

“The Nude Man’s City”: Flávio de Carvalho’s anthropophagic architecture as cultural criticism*

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Abstract. Cannibalism is one of the most recognisable taboos of the West and a benchmark with which a supposedly civilised world has traditionally sought to differentiate itself from the radically “other” of the hinterlands. As such, cannibalism has made its way both into the vocabulary of the West’s pseudo-ethnographic self-reflection (e.g. Freud) and the imaginary of its literary culture (e.g. Grimm). A less-well-known strain in this narrative uses cannibalism as a critical postcolonial metaphor. In 1928, the Brazilian poet and agitator Oswald de Andrade published a short text entitled “Anthropophagic Manifesto.” The aim of the manifesto was to distance an emerging Brazilian modernism from the European ideals that the São Paulo bourgeoisie uncritically embraced, and to synthesise more avant-garde ideas with aspects from the cultures of the indigenous Amazonian peoples into a truly national cultural movement. This essay draws on various aspects of the anthropophagic movement and seeks to understand, whether (and how) it influenced Brazilian urban planning and architecture, and especially if it is detectable in the ways in which architects Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer designed and executed the legal and political institutions in Brasília, the country’s iconic federal capital. The analysis, however, identifies a colonialist inclination in Costa and Niemeyer’s ideological debt to Le Corbusier. Instead, the radical potential of anthropophagic architecture is developed with reference to the less-known São Paulo architect and polymath Flávio de Carvalho whose aesthetic politics provide parallels with contemporary radical politics, as well. The essay suggests that such a notion of politics would be akin to a radical anti-instrumentalism that I have elsewhere, following Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, called a “politics of the impossible.”

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Constituted space

It is a strange paradox: if one perceives the profound absence of escape, the profound absence of goal and meaning, then – but only then – the mind liberated, we approach practically, lucidly, practical problems.
– Georges Bataille¹

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¹ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Stuart Kendall (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015),

Over the last few decades, *constituent power* has become a common staple of scholarly debates on political and legal phenomena. The term refers to the ultimate power of “the people” as the foundation of popular sovereignty and, consequently, of democracy, as well: the state’s central institutions and practices of government are an outcome of the expression of a popular will, and so they owe their existence to “the people,” and not vice versa.² This focus, including attempts to resolve the apparent dilemma when the radical democratic will of “the people” collides with what existing democratic institutions and principles are prepared to offer, have left the other side of the coin, namely *constituted power*, temporarily a bit more in the sidelines. This term, in turn, refers to the “end-product,” to the institutions and practices that “the people” has entrenched into its constitutions as the relatively permanent cornerstones of its political existence. These include the legal and political institutions that allow democracies to function: the legislature, the judiciary, various levels of public authorities, and so on. But despite their membership in the seemingly almighty “people,” individuals live out most of their everyday lives within the confines of institutionalised power relations that they have little access to or are, perhaps, even barely aware of.

The constituted side of public power has always been the standard focus in mainstream constitutional law and constitutionalism.³ Both deal mainly with legal definitions of *competencies* that constitutions assign to various government branches and authorities: the legislature passes laws, the executive drafts them and implements them, the judiciary applies them in individual cases, and so on. My focus here is quite different. Constituted power namely also embodies a *physical environment* in which the legal and political institutions of the state reside. Think of a public square hosting government buildings, a courthouse, or a monumental statue of a national hero. Individuals, on the other hand, live out a significant part of their everyday relations with public power and domination in and through such *spatially* ordered environments. These environments are most emphatically present in state capitals and government centres that can more generically be called *seats of power*.

After the so-called “spatial turn” in the social sciences, studies on the relationship between power and space have been abundant.⁴ But scholarship that would specifically

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² Most recently, see e.g. Joel Colón-Ríos, *Constituent Power and the Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), Lucia Rubinelli, *Constituent Power. A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), and Matilda Arvidsson, Leila Brännström and Panu Minkkinen, eds., *Constituent Power. Law, Popular Rule, and Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020). The main reason behind the growing interest in this constituent element has in all likelihood been the rise of populism. Populist politics, namely, makes manifest a fundamental dilemma inherent in any radical definition of democracy. Can the constituent popular sovereign, “the people,” really do no wrong? Is majority rule by “the people” always democratic? See also Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018).

³ E.g. N.W. Barber, *The Principles of Constitutionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁴ E.g. Doreen B. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), John Allen, *Lost Geographies of Power* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), and Martina Löw, *The Sociology*

deal with the spatial dimensions of constituted power, that is, with the *constituted space* of state capitals and government centres, is patchy at best.⁵ How is public power reflected in the designed and constructed spaces in which statist institutions and authorities operate? And how do individuals negotiate their own relationships with power and domination within them? Archetypical examples of such spaces would be 18th or 19th-Century neoclassicist and monumentalist capital cities in Europe and North America. As Henri Lefebvre notes, these spaces are not produced to be either inhabited in or “used” but, rather, to be “read.” As such, their overdetermined messages manage to conceal crucial strategic intentions and actions. So, for example, neoclassicist motifs like Graeco-Roman columns may function as more or less unambiguous signifiers of government through associations with the Greek *polis* or Roman law. But because the motifs are political, military and ultimately fascist in character, they also “mask the will to power and the arbitrariness of power beneath signs and surfaces which claim to express collective will and collective thought.”⁶ Georges Bataille seems to share a similar power-related distrust of all things architectural because:

only the ideal being of society, that which orders and prohibits with authority, expresses itself in what are architectural compositions in the strict sense of the term. Thus, the great monuments are raised up like dams, pitting the logic of majesty and authority against all the shady elements: it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that Church and State speak and impose silence on the multitudes.⁷

At the other end of the yardstick, modernism represents at least some promise of democracy that the innovative use of architecture and urban design can promote.⁸ A

of Space. Materiality, Social Structures, and Action, trans. Donald Goodwin (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). More specifically in relation to law, e.g. Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas and Martha Merrill Umphrey, eds., *The Place of Law* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003), and Leif Dahlberg, *Spacing Law and Politics. The Constitution and Representation of the Juridical* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

⁵ For rare exceptions from architectural and political science perspectives respectively, see Aggregate [Group], *Governing by Design. Architecture, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), and Duncan Bell and Bernardo Zacka, eds., *Political Theory and Architecture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* [1974], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 143. There is, perhaps, more literature available on courthouse architecture more specifically, such as Linda Mulcahy, *Legal Architecture. Justice, Due Process and the Place of Law* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), and Linda Mulcahy and Emma Rowden, *The Democratic Courthouse. A Modern History of Design, Due Process and Dignity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020). The focus of this essay, is, however, power and “constituted institutions” more generally.

⁷ Georges Bataille, “Architecture,” in *Rethinking Architecture. A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach, trans. Paul Hegarty (London: Routledge, 1997): 19-20, 19. See also Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture. The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

⁸ E.g. Vincent Scully Jr., *Modern Architecture and other Essays*, ed. Neil Levine (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

paradigmatic example of this promise would be the way in which the constituted power of the state has been spatially designed and built in Brasília, the federal capital of Brazil, by architects Lúcio Costa (1902-1998) and Oscar Niemeyer (1907-2012).⁹ In a crude taxonomy of constituted spaces, Brasília is ideal-typically a unique case. First, it is a purpose-built national capital. This is, of course, not unheard of. Canberra, New Delhi, and even Washington, D.C., come instantly to mind. But the site chosen for the capital was remotely located and closer to the geographical centre of the vast country as if the intention was to deliberately weaken the political influence of the two coastal metropolises further south, that is, the former capital Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo, the country's industrial powerhouse. Second and more significantly, the striking airplane-like outlines of Costa's plan and Niemeyer's iconic public architecture¹⁰ provide concrete points of reference for evaluating the democratic promises of modernism, that is, whether and how modernist design and architecture can strengthen democratic principles and values in spatial environments that are saturated with power.

In this essay, I will, however, attempt to show how Costa and Niemeyer end up watering down these promises of democracy by aligning themselves uncritically with certain aspects of Le Corbusier's design philosophy. I will further highlight the argument by juxtaposing Costa and Niemeyer's project with a more radical but less-known strain of Brazilian modernism that is commonly referred to as "anthropophagy." I will ask whether, and if yes, how, anthropophagy's cannibalistic metaphor can provide a more plausible platform for a radical spatial politics that might have currency even in contemporary times.¹¹ After briefly mentioning anthropophagy's genealogical forerunners and going through some recurring themes and protagonists, I will present in more detail the architectural ideas of one of anthropophagy's central figures, Flávio de Carvalho (1899-1973). The essay finally suggests that the notion of radical cultural politics that Flávio's¹² anthropophagic architecture suggests finds parallels in an anti-instrumentalist position that I have elsewhere, following Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, called a "politics of the impossible."¹³ And it is here, I conclude, that the radical democratic promise of a late modernist spatial politics lies.

⁹ See Lúcio Costa, *Brasília, cidade que inventei. Relatório de Plano Piloto de Brasília* [1957] (Brasília: GDF, 1991), and Oscar Niemeyer, *Minha experiência em Brasília* [1961], 4th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Revan, 2006).

¹⁰ E.g. Gaia Piccarolo, *Architecture as Civil Commitment. Lucio Costa's Modernist Project for Brazil* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), and David G. Epstein, *Brasília, Plan and Reality. A Study of Planned and Spontaneous Urban Development* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973).

