

Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age: 10th Anniversary Rendition

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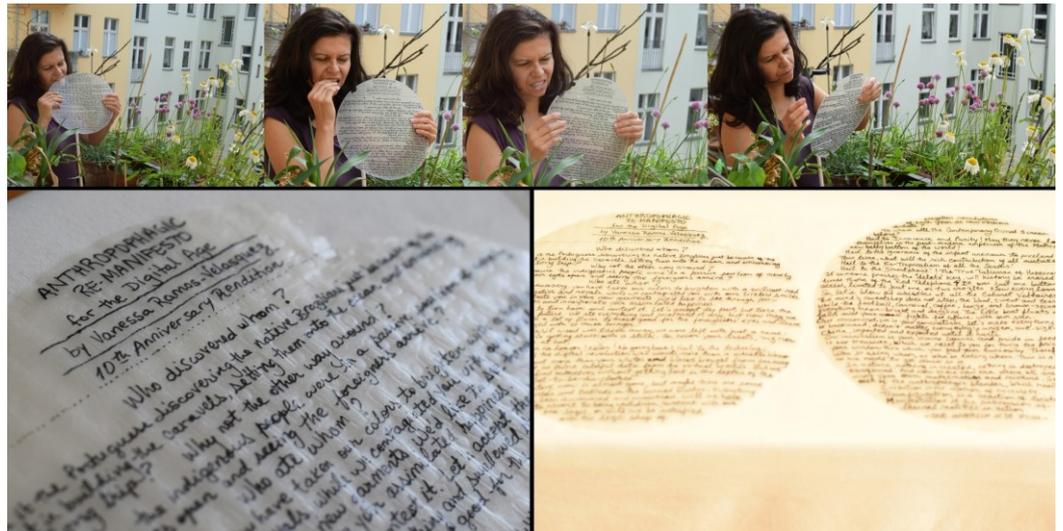
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Abstract

In 2009 I started writing the essay Digital Anthropophagyⁱ and its companion piece, the manifesto-poem Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Ageⁱⁱ. Being an artist from Brazil, I could not escape the cultural mystique of ‘Anthropophagy’. For those unfamiliar with the term, the etymology has a Greek origin dating back to the mythological Kronos (Saturn) eating his own son – ‘Anthrōphagia’: ‘Anthropos’= human being + ‘phagein’= to eat, i.e., an eating of a human. The words ‘Anthropophagy’ and ‘Anthropophagus’ were transplanted by the European conquistadors in the late 1400s/early 1500s to the land masses renamed ‘America’ and ‘The Caribbean’ at the onset of colonialism. Starting at this period, some native ethnicities of the ‘Amerindian’ populations have been described as practitioners of ritual Anthropophagy and/or Cannibalism. ‘Cannibalism’ itself supposedly finding its root in a misspelling or ironic naming – ‘Canib’ⁱⁱⁱ – by Columbus when describing the Carib people of Antilles/Caribbean Islands during his navigational enterprises between 1492-1504.

In 1928, Oswald de Andrade devoured Brazilian colonial history itself writing the ‘Manifesto Antropófago’, an adjective form of the term, meaning a Manifesto that possesses the agency to eat. The proposition of the Brazilian Moderns was to devour what comes from outside (‘First World’ novelties), absorb their useful ‘otherness’ in order to output something uniquely Brazilian. Thus ‘Antropofagia’ is appropriated and forever transformed in the 1920s São Paulo into a Brazilian avantgarde. Antropofagia is considered by some critics to be perhaps the only true Brazilian artistic canon. The concepts of this cultural icon have inevitably impregnated my own artworks, especially in my condition of migrant since the age of 19, living in a constant state of becoming ‘other’ somewhere.

Keywords: digital anthropophagy; anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the digital age; manifesto antropófago; Oswald de Andrade; antropofagia; Brazilian modernism; digital age; colonisation; Vilém Flusser; Aílton Krenak; Bauhaus



*Figure 1: The artist, Vanessa Ramos-Velasquez, biting off a piece of her Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age after reading it to no one in particular.
Image source – author's personal collection.*

Anthropophagy offers complexities that defy even the fields which have traditionally dealt with such a theme. My fields of interest and research focus on Ritual Anthropophagy, its cultural constructions, their appropriation in the arts and through the arts, and the ensuing generative potential for innovation constituting both a philosophy as well as a method of creativity, especially in moments of crisis. Ritual Anthropophagy has been described anthropologically as a switch of perspective. Especially in warring rituals, the winner supposedly consumes the strong enemy (weak individuals are never desired), in order to see oneself as the enemy sees him. This constitutes a motion toward acceptance of otherness in oneself, instead of negation of a dissimilar entity. A foreign strong body as a formidable body and its consumption an openness to the highest form of alterity.

