

A conversation with Guto Lacaz

Guto Lacaz has been the first artist I met in my second fieldwork in Brazil. We arranged the studio visit on my third sunny day in São Paulo. Located in the Jardins District, his house is divided into two buildings: the house/archive and the studio; there's a small garden with a funny metal sculpture in between. While exploring his work through his personal map of masters and aesthetic references that he updates daily, we stayed a while on concrete poetry. He showed me the Portuguese translation of Lewis Carroll's «Doublets», and we leaf through it enjoying its matrix. My favourite has been the following:

WINTER

Tinter

Tinder

Tender

Bender

Bander

Banger

Bagger

Bugger

Burger

Purger

Pulser

Pulper

Pumper

Bumper

Bummer

SUMMER

I was delighted to have jumped into the summer so quickly, as I had just left the Italian winter towards the Brazilian sun. Since the second half of the XX century, concrete poetry has been well explored in Brazil, so the passion for the line and the pure aesthetic of forms breathe everywhere in São Paulo. Formed as an architect, Guto is a multimedia artist with more than thirty years production in visual art and graphic design. The way he plays with the functionalism of technologies and the daily life objects is stunning. Later on, he showed me a work he made comparing Manet's «Le déjeuner sur l'herbe» and the reproduction of a «Banchetto Antropofagico¹», the etching which circulated in Europe in the second half of XVI century, when German explorer Hans Staden return to the continent after three years of prison

¹Antropofagia feast [trad.]

in a Tupinambá village, north Brazil. Staden described very precisely the Tupinambá practice of cannibalism, which is a taboo that makes me quite uncomfortable.

Guto explained to me the difference between cannibalism and antropofagia: the first aims to satisfy the hunger; the latter is a practice of metamorphosis, a statement of appropriation of the human body to be stronger and energized. Guto chose to quote Lacanian psychiatry and novelist Betty Milan's «Consolação», when her main character meets the modernist Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade in the Consolação cemetery:

- Só não entendo o seu manifesto.
- Qual deles?
- O «Manifesto Antropofágico»... Aprendi com ele a gostar dos canibais.
- Canibais não, antropófagos... O canibalismo é coisa lá do europeu, que comia carne humana para se saciar ou para se curar. Os médicos inclusive aconselhavam a beber sangue humano. De preferência quente. Até o século XIX, os carrascos ganhavam a vida vendendo partes do corpo do criminoso. O canibalismo não tem nada a ver com a antropofagia. Os tupis não comiam carne humana para satisfazer a fome.
- E por que então?
- Por respeito ao morto a à sua família. A antropofagia era um rito de amor. Os índios consideravam o enterro uma prática horrenda, bárbara mesmo. A idéia do cadáver apodrecendo na terra era insuportável para eles. Sei do frio que senti quando fui enterrado. Que humidade! Teria sido melhor que comessem o meu cadáver.

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- I just do not understand your manifesto.
 - Which one?
 - The «Manifesto Antropofágico»... I understand from it to like cannibals.
 - Not cannibals, antropófagos... Cannibalism is something there for European, who ate human flesh to indulge or to heal. The doctors even advised to drink human blood. Preferably hot. Until the XIX century, the executioners made a living selling body parts of the criminal. Cannibalism has nothing to do with antropofagia. The Tupi did not eat human flesh to satisfy the hunger.
 - And why did they do it, then?
 - Out of respect for the dead of his family. Antropofagia was a rite of love. The Indians considered burial a horrendous practice, even barbaric. The idea of the rotting corpse on earth was unbearable for them. I know how cold it felt when I was buried. So much humidity! It would have been better to eat my corpse.

I recalled the etymology that connects Heroes with Hera, the Greek goddess of women and marriage who carries the emblem of fertile blood and death in her hands. Heroes had to return to her in order to save the situation, and I could see some similarities in this kind of sacrifice with the interpretation of Antropofagia, a second well explored theme in Brazil during the last century. Creators of new utopias shouldn't be heroes? Which kind of sacrifice they should expiate in order for common people to join a better vision? I left Guto's place with this questions going around my head, and the strong desire to see Manet's «Le déjeuner sur l'herbe» again.