¹¹ See however C. Richard King, "The (Mis)uses of Cannibalism in Contemporary Cultural Critique," *Diacritics* 30.1 (2000): 106-123.

¹² The Brazilian convention is to use first names rather than surnames after an individual has been properly identified. With the exception of Costa and Niemeyer, I will do so when discussing the main Brazilian protagonists of the essay, as well.

¹³ See Panu Minkkinen, *Sovereignty, Knowledge, Law* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 131-144, and Panu Minkkinen, "Lacan avec Bataille avec Nietzsche: A Politics of the Impossible?," in *Jacques Lacan: Between Psychoanalysis and Politics*, eds. Andrea Zevnik and Samo Tomšič (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016): 281-298.

From cannibalism to anthropophagy

So why “anthropophagy”? What does it have to do with law and justice?

In his *Histories*, Herodotus famously recounts how the Scythians prepared for war against the great Persian armies by seeking to make alliances with their neighbours: the Tauri, the Agathyrsi, the Neuri, the Man-eaters, the Black-cloaks, the Geloni, the Budini, and the Sauromatae. One of the tribes stands out:

The Man-eaters [*Androphagoi*] are of all men the most savage in their manner of life; they know no justice and obey no law. They are nomads, wearing a dress like the Scythian, but speaking a language of their own; they are the only people of all these that eat men.¹⁴

Herodotus’ well-known passage marks two extremes on a common yardstick of humanity. At one end, we have an implied civilised individual who agrees to be governed by law and the principles of justice. At the other, we have the cannibal, the “androphage” or “anthropophage” – from “*andrós*” or “*ánthrōpos*” meaning “man” or “human,” and “*phágos*” meaning “eater” – as the ultimate representative of savagery who by eating his fellow human beings also negates the ideals of both law and justice. Cannibalism is certainly one of the most recognisable taboos of the West and a benchmark with which a supposedly civilised world has traditionally differentiated itself from the radically “other” of the hinterlands.¹⁵ As such, it has made its way into the vocabulary of the West’s pseudo-ethnographic self-reflection as well as the imaginary of its cultural identity.¹⁶

In Freud’s account, cannibalism is one of man’s atavistic desires that civilisation has consequently managed to prohibit. But as a “law,” a prohibition can only prevent fulfilling an instinctual desire. And so a certain residue or frustration of the unsatisfied desire will always remain even if the prohibition is respected. Of all the instinctual desires that human civilisation has supposedly taken on, Freud suggests that an untrained mind – a non-analyst – may think that of man’s atavistic desires cannibalism alone, perhaps as the most primeval, has been universally proscribed and successfully overcome.¹⁷ But just like incestuous desires are still detectable in the strength of the prohibition against their fulfilment, even cannibalistic desires find ways to surface from the unconscious:

¹⁴ Herodotus, *Histories. Book IV* [c. 430 BCE], in *Herodotus in Four Volumes. Volume II*, trans. A.D. Godley (London: William Heinemann, 1921): 197-407, 306-307 [4.106].

¹⁵ Geraldine Heng turns the perspective around by reviewing Medieval historical accounts of “crusade cannibalism” when starving troops ate their slain Muslim enemies, and how the European imagination simply lacked the ability to comprehend testimonies of fellow Christians committing such atrocities. Geraldine Heng, “Cannibalism, the First Crusade, and the Genesis of Medieval Romance,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 10.1 (1998): 98-174.

¹⁶ E.g. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen, eds., *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* [1927], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works*, trans. W.D. Robson-Scott and James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001): 1-56, 9-10.

art offers substitutive satisfactions for the oldest and still most deeply felt cultural renunciations, and for that reason it serves as nothing else does to reconcile a man to the sacrifices he has made on behalf of civilization.¹⁸

A less-well-known strain in this narrative of savage man-eaters, perhaps only familiar to scholars in Latin-American studies, reverses our commonly held associations of cannibalism and turns it into a critical postcolonial metaphor. In 1928, the Brazilian poet and cultural agitator Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954) published a short text entitled “*Manifesto Antropófago*” (“Anthropophagic Manifesto”).¹⁹ The apparent aim of the manifesto was to distance an emerging Brazilian notion of cultural modernism from the European ideals of Brazil’s colonial past that were still championed and uncritically emulated by the São Paulo bourgeoisie, and to combine newer avant-garde trends with aspects, both real and imagined, of the indigenous cosmology of the Amazonian peoples, most notably of the Tupinambá. This melange of avant-garde and indigenous thinking was intended to provide the foundation for a truly national cultural movement truly liberated from the country’s colonial past. Oswald’s well-known witticism condenses this spirit: “Tupi, or not Tupi that is the question.”²⁰

The anthropophagic metaphor of the cannibal likens the birth of Brazilian modernism to a ritual in which a family member, a fellow clansman or a captured enemy is consumed in the hope of internalising some of her respected, feared or magical qualities.²¹ In *Totem*

¹⁸ Freud, “The Future of an Illusion,” 13. E.g. Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Hansel and Gretel* [1812], in *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm. The Complete First Edition*, trans. Jack Zipes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014): 43-49. Another well-known line of argument begins with Michel de Montaigne who used the figure of the cannibal to underline the innocence of his “noble savage,” that there is, in fact, nothing innately barbarous or savage about eating your fellow human being, except that “we all call barbarous anything that is contrary to our own habits.” Michel de Montaigne, “Of Cannibals” [1580], in *Essays*, trans. J.M. Cohen (London et al: Penguin, 1958): 105-119, 108. On the “noble savage” more generally, see e.g. Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Oswald de Andrade, “Manifesto antropófago” [1928], in *Obras Completas VI. Do Pau-Brasil à Antropofagia e às Utopias. Manifestos, teses de concursos e ensaios* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1972): 11-20. The “Manifesto” was originally published in the first “teething” or “dentition” (*dentição*) of the journal *Revista de Antropofagia* that activists involved in the movement published for a few years. See Kenneth David Jackson, “A View on Brazilian Literature: Eating the ‘*Revista de Antropofagia*,’” *Latin American Literary Review* 7.13 (1978): 1-9. The “Manifesto” was first translated into English as Oswald de Andrade, “Cannibalist Manifesto,” *Latin American Literary Review* 19.38 (1991): 38-47. But in this essay, I am using the more recent – and more accurate – translation that can be found in Pedro Neves Marques’ excellent collection of relevant texts. Oswald de Andrade, “Athropophagic Manifesto,” in *The Forest and the School/Where to Sit at the Dinner Table?*, ed. Pedro Neves Marques, trans. Pedro Neves Marques (Berlin: Archive Books, 2014): 99-107.

²⁰ Andrade, “Athropophagic Manifesto,” 99.

²¹ See Pedro Neves Marques, “Introduction,” in *The Forest and the School. Where to Sit*

and *Taboo*, Freud claimed that the “higher motives” for cannibalism among so-called primitive peoples suggested that “by incorporating parts of a person’s body through the act of eating, one at the same time acquires the qualities possessed by him.”²² This incorporation applies to the primal horde and original patricide, as well. The oft-cited passage explains:

Cannibal savages as they [the fraternal horde] were, it goes without saying that they devoured their victim [the father] as well as killing him. The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. The totem meal, which is perhaps mankind’s earliest festival, would thus be a repetition and a commemoration of this memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things – of social organization, of moral restrictions and of religion.²³

By analogy, Oswald’s anthropophagy equates Brazilian modernism with the “totem meal” where the former Portuguese colony celebrates its independence and cultural uniqueness by devouring and destroying its former colonial masters. Some have, however, argued that Oswald’s manifesto never managed to draw the disparate individuals involved together into what might be considered a coherent “movement.”²⁴ But it certainly was influential and effective as political agitation. According to the authoritative historical account, the founding moment of Brazilian modernism coincided with the 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna* exhibition in São Paulo, an event organised to celebrate a century of Brazilian independence from Portuguese rule.²⁵ Over the course of three days in mid-February, the city’s Municipal Theatre exhibited new visual and plastic arts, and provided forums for lectures, concerts and poetry recitals. The critical edge of the event was aimed at the local

at the Dinner Table?, ed. Pedro Neves Marques (Berlin: Archive Books, 2014): 27-56 and 297-312.

²² Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* [1912-1913], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIII (1913-1914): Totem and Taboo and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 1995): vii-162, 81.

²³ Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 140-141. My personal understanding of Freud’s “armchair anthropology” is indebted to Eugène Enriquez’s detailed reading of the social dynamics of the horde. See Eugène Enriquez, *De la horde à l'État. Essai de psychanalyse du lien social* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

²⁴ See e.g. Sara Castro-Klarén, “A Genealogy for the ‘Manifesto Antropofago,’ or the Struggle between Socrates and the Caraipe,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1.2 (2000): 295-322, and Henryk Siewierski, “Utopia and Anthropophagy,” *Third Text* 21.5 (2007): 499-508.