While I was moving from New York City to Berlin, Germany, in 2009, I started writing the essay Digital Anthropophagyⁱ containing a companion piece, the manifesto-poem Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age. Drawing from my experience as a migrant of continuous cultural transformation, a constant motion toward the unknowable 'other', experimenting with a multiplicity of worldviews and perspectives, I felt an embodiment of the concepts that enliven Anthropophagy/Anthropofagia. In my artistic practice at that time, being a video and film editor, I was hand-making films from discarded 16mm film pieces, creating new narratives for these materials that I found in dumpsters, donated archives, and bulk purchases of undeveloped rolls from Ebay. After receiving the Distinction Prize of the Vilém Flusser Theory Award in 2011 at transmediale^{iv}, the annual festival for art and digital culture in Berlin, I presented my essay and manifesto globally as an audiovisual

performance-lecture and a communal ritual. When I finish reciting the Re-Manifesto, handwritten on rice paper, I eat a piece of it and pass the communion wafer to the public, a translation gesture of one of the most disseminated and recognised (ecumenical) meanings behind ‘Anthropophagy’: eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus as bread and wine. The gesture also points to a turn against itself, eating one’s own words, a de-programming act: *cor inversum in se ipsum* [The heart turned against itself] (Flusser, 2008: 28).

Anthropophagy in Brazil has been constructed initially from the ethnographic descriptions by German adventurer Hans Staden, recounting his captivity with the (ritualistic anthropophagic) Tupinambá indigenous people in 1553/54. Staden’s *Warhaftige Historia und beschreibung eyner Landtschafft der Wilden Nacketen, Grimmigen Menschfresser-Leuthen in der Newenwelt America gelegen* (*True Story and Description of a Country of Wild, Naked, Grim, Man-eating People in the New World, America*) became a global best-seller upon publication in 1557 and remains forever ingrained in the global imaginary, depicting the Americas as a wild territory. This worldview has endured, especially after Theodor De Bry (b. Liège) replicated the images created by Staden some decades later, in his art studio established in Frankfurt, in finer, yet imagined details. De Bry never travelled to the Americas, his imaginary interpretations executed on copper prints were based on Staden’s texts and woodcut prints. Furthermore, De Bry’s two sons continued his creative productions and replications in the 1600s. These images influenced the drawing of world maps of that time period, illustrated showing ‘men-eating’ savages inhabiting the American territories. This was the Anthropophagic history told by Europeans of the ‘new’ continent in the 16/17th Centuries, during Shakespearean time.

In my Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age, I reflect on the entanglements of wildly different cultures coming into contact and the uneven reciprocities that ensued. In Pindorama – Land of Palm Trees, mythical place of the Tupi-Guarani peoples – the ‘native’ were seduced by European trinkets, such as whistles, mirrors, rattles, gifted to them in exchange for the far more valuable ‘Pau-Brasil’ wood. Trees which the natives had to fell, chop, carry and load into the Portuguese caravels in a system of uneven value exchange and exploitation. It is worthwhile to reflect here on the significance of that encounter from the native’s perspective. Aílton Krenak, one of the most recognised voices in contemporary indigenous thought explains:

...well before the [European] geographic demarcation of Brazil as a country, the narratives of our ancestors built our own histories, which are many. Their recollection are populated by narratives sounded in

more than 500 languages, just accounting for those spoken in South America...In each of these ancestral narratives was the prophecy announcing the arrival, the return of the white brother. These narratives dating back to four thousand years already mentioned the life of this other brother, always identified as someone who left our coexistence and was no longer traceable. Having left us, he also lost the sense of humanity we had been building. He had gone to a faraway place and lived there for many, many generations. In this time, he learned another technology, developed other languages and learned a different type of organisation than ours. In our ancestral narratives, he appeared time and again as someone who was returning home, but his thoughts were no longer known, nor what he was searching for. We no longer knew what he wanted. [He learned many things away from us, but also forgot where he came from and found it difficult to know where he was going]. The ancestral narratives are reminders in the form of prophecy or warning of the arrival of the white brother. But the narratives also carry within them a message: the promise to relink with, to reencounter our former brother. (Krenak, 2015: 160-162, author's translation)

