culturally, in intersecting movements, as in *Modernism/Hypermodernism: the contemporary Italian theoretical debate*, by Leonardo Ferreira Aguiar. Broadening his time focus, the author discusses concepts like Modern/Post-Modern, Modernism/Post-Modernism and Hypermodernism, without losing sight of the troubled present we live in, as he states: “today, 100 years after European modernisms and on the doorstep of the Modern Art Week centenary in Brazil, the world seems to replicate tensions analogous to those at the beginning of the last century, with wars in the Middle East, the New Coronavirus pandemic, the generalized turn to conservatism and totalitarianism as vectors exposing a wound that many believed to have healed at least 30 years ago, with the end of the Cold War polarization.”

The vitality of the anthropophagy concept can be measured not only by its totemic place in Brazilian culture, but mainly by the assumption that it assumes a reading operator function, as Maria José Araújo, in her paper *The bells of agony: a baroque feast to be enjoyed here and now*, which visits anthropophagy as a theoretical, aesthetic and political place that makes it possible to show how Autran Dourado, in *Os sinos da agonia*, turns to the baroque as a writing style, a style that appeals to the human experience, immersed in the metaphorical game, in a true unfolding of images, in a movement that gives shape to the chaotic human world. With similar critical resource, Luciana Brandão Leal, in *Virgílio de Lemos and his delirious anthropophagy: aesthetics and vertigo in Mozambican poetry*, stages movements of devouring the European vanguards scene,

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<sup>8</sup> Texts without reference in quotation marks are excerpts from the papers mentioned in this presentation.

biased by a strabic look, to use the expression of Ricardo Piglia (2012) in his reading of the Latin American writer's place. This reference shows us how concepts created to examine a conjunction of events are displaced as well as movements of cultural production and reception.

The papers about Carlos Drummond de Andrade The "Machine Of The World" and the Philosophy of the absurd, by Cleber Ranieri Ribas de Almeida, and Carlos Drummond de Andrade: from print culture to digital media, by Janeide Sousa Santos, deal with the Brazilian poetry series. The first one, observing the process of intertextual composition of Drummond's famous poem, draws special attention to the "poetic dialogue" with *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), by Albert Camus. The other one looks back to the present and, attentive to the reception and circulation moment, analyzes the use of Drummond's poems in the Internet. Also searching how to insert Cecília Meireles in the framework of proposals of what is conventionally called Modernism, in her paper *Cecília Meireles, a lyric at the height of modernism*, Ana Amélia Neubern Batista dos Reis proposes to broaden this framework by including the poet's dialogue with the Hindu tradition.

Also Andréa Portolomeos, in *Benjamim Costallat's chronicle: a new idea of literature for the expansion of the reading public through Rio de Janeiro newspapers in the 1920s*, seeks to widen the modernist framework, by showing "how the chronicler works in default of a traditional concept of culture and literature, giving rise to an important aesthetic rupture in Brazil that implied – beyond an exclusive renewal of artistic language – the use of new supports, such as the newspaper, and the use of new technologies, such as the cinema."

With "Two artists from Minas Gerais in the Week of Modern Art: revision and de-centering of the Modernism of 22", Ivana

Ferrante proposes to discuss those who, present in the acts of the Week, would have fallen into oblivion: the poet Agenor Barbosa and the painter Zina Aita. This lens of exclusion and inclusion is also launched in the reading of a Portrait of contemporary poetry when in dislocation with modernism, by Luis Henrique Garcia Ferreira and Luana Signorelli Faria da Costa.

In an intriguing interview by Fernando Breda, professor Carlos Berriel, from Unicamp, talks about modernism as “an artistic movement with a very significant relationship with coffee oligarchies in São Paulo. Something kind of distant from the most conventional views of the movement, which often qualify it as a moment in Brazilian culture of aesthetic-social rupture with a certain political-cultural stagnation prevailing in the country until then [...]”.

The imbricated paths between the studies undertaken within and between papers are thus noted, which highlights how difficult it is to visualize the abyssal lines and to perceive the power games staged there. Therefore, exercising another anthropophagic act, we quote Sérgio Vaz, as in *Receita para ser feliz*, by Luiz Ruffato (2021): “to achieve utopias it is necessary to face reality [...]”.

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