²⁵ See e.g. Beatriz Resende, “Brazilian Modernism: The Canonised Revolution,” in *Through the Kaleidoscope. The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, ed. Vivian Schelling, trans. Lorraine Leu (London: Verso, 2000): 199-216, and Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, “Remembering Modern Art Week,” in *Manifestos and Polemics in Latin American Modern Art*, ed. Patrick Frank, trans. Patrick Frank (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2017): 15-19.

bourgeois cultural elite, and due to its radicalness, the event was received with hostility by the general public and prompted a fierce and angry response from the Brazilian press. It did, however, consolidate an emerging cultural movement that had begun to take shape some five years earlier with the return of painter Anita Malfatti (1889-1964) to her native São Paulo.²⁶

Anita had travelled in Europe and in the United States and was inspired by the new avant-garde movements that were reshaping the face of the arts. In an exhibition in 1917/1918 that followed her return to São Paulo, she set the stage for what would eventually lead to the formation of the “Group of Five,” a collective of artists that, in addition to Anita, included fellow painter Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1973), and authors Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), the aforementioned Oswald de Andrade (no relation, as is customary to point out) and Menotti del Picchia (1892-1988). In addition to Oswald’s manifesto, the group would come to define anthropophagy as the most radical variant of Brazilian modernism through milestone artistic works such as Mário’s 1928 novel *Macunaíma*,²⁷ Tarsila’s painting *Abaporu* from the same year,²⁸ and Menotti’s political poetry.²⁹

One can, perhaps, approach the group’s choice of the cannibalistic metaphor from at least three perspectives.

The first – the least persuasive – concerns the word’s supposed shock value in general. So not only a “regressive” identification with primitive humanity, but also with one of the most persistent taboos of Western culture. This first perspective may be more helpful in explaining the hostile reaction of the Brazilian bourgeoisie at the time than framing the radical artistic and cultural agenda of the anthropophagic collective itself.

A second perspective serves as a crude genealogy in the charting of anthropophagy’s main sources of inspiration.³⁰ Although anthropophagy was intended as a distinctively Brazilian take on modernism, many of its representatives had spent lengthy periods travelling in Europe and North America and become inspired by movements such as expressionism, futurism and Dadaism.³¹ Oswald himself travelled extensively in Europe and

²⁶ See entry in Kristin G. Congdon and Kara Kelley Hallmark, *Artists from Latin American Cultures. A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 158-160.

²⁷ Mário de Andrade, *Macunaíma*, trans. E.A. Goodland (London: Quartet, 1985). See also Kimberle S. López, “Modernismo and the Ambivalence of the Postcolonial Experience: Cannibalism, Primitivism, and Exoticism in Mário de Andrade’s ‘Macunaíma,’” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 35.1 (1998): 25-38.

²⁸ See Stephanie D’Alessandro and Luis Pérez Oramas, eds., *Tarsila do Amaral. Inventing Modern Art in Brazil* (Chicago, IL: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2017), and Carol Damian, “Tarsila do Amaral: Art and Environmental Concerns of a Brazilian Modernist,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 20.1 (1999): 3-7.

²⁹ See Luís Madureira, *Cannibal Modernities. Postcoloniality and the Avant-Garde in Caribbean and Brazilian Literature* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 52-85, and Albert R. Lopes and Willis D. Jacobs, “Menotti del Picchia and the Spirit of Brazil,” *Books Abroad* 26.3 (1952): 240-243.

³⁰ See e.g. Zita Nunes, *Cannibal Democracy. Race and Representation in the Literature of the Americas* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 25-57.

³¹ See e.g. Virginie Pouzet-Duzer, “Dada, Surrealism, Antropofagia: The Consuming

became acquainted with, among others, French artist and poet Francis Picabia who, at the time, was one of the leading figures of the Dadaist movement in Paris.³² In 1920, Picabia published a short text called “*Manifeste Cannibale Dada*”³³ which, no doubt, served as some sort of template for Oswald’s own provocation. In this sense, the genealogy of anthropophagy points in a somewhat paradoxical way to European, white and middle-class origins that coincide with “primitivist” and ethnological motifs in avant-garde art and culture.³⁴

But despite these international sources of inspiration, anthropophagy aspired to be a truly *national* movement that, like the Amerindian cannibal, devoured its European counterpart with the aim of producing something unique combining avant-garde and aboriginal thinking.³⁵ The concrete poet Haroldo de Campos claims that this third, distinctively Brazilian take on cannibalism involved:

the critical devouring of universal cultural heritage, formulated not from the submissive and reconciled perspective of the “noble savage” ... but from the disabused point of view of the “bad savage,” devourer of whites, the cannibal. This last view does not involve submission (conversion) but, rather, transculturation, or, even better, “transvalorization”: a critical view of history as a negative function (in Nietzsche’s sense), capable of appropriation and of expropriation, of dehierarchization, of deconstruction.³⁶

In other words, the cannibal of anthropophagy would seem to represent a next-to-complete reversal of the traditional humanistic ideals associated with the “noble savage.”

From an interpretative point of view, Oswald’s humorous and raucous manifesto may

Process of the Avant-Gardes,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 53.3 (2013): 79-90. On the influence of psychoanalysis, see Catrin See Franz, *Tupi Talking Cure. Zur Aneignung Freuds im antropofagischen Modernismus Brasiliens* (Wien: LIT Verlag, 2013), and Cristiana Facchinetti, “Modernist Pills against Brazilian Alienism (1920–1945),” *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling* 20.1 (2018): 48-61.

³² See e.g. Alexandra Karentzos, “Incorporations of the Other - Exotic Objects, Tropicalism, and Anthropophagy,” in *Art History and Fetishism Abroad. Global Shiftings in Media and Methods*, eds. Gabriele Genge and Angela Stercken (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014): 251-270, 252-258.

³³ Available in English as Francis Picabia, “Dada Cannibal Manifesto” [1920], in *I Am a Beautiful Monster. Poetry, Prose, and Provocation*, trans. Marc Lowenthal (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007): 204.

³⁴ See e.g. K. David Jackson, “Three Glad Races: Primitivism and Ethnicity in Brazilian Modernist Literature,” *Modernism/Modernity* 1.2 (1994): 89-112.

³⁵ Of the “Group of Five,” it was especially Mário who displayed a more systematic interest in Tupinambá languages and thinking. As a self-professed “idiosyncratic ethnologist,” he recorded and analysed his observations on several expeditions to the Amazonian forests. See e.g. Fernando J. Rosenberg, *The Avant-Garde and Geopolitics in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 106-135.

³⁶ Haroldo de Campos, “Anthropophagous Reason: Dialogue and Difference in Brazilian Culture,” in *Novas. Selected Writings* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007): 157-177, 159-160.

seem almost impenetrable³⁷ although most regard it as critical of the trappings of modernism, as a specifically “decolonial” project to use Luis Felipe Garcia’s expression.³⁸ One can safely assume that much is lost in translation, especially taking into account that the manifesto was never really intended for “international” audiences. It is made up of some fifty short fragments often written in a highly metaphorical style with a certain rhythmic repetition betraying Oswald’s background as a poet. Carlos Jáuregui claims that both the manifesto and the movement were, in fact, so heterogeneous that no single interpretation of its essence could be presented.³⁹ By the same token, anthropophagy was easily appropriated, resignified and transformed – “paradoxically consumed and devoured”⁴⁰ – for a plethora of purposes such as the *tropicália* or *tropicalismo* movement in Brazilian music and cinema.⁴¹

This relative success, as Pedro Neves Marques notes, also domesticated anthropophagy and diluted its potential radicalness into a general cultural style of hybridity.⁴² By contrast, as an *anthropology*, anthropophagy enabled examining the Amerindian cannibal as a transformation of Western capitalist predation and the sterilisation of the world with reason. Anthropophagy was not only an anthropology of otherness, but also an *inverted* anthropology of ourselves, “neither as the study of others or as the study of oneself, but the study of our world through the other; and the rupture with the Indian as the pure (purified), natural (naturalized) other.”⁴³ It is in the same vein that Eduardo Vivieros de Castro sees an indigenous anthropology as a “permanent decolonisation of thought”:

If the goal of multiculturalist European anthropology was to describe human life as it is experienced from the indigenous point of view, indigenous multinaturalist anthropophagy presumed as a vital condition of its self-description the

³⁷ See Luiz Fernando Medeiros de Carvalho and Fabio Marchon Coube, “Le Manifeste anthropophage, un menu pour bien manger,” *Lignes* 40.1 (2013): 102-115, and Beth Joan Vinkler, “The Anthropophagic Mother/Other: Appropriated Identities in Oswald de Andrade’s ‘Manifesto Antropófago,’” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 34.1 (1997): 105-111.

³⁸ Luis Felipe Garcia, “Only Anthropophagy Unites Us – Oswald de Andrade’s Decolonial Project,” *Cultural Studies* 34.1 (2020): 122-142.

³⁹ Carlos Jáuregui, “Anthropophagy,” in *Dictionary of Latin American Cultural Studies*, eds. Robert McKee Irwin and Mónica Szurmuk (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012): 22-28. See also Carlos Jáuregui, “Cannibalism, the Eucharist, and Criollo Subjects,” in *Creole Subjects in the Colonial Americas. Empires, Texts, Identities*, eds. Ralph Bauer and José Antonio Mazzotti (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009): 61-100.

⁴⁰ Jáuregui, “Anthropophagy,” 22.

⁴¹ See e.g. Cynthia Canejo, “The Resurgence of Anthropophagy: Tropicália, Tropicalismo and Hélio Oiticica,” *Third Text* 18.1 (2004): 61-68, and Theodore Robert Young, “You Are What You Eat: *Tropicalismo* and *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman*,” in *A Twice-Told Tale. Reinventing the Encounter in Iberian/Iberian American Literature and Film*, eds. Santiago Juan-Navarro and Theodore Robert Young (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2001): 80-88.