In 1920s Brazil, during the rise of the modernist and industrial era, Anthropophagy experienced a revival through Brazilian artistic productions – the Anthropophagic act was transformed from taboo (European construct of indigenous social practice) into (artistic) totem. Anthropophagy was thus invigorated with two remarkable bracketing events: *Semana de Arte Moderna* in São Paulo in 1922, and the *Manifesto Antropófago*^v by writer Oswald de Andrade in 1928, published in his newly founded *Revista de Antropofagia*. Andrade's Manifesto was a punch in the stomach that laid deglutition claim to just about anything, from all '-isms' to Freudian thought and revolutionary enterprises across time. All the while, the Manifesto demanded access to 'the other', an open license to taste the state-of-the-art influences from outside Brazil without committing to any of them, an unapologetic attitude toward devouring history itself, while fully embracing and celebrating indigeneity and its values, in order to spit out something new, original, worthy of envy. Feeling the effects of swift industrialisation clashing with abreast traditional cultures within reach throughout the Brazilian territory, Andrade also introduced a character in his Manifesto: [Hermann Alexander Graf] Keyserling's 'technified barbarian' (Andrade, 1928: 3), a role played by the North Americans.

Almost 100 years later, the role of that 'technified barbarian', an important allegory in Andrade's Manifesto begets the question: 'Who is considered the Barbarian now?' Who, in fact, is the barbarian at the gate, controlling the inputs and outputs of the digital age? This new era was my cue to write

the 'Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age' in 2009, a remix of concepts birthed from a paradigm shift, sensing deep changes brewing in the imminent increase of interconnectivity speed about to take over the world via broadband internet service embedded in more advanced mobile digital devices. I translated this new reality into a latent cultural cannibalism in the age of digital culture, of which unceremonious information consumption practices would push the internet-worked information society toward a new type of colonial paradigm. A colonisation via viral ideas with the conquering of new types of property, where digital data becomes an extremely valuable raw resource and new currency, and anyone can be a coloniser. A new practice of consumption – ingestion, digestion and excretion – involving a technological mediation. Using Anthropophagy as both metaphor and strategy to navigate the rough seas of internet constitutionalism and innovation, I set out to consider new power structures favouring 'embrace, devour, share' within a new code of ethics as a holistic natural transparent approach for our socio-economic survival. All the while maintaining a healthy ecosystem online – based on net neutrality – and also offline, to support ethical information traffic and a safer metabolism of such large amounts of information.

But how could this new online frontier be explored any differently than in the past terrestrial colonial scenarios of exploitation? It would not take very long indeed for wild exploits to loom in the horizon. The online community – if there has been ever such a thing as a 'community' – steering wide-eyed in a Jules Verne's Nautilus type of vessel did not manage to reach the cost of utopia. The hope was perhaps to get to the destination navigating the international online waters free from land-based government. However, in a space of just ten years, roughly 2009-2019, the online world has gone from innocent ebullient optimism to fear, scepticism and pollution. A vertiginous trajectory from an environment of relatively equal stake-holders at the beginning of the internet era with a horizon built brick by brick to the current world entirely calculated to fit into a smartphone – the new acculturation tool. Its degenerative dynamics alike a 'Requerimiento' (penned in 1513 by jurist Juan López de Palacios, to be read out loud even in empty beachfronts with the purpose of submitting non-conforming indigenous to the complete rule of Spanish kingdom, under penalty of death). And although history teaches us patterns, models and structures of dominance and subjugation, the long journey traced since the 15/16th Century Iberian caravels only shows us how much today's internet-worked culture has fallen into those same patterns, models and structures.

Digital Anthropophagy, a term I coined in 2009, whose sentiment permeates my Re-Manifesto, reflects a globalised user-based practice and cultural manifestation occurring online and outwards into the physical world and back online as a resonating never-ending feedback loop of vast cultural consumption and transformation. Whereas there have been plenty of profound exchanges and symbiotic profiteering online, it has become increasingly apparent that a lesser form of Digital Anthropophagy is unfortunately also possible, namely: cannibalism. While Anthropophagy produces new forms, bodies, effects, original expression, synthesis; cannibalism is an act of poor destruction, at best it produces just a copy, without imagination, without ritual, without magic.