⁴² As in Michelle Andressa Alvarenga de Souza, “Analysing Brazilian Modernism from a Postcolonial Perspective: The Importance of Anthropophagy in the Movement towards a Decolonization of the Mind,” *International Journal of Arts & Sciences* 8.7 (2015): 411-423.

⁴³ Marques, “Introduction,” 30-31.

“semiophysical” prehension – taking life through eating – of the point of view of the enemy. Anthropophagy as anthropology.⁴⁴

The “inexplicable astonishment” of Brasília

So how has the Brazilian modernism that was launched at the 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna* event in São Paulo influenced the way in which Costa and Niemeyer spatially conceived and designed the statist institutions of constituted power in Brasília?⁴⁵

We know that in 1938 Niemeyer who was based in Rio designed Oswald and Tárсила’s home in São Paulo, and that this commissioned work is a somewhat unusual “tale of two cities” that can be taken as evidence of some reciprocal aesthetic and political acknowledgement.⁴⁶ But the story about how Brasília came to be is otherwise quite detached from the Paulista strain of modernism that we’ve identified as anthropophagy. The plan to move the capital from Rio on the coast to the inland plateaus closer to the country’s geographical centre was already initiated in the early 19th Century. It was only President Juscelino Kubitschek (1902-1976) who began to put the plan into effect in the 1950s.⁴⁷ In 1957, Costa won the design competition with his entry known as the “*Plano*

⁴⁴ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics. For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, trans. Peter Skafish (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2014), 143.

⁴⁵ See Valerie Fraser, *Building the New World. Studies in the Modern Architecture of Latin America, 1930-1960* (London: Verso, 2000), 212-244. Also Styliane Philippou, “The Primitive as an Instrument of Subversion in Twentieth-Century Brazilian Cultural Practice,” *Architectural Research Quarterly* 8.3-4 (2004): 285-298, Styliane Philippou, “Modernism and National Identity in Brazil, or How to Brew a Brazilian Stew,” *National Identities* 7.3 (2005): 245-264, and Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, “Brasília: Utopia Postponed,” in *Law and the City*, ed. Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007): 239-254. A classic critical account about constructing the city is James Holston, *The Modernist City. An Anthropological Critique of Brasília* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁴⁶ See e.g. Lauro Cavalcanti, *When Brazil Was Modern. Guide to Architecture, 1928-1960*, trans. Jon Tolman (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), 192-193. It is, perhaps, worth pointing out that following the hugely successful 1942 exhibition *Brazil Builds* at MoMa in New York, and the publication of its equally well received catalogue, the São Paulo-based architect Luís Saia noted how the exclusion of many prominent Paulista architects from the exhibition led to an over-simplified identification of Brazilian modernism with the Carioca (i.e. Rio-based) School represented by, among others, Costa and Niemeyer. The catalogue was published as Philip L. Goodwin, *Brazil Builds. Architecture New and Old, 1652-1942* (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1943), and Saia’s critical review is reprinted as Luís Saia, “Brazil Builds,” *Revista de Pesquisa em Arquitetura e Urbanismo*, No.18-19 (2014): 184-186. See also Ruth Verde Zein and Cristián Fernández Cox, “Regional Study Brazil,” in *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Architecture. Case Studies from the South*, eds. Peter Herrle and Stephanus Schmitz (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009): 37-86.

⁴⁷ E.g. Juscelino Kubitschek, *Por que construí Brasília* [1975] (Brasília: Senado Federal, 2000). For a general discussion of the long process, see William Holford, “Brasília: The Federal Capital of Brazil,” *The Geographical Journal* 128.1 (1962): 15-17.

Piloto” (“Pilot Plan”).⁴⁸ The entry consisted of only fifteen freehand sketches and 23 handwritten paragraphs, the sort of nonchalance that only a celebrity architect could afford. After winning the competition, Costa invited his former assistant and now internationally renowned compatriot Niemeyer to design the capital’s major administrative buildings for which Brasília is, perhaps, best known. In addition, Roberto Burle Marx, a landscape architect and avant-garde artist, designed gardens for many of the most important buildings.⁴⁹ Martino Stierli insists that although Niemeyer never explicitly referred to the anthropophagic modernism of his Paulista compatriots, his architecture for Brasília reflects Oswald’s spirit as “a carnivalization of the European avant-gardes, a double gesture of both tribute and irreverence towards hegemonic discourse.”⁵⁰

In Costa’s entry, the first sketch of the city plan was simply two lines drawn into a cross. The administrative buildings were to be built on the vertical line called the “monumental axis.” In the subsequent sketches, the horizontal line of the cross curved slightly upwards. This “residential axis” would host a total of 108 superblocks or “*superquadra*” to provide housing for the capital’s politicians and civil servants. A large bus terminal would be built at the intersection of the two axes, and multi-lane motorways with vast curving interchanges would cross both axes. At the bottom of the monumental axis, a triangular area marked a plaza, the “*Praça dos Três Poderes*” (“Plaza of the Three Powers”), that today hosts the buildings of the three main government branches: the National Congress Building, the presidential Planalto Palace, and the Supreme Federal Court (see Figures 3 and 4). The almost equilateral triangle represents the three state powers in a simplified and overdetermined way suggesting a separation that would allow each branch to effortlessly oversee the activities of the others through constituted “checks and balances.” This overdetermined representation is, of course, far from how any separation of powers factually works. From the plaza, the monumental axis stretched upward as an esplanade where the ministries and public authorities of lesser importance are situated. This is, then, a key element of Brasília’s constituted space.

If we look at the city from above, Costa’s planned outline does, indeed, resemble an airplane or an “*avião*” as the city centre is colloquially known. The outline can be explained with the help of several narratives, but one is particularly persuasive. Costa and Niemeyer were deeply inspired by Le Corbusier, both before and during the planning of Brasília. The Swiss master had close ties with Latin America to begin with, and in 1943 he had supervised the design and building of the Ministry of National Education and Public Health in the then capital Rio, today known as the Gustavo Capanema Palace, and known especially for its innovative use of concrete *brise-soleil* structures.⁵¹ With Le Corbusier as an

⁴⁸ Costa, *Brasília, cidade que inventei*.

⁴⁹ See Rossana Vaccarino, ed., *Roberto Burle Marx. Landscapes Reflected* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000).

⁵⁰ Martino Stierli, “Building No Place: Oscar Niemeyer and the Utopias of Brasília,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 67.1 (2013): 8-16, 15

⁵¹ Henrique E. Mindlin, *Modern Architecture in Brazil* (Rio de Janeiro/Amsterdam: Colibris Editora, 1956), 196-199, and Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète 1938-1946*, ed. Willy Boesiger (Zurich: Les Editions d'Architecture, 1946), 82-89. Many accounts present the reception of Le Corbusier in Brazil as an uncritical and straightforward affair. Valerie Fraser, however, shows how especially Roberto Burle Marx managed to filter at least some of Le Corbusier’s neocolonialist idiosyncrasies from the collaborative works. Valerie Fraser,

official consultant, Costa was the main architect of the Ministry project, and Niemeyer was a young assistant in Costa's office. But more important than the cooperation itself was the way in which Le Corbusier had found his way to Brazil.

Le Corbusier had visited Rio already in 1929 on his first tour of South America. He first arrived in Buenos Aires where he in all likelihood met the author and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.⁵² Saint-Exupéry had established a number of permanent flight routes across the South American continent on his *Compagnie Générale Aéropostale*. Le Corbusier, for his part, travelled from Buenos Aires to Brazil on one of these routes and was mesmerised by the aerial views that these flights provided.⁵³ This coincides with the time during which Le Corbusier's "*Ville contemporaine*," his utopian metropolitan project originally conceived in the 1920s,⁵⁴ was gradually morphing into the "*Ville radieuse*" with its emphasis on strict zoning, linearity and outlines often derived from the anthropometric Modulor scale.⁵⁵ As such, a new urban project could only be achieved by annulling any existing characteristics of the terrain with a view from above.

The "bird's eye view" from the airplane inspired Le Corbusier to such an extent that, in 1935, he published a short book celebrating the vehicle itself. In its preface, Le Corbusier wrote that:

to-day it is a question of the airplane eye, of the mind with which the Bird's Eye View has endowed us; of that eye which now looks with alarm at the places where we live, the cities where it is our lot to be. ... And the spectacle is frightening, overwhelming. The airplane eye reveals a spectacle of collapse.⁵⁶

So not only does the book celebrate the airplane as a modern technological innovation, but it also establishes the mechanised bird's eye view as a new tool of urban planning:

By means of the airplane, we now have proof, recorded on the photographic plate, of the rightness of our desire to alter methods of architecture and town-planning. ... With its eagle eye the airplane looks at the city. ... The airplane instils, above all,

"Cannibalizing Le Corbusier: The MES Gardens of Roberto Burle Marx," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 59.2 (2000): 180-193.

⁵² On Saint-Exupéry in Buenos Aires, see Stacy Schiff, *Saint-Exupéry. A Biography* (New York, NY: A.A. Knopf, 1994), 169-195.

⁵³ Stanislaus von Moos, *Le Corbusier. Elements of a Synthesis*, revised and expanded ed. (Rotterdam: 101 Publishers, 2009), 282-285. This transformation is, perhaps, best captured in the lectures that Le Corbusier gave in Buenos Aires and that he later published as Le Corbusier, *Precisions on the Present State of Architecture and City Planning* [1930], trans. Edith Schreiber Aujame (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

⁵⁴ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-morrow and its Planning* [1929], trans. Frederick Etchells (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1987), 163-180.

⁵⁵ Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City. Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of our Machine-Age Civilization* [1935], trans. Pamela Knight, Eleanor Levieux and Derek Coltman (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), and Le Corbusier, *The Modulor I and II* [1948/1955], trans. Peter de Francia and Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

⁵⁶ Le Corbusier, *Aircraft* [1935] (London: Trefoil Publications Ltd, 1987), 5.

a new conscience, the modern conscience. Cities, with their misery, must be torn down. They must be largely destroyed and fresh cities built.⁵⁷

There is a marked difference in this enthusiasm for what the view from above enables compared to Le Corbusier's earlier mock of the vanity of Louis XIV admiring his bird's eye plans for Versailles and "swelling with pride."⁵⁸ The bird's eye view was not, of course, a new innovation that coincided with flying. Even ancient land surveying techniques allowed cartographers to develop maps that simulated the same effect. Through detailed measurements, cartographers could produce more or less accurate depictions of existing land formations as if they were seen from above. But as such, these techniques were less useful in planning. Aerial photography, on the other hand, that is, Le Corbusier's "photographic plate," enabled the process to be fully reversed.⁵⁹ We could now create something that didn't exist at all by first designing it on top of a flat two-dimensional aerial image of a space that we need not even visit. From high above, we can disregard all signs of existing life on the ground and begin anew, so to speak. The aerial image reduces spatial complexities into an empty working surface after which a detailed design is much easier to execute. This type of terraformative gaze is an effective tool of colonisation that has been used in, for example, the systematic agricultural deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, and its "aircraft variant" was ingrained into the planning ideology of the influential *Congrès international d'architecture moderne* (CIAM) that Le Corbusier founded a year before his first trip to Latin America.⁶⁰ Costa's "airplane" design for Brasília is an excellent example of Corbusian aerial-based creation *ex nihilo*.

Celebrations of Brasília often present the city from this aerial perspective, whereas critical accounts enter the space from ground-level seemingly unaware of how everything looks like from above. In 1974, Brazilian author Clarice Lispector wrote an essay based on a short lecture trip that she made to the federal capital from Rio. Lispector's relation to Brasília is clearly critical, albeit in an ambivalent way. At the same time as she criticises the man-made artificiality of the environment, the city has a certain majesty that she can't quite turn away from:

Brasilia [sic] is artificial. As artificial as the world must have been when it was created. When the world was created, it was necessary to create a human being especially for that world. We are all deformed through adapting to God's freedom. We cannot say how we might have turned out if we had been created first, and the

⁵⁷ Le Corbusier, *Aircraft*, 11-12.

⁵⁸ Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture* [1923], trans. John Goodman (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2007), 229

⁵⁹ Adnan Morshed, "The Cultural Politics of Aerial Vision: Le Corbusier in Brazil (1929)," *Journal of Architectural Education* 55.4 (2002): 201-210, and Anthony Vidler, "Photourbanism: Planning the City from Above and from Below," in *A Companion to the City*, eds. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003): 35-45.

⁶⁰ See e.g. Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000). Politically Le Corbusier was riddled with contradictions. A self-professed syndicalist on the one hand, but collaborations with, e.g., the pro-Nazi Vichy government on the other as discussed in Xavier de Jarcy, *Le Corbusier, un fascisme français* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2015).

world had been deformed afterwards to meet our needs.⁶¹

So in Brasília, the order of creation somehow follows this divine sequence. Only God is free to create an empty world, and if man is to inhabit that world, she must be created only after the world has come to be so that she can adapt and “deform” herself appropriately. For Lispector, Brasília, as overwhelming as its majesty may be, is created for no one. It is an empty creation, perhaps because it can only be seen from above. And it certainly holds no promises of democracy:

The two architects who planned Brasilia were not interested in creating something beautiful. That would be too simple; they created their own terror, and left that terror unexplained. Creation is not an understanding, it is a new mystery.⁶²

The ill-mannered archaeologist

But if the democratic promise of modernism cannot be found in Brasília, where should we look? The true anthropophagic representative of architecture is much more likely the extraordinarily versatile avant-garde artist Flávio de Carvalho.⁶³ Flávio’s background is in many ways similar to his anthropophagic colleagues’. After spending his childhood in France, he studied civil engineering and the fine arts in Northern England. During his university years, he became acquainted with Vorticism, the British modernist movement founded by artist and author Wyndham Lewis.⁶⁴ Through Vorticism, Flávio absorbed influences from expressionism and primitivism that would, upon his return to São Paulo in 1922, both define his own work as an architect and artist, and align his interests with representatives of anthropophagy who were becoming more active at the same time. The extent and intensity of Flávio’s affiliations with the group are, however, not entirely clear.

During his first years in his native Brazil, Flávio concentrated on architectural designs of which the best known are a proposal for the Palace of the Governor of the State of São Paulo from 1927, and his entry for the competition of the Columbus Memorial Lighthouse

⁶¹ Clarice Lispector, “Five Days in Brasília,” in *The Foreign Legion. Stories and Chronicles*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (New York, NY: New Directions, 1986): 136-140, 136.

⁶² Lispector, “Five Days in Brasília,” 136.

⁶³ See Rui Moreira Leite, “Flávio de Carvalho: Modernism and the Avant-Garde in São Paulo, 1927-1939,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 21 (1995): 197-217. Leite has also written a general analysis of Flávio as an artist in Portuguese. See Rui Moreira Leite, *Flávio de Carvalho. O Artista Total* (São Paulo: SENAC, 2008). But no definitive introduction to this remarkable character is available in English. To my knowledge, notwithstanding a few exhibition catalogue entries, only one of his texts, included in Pedro Neves Marques’ collection, is available in English. See Flávio de Carvalho, “Hunger,” in *The Forest and the School/Where to Sit at the Dinner Table?*, ed. Pedro Neves Marques, trans. Pedro Neves Marques (Berlin: Archive Books, 2014): 178-201. In addition to the individual publications referred to here, I would recommend the translated essays appended to a catalogue dedicated to the self-professed “ill-mannered archaeologist.” See Amanda Bonan and Renato Rezende, eds., *Flávio de Carvalho Expedicionário* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Circuito, 2017), 128-144.

⁶⁴ See Paul Edwards, ed., *Blast. Vorticism 1914-1918* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

in the Dominican Republic the following year. The anthropophagic spirit of these designs is, perhaps, best captured in their clear intention to function as statements or provocations rather than as realisable building projects.

Flávio's sketches for, for example, the Governor's Palace proposal entitled "*Eficácia*" ("Efficiency," see Figure 5) are not technical drawings from which a building could be completed, but, rather, graphic art some of which was deliberately optimised for the crude newspaper printing techniques that were typical at the time. This conscious use of mass media to promote his work is a recurring feature that both distinguishes Flávio from his own contemporaries and, in many respects, makes him an international artistic forerunner well ahead of his time.⁶⁵ Apart from the sketches, there is very little information available – at least in English – on the proposal itself even though its power-related theme would fit in well with the more general aims of this essay.⁶⁶ In his authoritative introduction to Brazilian architectural modernism, Henrique Mindlin does, however, note in the passing that in the competition, Flávio "scandalized the public with his 'modernistic' design for a Palace provided with an air-raid shelter."⁶⁷

We know a bit more about the lighthouse design because the competition itself was well-known. Flávio's entry was not chosen for the second round. But in a report prepared by the organisers after the first round, it was presented in a section called "Comments and appreciations" as one entry among others reflecting "the variety of the ideas submitted, and quite regardless of their architectural merits or of their, in some cases, very obvious architectural shortcomings."⁶⁸ Flávio would seem to fit into this latter category. As an architect, he is described as an "extreme modernist," and his entry "*Criação*" ("Creation") is said to display "a deeply founded sympathy and an almost mystical belief, anxious to interpret hieroglyphs and ideograms and the books of magic of various Indian civilizations ... though we do not like it."⁶⁹

A few years later, the São Paulo collective of artists and activists that had come together under the anthropophagy umbrella sent Flávio to Rio to represent the group at the Fourth Pan-American Conference of Architects.⁷⁰ Flávio's address to the conference clearly echoed themes that had already been introduced more generally in the earlier anthropophagic texts like Oswald's manifesto. The address was entitled "*A cidade do homem*

⁶⁵ See e.g. Rui Moreira Leite, "Flávio de Carvalho: Media Artist Avant la Lettre," *Leonardo* 37.2 (2004): 150-157.

⁶⁶ See however Hugo M. Segawa, *Architecture of Brazil: 1900-1990*, trans. Denilson Amade Souza (Dordrecht et al: Springer, 2013), 40.

⁶⁷ Mindlin, *Modern Architecture in Brazil*, 4.