To compound the lesser favourable winds of development, this new era of consuming 'The Other' in a supposedly immaterial way has only revealed that the digital world is heavily material. All the apparatus that support it are based on materials: bodies implicated in the production of devices, content and data; rare metals extracted from the earth and ocean to make our digital lightness/heaviness of being, colourful, pleasant, and chic. We have been paying a high price for the commodification of life. Nevertheless, it is nearly impossible to imagine a world without these technological companions and coadjutants to our lifestyles, they have so profoundly changed our humanity. The conveniences and addictive happiness these devices afford users exist in the very tension between the material world and the deep level of abstraction invisible and impenetrable to most who have embarked in this great digital adventure.

Looking back at my Re-Manifesto, I recognise it as a provocation – what does it mean to be Anthropophagic in the Digital Age with the supreme interconnectivity of the information society, in which everyone is consuming the world, and each other, at an unprecedented pace and intensity? By opening up a new blank map on which to inscribe a new history, I was exploring potential: both high and low. In this tension, I recognised that our cannibalistic relations, not only to each other, but also with technology, were causing an ontological shift in the way we see ourselves as human, an ontological turn proposed by philosopher Vilém Flusser in *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie* in 1983. Flusser proposes that, starting with the invention of photography, human beings began orienting themselves from the images, which not only stand as surfaces (mediations) between human and world, but also veil what stands behind its algorithmic representation.

I had proposed *Digital Anthropophagy* as a valuable cultural concept for our time, neither euphoric nor pessimistic. Now, reflecting on what the Internet has become in these last ten years, I see that a global 'user culture' has succumbed in the digital era to meta structures that engulf us

and transform us into cannibalised bodies. I am reminded of a constant theme in Flusserian philosophy that speaks of our highly technological moment: 'The change of codes is far more important than the invention of new media...the function of codes is not dependent on a metaphysical 'eidos' of the medium, but on how the medium is handled' (Guldin, R. et al, 2008: 5). Flusser himself states: 'Indeed we are actively generating our tools and through them we are generating the world, but it is also true that those tools are hitting back on us and are generating us' (Flusser, 1991).

The question now seems to be what world should we generate next in widely and wildly divided global societies? Do we need another paradigm shift, a radical discontinuity to sever deep dependencies on the control mechanisms of the digital age? Flusser believed that the artist is an agent who can intervene in programmed apparatus, be it a technological black box or institutions of control. If an indigenous ritual-philosophy informed artistic and cultural production in the 1920s, why not consider indigenous art production, which has managed to transcend time and western artistic cannons, to inform a new imagination? Aílton Krenak and Bené Fonteles offer the following:

[Indigenous artistic expression] is born from a magical world that unveils the unconscious and reveals the 'third bank' of a river that can't be reached with an actual canoe. In order to cross it, what we need is the technology of a mind with imagination, but also an invisible canoe that may take us to that bank without expecting goals or outcomes. Everything requires more than a mystical and magical trance, a free transit between visible and invisible worlds that are not separated. As the Toltec shaman Miguel Ruiz says, 'you are both the dream and the dreamer'.

In order to be that primordial dream and to compose it, indigenous peoples need to be left in peace in the forest, unaffected by the barbarism of 'civilisation', continuing to create an art that can navigate the different banks with interdisciplinary independence, with solidarity and interaction, involved with everything rather than developed, without losing its creative body and its cultural and spiritual essence, which persists from cave and rock painting to the plural and instigating contemporary art forms. (Krenak et al, 2019: 148)

To dream new worlds and new frontiers is the only way out. But to cultivate one's birth ground or chosen home is the only way in, which is what the original populations of the many places called 'America' will tell us. Likewise, Flusser, having escaped the Holocaust seeking refuge in Brazil in 1941, but losing his family in concentration camps, was well aware of Nationalism's project. He saw in the zero-dimension of pure numbers a dangerous capacity to generate (i.e., to project) and effectively change the

world supported by meta-apparatus. The danger implicated in a change of our subjectivity, potentially transforming our species into an entirely programmable and predictable subordinate apparatus to be fully utilised in mechanisms of control. But history bears no obligation to repeat itself just for the sake of teaching lessons. It is useful to once again devour history against neo-colonial rule, against cannibalistic destructive binaries that erase diversity, against techno-escapism, and to move toward a multiplicity that celebrates other forms of alterity, different modes of living, fluid identities and the pursuit of happiness landing with our feet back on earth, our home. To embrace the dissimilar absolutely, but away from the obsolete neo-liberal patriarchy and into the welcoming wild arms of 'matriarcado de Pindorama' (de Andrade, 1928) ... 'From this Earth, on this Earth, for this Earth. And it's about time' (De Andrade, 1944, author's translation).