⁶⁸ Albert Kelsey and Pan-American Union, *Program and Rules of the Second Competition for the Selection of an Architect for the Monumental Lighthouse which the Nations of the World Will Erect in the Dominican Republic to the Memory of Christopher Columbus* ([s.l.]: Pan-American Union, 1930), 51.

⁶⁹ Kelsey and Pan-American Union, *Christopher Columbus Lighthouse Competition*, 94-95.

⁷⁰ See e.g. José Lira, "Brazilian Machineries (or the Collapse) of Pleasure: Architecture, Eroticism, and the Naked Body," in *Beyond the Supersquare. Art and Architecture in Latin America after Modernism*, ed. Antonio Sergio Bessa (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2014): 51-70, 53-55.

nu” (“The Nude Man’s City”),⁷¹ and it was once again closer to a provocative political and cultural statement than an attempt to present any realisable architectural or urban design. Drawing his theoretical inspiration liberally from Freud and Nietzsche, and playing around almost mischievously with “radiant” Corbusian themes like measurements and zoning, Flávio envisioned a city in which the weary “machine-man of classicism” will be “crushed under foot, in the logic of natural selection, by the more efficient natural man.”⁷² The humans of so-called classical societies would see this as a welcome development because they wished to “throw off the repetitive destructive churning movement of their souls, to seek out a way of thinking that does not stifle their desire to explore the unknown.”⁷³ Flávio’s city was clearly of the “new world”:

American cities are no longer the fortress-cities of the Conquest. They are geographical, cities for critical times, cities of nude men, of free rational thinkers and eminently anthropophagic men. The anthropophagic city satisfies the nude man because it suppresses the taboos of matrimony and property; it belongs to the whole collective, it is an enormous monolith functioning homogeneously, a gigantic motor in motion, transforming the energy of ideas into the needs of the individual, realizing collective desires, producing the happiness which lies in understanding life or movement.⁷⁴

The anthropophagic city was to be built on seemingly contradictory principles. On the one hand, the “nude man” represents pure science and reason. One of the curious Corbusian dichotomies with which Flávio operates has to do with measures that seek to “transform a *non-metric* into a *metric* world, creating new taboos to yield new benefits, encouraging reason to strike out into new fields.”⁷⁵ In the city, the “nude man”:

can find his ancient soul, can project his free energy in any direction, without repression, discover new desires, impose on himself a strictly efficient selection, shape his new ego, guide his libido and destroy the illogical, thereby approximating to the symbolic god the sublime anguish of the Unknown of non-metric changeability.⁷⁶

In anthropophagic city life, eroticism and desire are equally important:

Sex [*a erótica*] plays a vital role in the life of the nude man. The nude man will choose his own sexual proclivities; there will be no restrictions and no need for renunciation; his own mental energy will be sufficient for controlling and selecting

⁷¹ See Flávio de Carvalho, “A Curious Thesis: The Nude Man’s City” [1930], in *A Cidade do Homem Nu. Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 15.04.2010-13.06.2010*, trans. Cristiano Astolpho Mazzei (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 2010): 20-29.

⁷² Carvalho, “The Nude Man’s City,” 22.

⁷³ Carvalho, “The Nude Man’s City,” 23.

⁷⁴ Carvalho, “The Nude Man’s City,” 25.

⁷⁵ Carvalho, “The Nude Man’s City,” 24 [my emphases].

⁷⁶ Carvalho, “The Nude Man’s City,” 28.

his desire.⁷⁷

The reason why Flávio's choice of words is worth opening up here is that "sex" is not merely a reference to some superficial notion of Brazilian "sensuality" that is often associated with, for example, the *tropicália* movement. It is much closer to "erotism" and an indication of Flávio's rather complicated relationship with Freud, a relationship that subsequently allows us to assess anthropophagy's genealogical kinship with, for example, the French post-surrealists. I will return to this kinship relation in the final part of the essay.

As a mathematical representation of the man freed from the "scholastic dogma" of the old colonialist world, Flávio's anthropophagic city is organised into three concentric circular zones with the most important aspects of city life concentrated into the outermost rings. The most significant of these rings is a research centre that is also the only established authority in the city. It selects, orders and distributes the city's resources and "energies" according to scientific criteria. It is "a mutable god, a god in continuous movement, a god who symbolizes the marvellous desire to reach out into the unknown."⁷⁸ The research centre includes three annexes: an educational facility, a "huge machine where life is studied and catalogued"⁷⁹ for management purposes, and a small hospital as hygiene in the city is second to none. The second most important ring is the sex zone, a "vast laboratory where a wide range of desires are indulged in."⁸⁰ The sex zone also includes designated areas for religion and food, both, perhaps, reflecting the underlying principles of anthropophagic desire. The central nucleus of the city includes less significant government buildings and a residential area that is built around it, while a transportation network operates underground connecting the nucleus with the city's more exterior zones. Finally, industry and farming are situated further away beyond the city's perimeters.

Given the nature of his works, Flávio's "career" as an architect is perplexing. Contrary to what Lauro Cavalcanti suggests,⁸¹ he never won competitions, and to my knowledge, only two of his designs, both from the 1930s, were actually realised: a set of residential homes on the Alameda Lorena in central São Paulo,⁸² and his personal estate in Fazenda Capuava on the outskirts of the city.⁸³ But even so, Flávio could not really be described as an "unsuccessful" architect. Inti Guerrero quite rightly points out that Flávio's architectural work must be assessed in the context of his other art,⁸⁴ and especially in light of the two performance art "happenings" serialised as *Experiência N°2* and *Experiência N°3* that he is best known for.

⁷⁷ Carvalho, "The Nude Man's City," 27.

⁷⁸ Carvalho, "The Nude Man's City," 27.

⁷⁹ Carvalho, "The Nude Man's City," 27.

⁸⁰ Carvalho, "The Nude Man's City," 28.

⁸¹ Cavalcanti, *When Brazil Was Modern*, 100-107. For a more accurate description, see Segawa, *Architecture of Brazil: 1900-1990*, 40-41.

⁸² See "A Vila Modernista Esquecida," *São Paulo Antiga*, 10 February 2011. Available at <https://saopauloantiga.com.br/a-vila-modernista-esquecida/> (accessed 21 February 2021).

⁸³ See Paola Anziché and Nelson Kon, "Flávio de Carvalho: The Total Aesthete," *Domus*, No. 963 (2012): 68-75.

⁸⁴ Inti Guerrero, "Flávio de Carvalho: From an Anthropophagic Master Plan to a Tropical Modern Design," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, No. 24 (2010): 55-59.

In the former “experiential” urban performance from 1931, Flávio deliberately disturbed São Paulo’s religious Corpus Christi procession by defiantly walking against the flow of the large crowd turning it into an angry lynch mob. He later wrote and illustrated a book on the performance reflecting on his observations of mass psychology and crowd behaviour.⁸⁵ For the latter performance from 1956, Flávio designed a businessman’s outfit that he deemed more appropriate than hot woollen suits for Brazil’s tropical climate. The design included a white pleated miniskirt, a silk blouse with puffed sleeves, fishnet stockings and sandals. Flávio called his outfit the “New Look” as a reference to fashion designer Christian Dior’s post-war modernism,⁸⁶ and even in this case, he launched his design by dressing up in the clothes himself and walking in drag through the financial district of São Paulo (Figure 6).⁸⁷ Both performances were supported by intense media coverage which had become a general trademark of Flávio’s artistic profile.

It is this association with performance art that, to my mind, also defines Flávio’s radicalness as an architect. His most significant architectural designs and plans for public buildings such as the competition entry for the Governor’s Palace in São Paulo and “The Nude Man’s City” initiative were both bold modernist statements supported by media spin generated by Flávio himself, but that, unlike projects by the Rio-based Carioca School of architecture, were never really intended to be realised. The gist of Flávio’s “performative architecture”⁸⁸ is perhaps best captured in his claim that, in the unrealised Governor’s Palace project, what would prevail was the “modernist doctrine by Le Corbusier, only modified for better: in the building, the most important thing is the plan.”⁸⁹ Flávio rendered his anthropophagic architecture “useless” in the sense that, rich in metaphor and symbolism but poor in function and utility, it really had no other purpose than to communicate its own impossibility. In this way, he paradoxically also captured what is truly radical about the early Paulista variant of Brazilian modernism. And at the same time, with the design and construction of Brasília, Flávio’s Carioca colleagues had put into effect an internationally celebrated and exportable “made in Brazil” modernism which bore little resemblance to the radical principles of anthropophagy. There is nothing particularly national about Brasília, and all things potentially indigenous had to make way for the clearing forcefully achieved from the bird’s eye view. In many ways, Brasília is the “*Ville radieuse*” that is almost anathema to Flávio’s anthropophagic modernism.

⁸⁵ See Flávio de Carvalho, *Experiência n.2. Realizada sobre uma procissão de Corpus Christi. Uma possível teoria e uma experiência* [1931] (Rio de Janeiro: Nau, 2001).

⁸⁶ See e.g. Laurence Benaïm, *Dior. The New Look Revolution* (New York, NY: Rizzoli, 2015).

⁸⁷ See Flávio de Carvalho, *A moda e o novo homem* [1956] (Rio de Janeiro: Azougue Editorial, 2010).

⁸⁸ See e.g. Marcia Feuerstein and Gray Read, eds., *Architecture as a Performing Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), and Branko Kolarevic and Ali M. Malkawi, eds., *Performative Architecture. Beyond Instrumentality* (London: Spon Press, 2005).

⁸⁹ Cited in Segawa, *Architecture of Brazil: 1900-1990*, 40. Saulo Gouveia has analysed, among other things, the complicated relationship between Le Corbusier and the São Paulo modernists through Mário de Andrade’s early works. Saulo Gouveia, “Mário de Andrade’s Early Modernist Manifestos: Power, Simulated Authority, and the Domestication of the Avant-Garde Experiments,” *Hispanófila*, No. 161 (2011): 85-101.

The impossible

There are, then, two narratives about Brazilian modernism that run on parallel lines but at quite a distance from one other. The first is the internationally better-known Carioca version that tells the epic tale of how two celebrated architects from Rio created a masterpiece *ex nihilo* into the Brazilian wilderness. This narrative also colonised the whole history of Brazilian modernist architecture, at least if we view it from the outside. The second narrative is the lesser-known version of anthropophagy that started off as a general Paulista cultural movement. Unlike its Carioca counterpart, the ideas that anthropophagy had about the ways in which architecture could advance progressive politics were much more ambivalent. As Flávio's personal history indicates, the Paulista interpretation of modernism transformed architectural projects into radical art by leaving those projects unrealised suggesting that "democratic architecture" is an impossibility, that despite the best intentions, realised urban designs and buildings can only strengthen the totalitarian tendencies of constituted power.⁹⁰ As far as built environments go, this seemed to be the motto-like essence of early anthropophagy even if its initial radicalness later mellowed into what would be known as the Paulista Brutalist School led by architects such as João Batista Vilanova Artigas (1915-1985).⁹¹

The stark juxtaposition of the Carioca and Paulista interpretations of Brazilian modernism and how the former came to colonise the latter may well be an oversimplification. But oddly enough, this colonisation thesis does find some support from another narrative that is closer to the human sciences. Between the years 1935 and 1939, Claude Lévi-Strauss taught sociology at the newly founded University of São Paulo as part of the French cultural mission in Brazil.⁹² During that time, Lévi-Strauss and his first wife Dina (née Dreyfus) participated actively in the cultural life of their vibrant new home. Both are reported to have been particularly close with Oswald and Mário, and especially the latter's expertise in the Tupian languages and indigenous music that he had accumulated by participating in several ethnological field trips was clearly an inspiration.⁹³ During his four

⁹⁰ A possible exception to this rule is the Constitutional Court of South Africa in Johannesburg that captures vividly how "the injustices of our past" acknowledged in the Preamble of the country's 1996 Constitution can also be translated into public architecture. See Wessel le Roux, "War Memorials, the Architecture of the Constitutional Court Building and Counter-Monumental Constitutionalism," in *Law, Memory and the Legacy of Apartheid. Ten Years After AZAPO v. President of South Africa*, eds. Wessel le Roux and Karin van Marle (Pretoria: PULP, 2007): 65-92.

⁹¹ See Segawa, *Architecture of Brazil: 1900-1990*, 167-171.

⁹² See Emmanuelle Loyer, *Lévi-Strauss. A Biography*, trans. Ninon Vinsonneau and Jonathan Magidoff (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), 107-129.

⁹³ See Wolfgang Kaltenbacher, "Departures," *Diogenes* 60.2 (2013): 16-23, 20. Lévi-Strauss' acquaintance with Mário is also referred to as a "close friendship" by Emmanuelle Loyer. Loyer, *Lévi-Strauss*, 133. Loyer, for her part, has to verify the claim from Brazilian sources. See Fernanda Peixoto, "Lévi-Strauss à São Paulo: la ville et le terrain," in *Claude Lévi-Strauss. Les Cahiers de l'Herne N° 82*, ed. Michel Izard (Paris: L'Herne, 2004): 87-91, 90. These, in turn, ultimately trace the claim to an untranslated interview in a São Paulo newspaper. Napoleão Sabóia, "Entrevista com Lévi-Strauss (O Personagem da Semana)," *O Estado de São Paulo*, 6 June 1982, 225-227. From Dina Lévi-Strauss' point of view, see

years in São Paulo, Lévi-Strauss also conducted fieldwork – the only fieldwork he ever did – by accompanying Dina who, of the two, was actually the trained ethnographer and anthropologist.⁹⁴

Lévi-Strauss, for his part, later systematised his fieldnotes from Brazil and published them in 1955 as part of the celebrated memoir *Tristes Tropiques*. In one short section towards the end of the book that clearly reaches out towards some notion of the “noble savage,” Lévi-Strauss questions whether the so-called primitive societies of the Amazonian jungle that practiced cannibalism should be viewed as cruel and barbarous. If we do so, then how, he asked, would those societies view ours and our criminal justice practices of incarceration and isolation? And so Lévi-Strauss suggests a structural binary:

If we were to look at them from outside it would be tempting to distinguish two opposing types of society: those which practise cannibalism [*anthropophagie* in the original] who believe, that is to say, that the only way to neutralize people who are the repositories of certain redoubtable powers, and even to turn them to one’s own advantage, is to absorb them into one’s own body. Second would come those which, like our own, adopt what might be called anthropoemia (from the Greek *emein*, to vomit). ... They expel these formidable beings from the body politic by isolating them for a time, or for ever, denying them all contact with humanity, in establishments devised for that express purpose.⁹⁵

Lévi-Strauss is here suggesting that what characterises the “old world,” “our” world, with its asylums, prisons and other institutions of confinement, is an anthropoemic culture that outlaws and exorcises its enemies, whereas an anthropophagic one seeks to come to terms with enmity through absorption, perhaps even by “rehabilitating” its enemies back into the body politic in more modern parlance. Be that as it may, even though Lévi-Strauss literally speaks here of “anthropophagy,” he makes no reference to, or acknowledgement of, his Paulista friends. At the risk of reading too much into this, one can but wonder whether such a dismissive silence is yet another colonialist “anthropoemic” rejection of the “other.”⁹⁶

A dismissive stance seems to be the red thread uniting the fate of anthropophagy and its proponents. Flávio is even less well known outside of his native Brazil than his Paulista contemporaries. Even so, his avant-garde approach to architecture – and art more generally – align him much more clearly with certain strains of European cultural radicalism. In particular, I see a kinship with Bataille and with the broader agenda of various individuals affiliated with the “*Collège de Sociologie*.”⁹⁷ This kinship can be examined on at least two

D[ina] Lévi-Strauss, “Société d’ethnographie et de folklore de São Paulo (Brésil),” *Journal de la Société des américanistes* 29.2 (1937): 429-431.

⁹⁴ See Dina Dreyfus, *Écrits*, eds. Christiane Menasseyre and Bertrand Saint-Sernin (Paris: Hermann, 2013).

⁹⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Russell, first American ed. (New York, NY: Criterion Books, 1961), 386.

⁹⁶ The possible Paulista origins of Lévi-Strauss’ binary are also lost on Zygmund Bauman who brings it back to life in his own analysis of modernism. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 98-104.

⁹⁷ See Denis Hollier, ed., *The College of Sociology (1937-39)* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Rethinking the Political*.

levels. First, Bataille, just like Flávio and his fellow anthropophages, draws much from a Freud-inspired notion of cannibalism as a sacred society-founding event. Humans do not consume each other for sustenance, and cannibalism will always include ritual elements. Eating human flesh is always a wilfully committed and forbidden act, but the fundamental taboo is religiously violated all the same. As Bataille explains:

The object some indiscriminating animal is after is not what is desired; the object is “forbidden,” sacred, and the very prohibition attached to it is what arouses the desire. Religious cannibalism is the elementary example of the taboo as creating desire: the taboo does not create the flavour and taste of the flesh but stands as the reason why the pious cannibal consumes it.⁹⁸

Second, if we interpret Flávio’s projects as indigenously inspired critical responses to colonial “classicism” and to the inherent ties between architecture and power, we can clearly see similarities with Bataille’s deeply rooted suspicion of things architectural. Flávio’s confrontation with architecture is, however, subtler and more humorous. He seems to emphasise the deviant art that architectural design produces as sketches and media representations at the expense of tangible buildings that, coincidentally in his case, were seldom even realised. This resonates well with what Jill Stoner calls “minor architecture.”⁹⁹ But the central thematic focus on the problematic relationship between architecture and power is clearly shared by both, as is the need to find more radical alternatives to what a domesticated modernism can offer: “strange though it may seem, when it is a question of a creature as elegant as the human being, a way opens – as indicated by the painters [i.e. by art] – towards a bestial monstrosity; as if there were no other possibility for escape from the architectural galley.”¹⁰⁰ This contestation of public power through art and the “impossible”¹⁰¹ is something that is clearly missing in Costa and Niemeyer’s aestheticised

The Sacred, Aesthetic Politics, and the Collège de Sociologie (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), and Tiina Arppe, “Sorcerer’s Apprentices and the ‘Will to Figuration’: The Ambiguous Heritage of the *Collège de Sociologie*,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26.4 (2009): 117-145.

⁹⁸ Georges Bataille, *Erotism. Death & Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1986), 72. Elsewhere Bataille addresses misconceptions about his thinking. He points out that while cruelty against fellow human beings may be wrong in principle, it is a fact. And this relates to cannibalism, as well: “Exploitation of man by man, as hateful as it is, is given in humanity. Even anthropophagy, when this is the convention, coexists with the prohibition of which it is the ritual violation.” Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats followed by Dianus and by The Oresteia*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1991), 207.