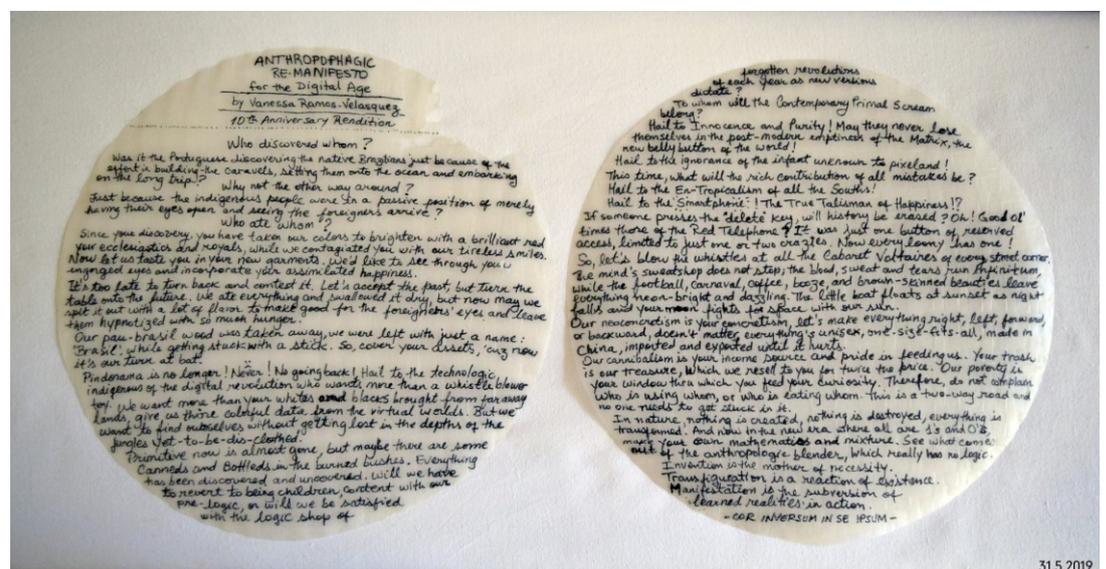


Figure 2: The 10 Year Anniversary Rendition of the Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age. Medium: indigestible ink on edible paper. Image source – author's personal collection.

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Media artist, researcher, Ph.D. candidate at Bauhaus-University Weimar developing a project intersecting Anthropophagy, Media Theory, Environment & Society and Indigenous Studies. Master of Arts/New Media, University of the Arts Berlin in collaboration with Humboldt University's Department of Cultural History and Theory. Bachelor of Fine Arts/Expanded Media, University of Kansas, USA via IBEU/IIE/Fulbright scholarship. Her unconventional artistic practices create a hybrid space between academic and artistic languages to explore forms of decolonization of knowledge. Although rooted in performance, she employs a variety of media to formulate meta-narratives. Explores structuralist image-making processes and their integration into performative installations and audio-visual experiences.



List of Illustrations

Figure 1: The artist, Vanessa Ramos-Velasquez, biting off a piece of her Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age after reading it to no one in particular. Image source – author's personal collection.

Figure 2: The 10 Year Anniversary Rendition of the Anthropophagic Re-Manifesto for the Digital Age. Medium: indigestible ink on edible paper. Image source – author's personal collection.

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Endnotes

ⁱ See: http://quietrevolution.me/DIGITAL_ANTHROPOPHAGY.html

ⁱⁱ See: http://quietrevolution.me/Anthropophagic_Re-Manifesto.html

ⁱⁱⁱ See: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/cannibal>

^{iv} See: <https://transmediale.de/de/content/vanessa-ramos-velasquez>

^v See: http://quietrevolution.me/ANTROPOFAGIA_ANTHROPOPHAGY.html

^{vi} This has been published several times but modified by the author for each publication. The first published short version appeared in 2010, with this reference linking to the performance with full text. The most recent publication was in 2013.