⁹⁹ Stoner’s minor architecture would arise as “opportunistic events in response to latent but powerful desires to undo structures of power; and as such, minor architectures are precisely (if perversely) concerned with the privilege and circumstances of major architecture, the architecture of State and economic authority.” Jill Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 7.

¹⁰⁰ Bataille, “Architecture,” 20.

¹⁰¹ See Jean-Michel Besnier, “Georges Bataille in the 1930s: A Politics of the Impossible,” *Yale French Studies*, No. 78 (1990): 169-180.

Corbusian designs for Brasília.

Finally, there is even a factual historical link. Flávio travelled through Europe in the mid-1930s, and during the trip, he also interviewed representatives of the surrealist movement for the Brazilian media. Among his interviewees was Roger Caillois, Bataille's "Collège" collaborator. Some ten years later during his stint in Argentina from 1939 to 1945,¹⁰² Caillois paid a return visit to São Paulo staying at Flávio's estate. Although not much is known about these meetings, Veronica Stigger draws on James Clifford's notion of ethnographic surrealism to speculate on the reasons that brought the French ethnologist together with a representative of Brazilian anthropophagy.¹⁰³ Clifford untangles this seemingly odd coupling in the following way:

Ethnographic surrealism and surrealist ethnography are utopian constructs; they mock and remix institutional definitions of art and science. To think of surrealism as ethnography is to question the central role of the creative "artist," the shaman-genius discovering deeper realities in the psychic realm of dreams, myths, hallucinations, automatic writing. This role is rather different from that of the cultural analyst, interested in the making and unmaking of common codes and conventions. Surrealism coupled with ethnography recovers its early vocation as critical cultural politics, a vocation lost in later developments.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps anthropophagy also meets the design and construction of constituted spaces at a similar radical intersection.

¹⁰² On Caillois' literary work from South America, see the essays in Roger Caillois, *The Edge of Surrealism. A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. Claudine Frank, trans. Claudine Frank and Camille Naish (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 201-274.

¹⁰³ Veronica Stigger, "Flávio de Carvalho in the Amazon Rainforest," in *Flávio de Carvalho Expedicionário*, eds. Amanda Bonan and Renato Rezende (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Circuito, 2017): 131-137, 134-135.

¹⁰⁴ James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," in *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988): 117-148, 147.

Figures



Figure 1. Flávio de Carvalho, *Portrait of Oswald de Andrade* (watercolour), 1939. Private collection of Israel Dias Novaes, São Paulo. Image reprinted from *Exposição Flávio de Carvalho* [catalogue], 17^a Bienal de São Paulo, 14 de outubro a 16 de dezembro de 1983, 7.



Figure 2. Inaugural day in Brasília, 21 April 1960. Photo: anonymous/Manchete magazine. Courtesy of Julieta Sobral/Lúcio Costa Archives.

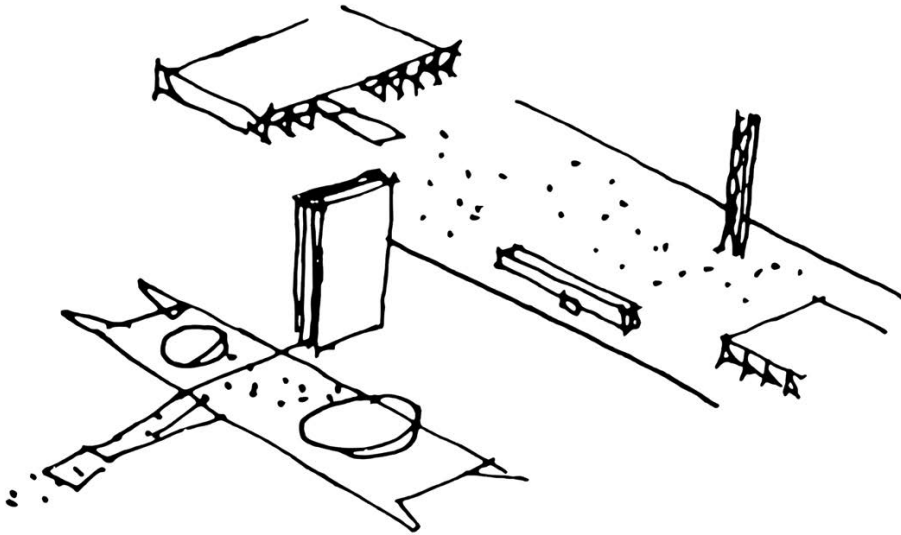


Figure 3. Oscar Niemeyer, *Praça dos Três Poderes* (architectural sketch), 1957. Reprinted from Philip Jodidio, *Niemeyer* (Köln: Taschen, 2012), 57.



Figure 4. Aerial view of *National Congress Palace, Brasília*, around 1961. Photo: Marcel Gautherot. Reprinted from Samuel Titan Jr. and Sergio Burgi, eds., *Marcel Gautherot. The Monograph* (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2015), 210.

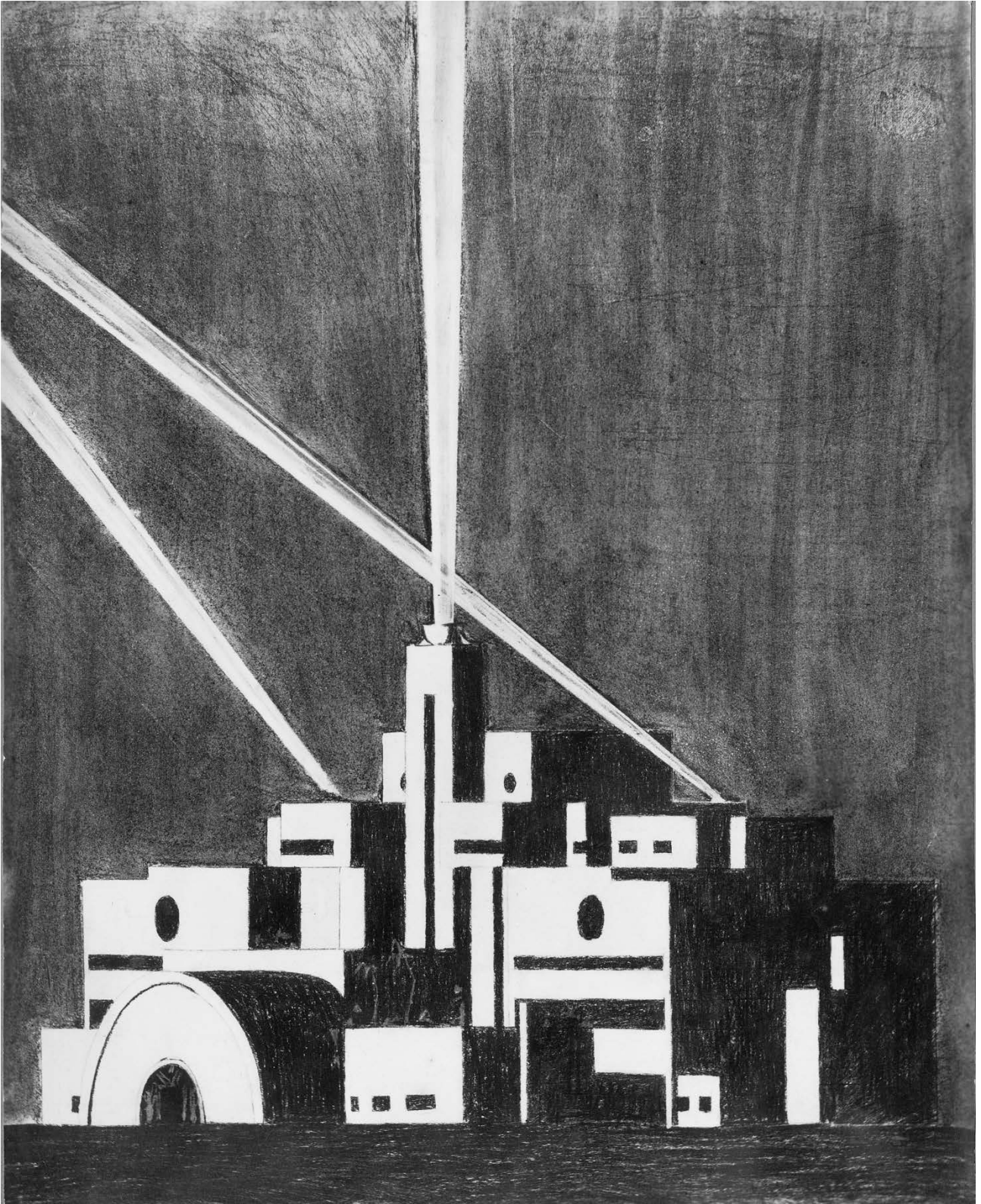


Figure 5. Flávio de Carvalho, *Palace of the Governor of the State of São Paulo* (sketch), 1927. Courtesy of the Flávio de Carvalho Archives, CEDAE/UNICAMP.



Figure 6. Flávio de Carvalho, *Experiência Nº 3: "New Look"* (fashion design and performance), 1956. Photo: anonymous. Courtesy of the Flávio de Carvalho Archives, CEDAE/UNICAMP.