

Santos, Alessandra. *Arnaldo Canibal Antunes*. São Paulo: Editora Versos, 2012. Impreso. 295 pp.

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Arnaldo Canibal Antunes by Alessandra Santos, Assistant Professor in the Department of French, Hispanic, and Italian Studies at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver (Canada), is perhaps the first book-length study devoted to Arnaldo Antunes (1960-), one of Brazil's most versatile and innovative artists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A musician, lyricist, poet, and visual artist, Antunes began his remarkable career in the 1980s with the rock band *Os Titãs*. His early poetry and musical lyrics explored the material aspects of language under the influence of concrete poetry, a movement launched by Haroldo and Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari in the late 1950s. Later avant-garde works by Antunes engaged postmodernist techniques and pop culture aesthetics. More recently, he has authored experimental multi-media pieces, including video-art, digital poetry and art installations. Santos provides a generous and sympathetic treatment of Antunes's prolific and wide-ranging output under the specific lens of *Antropofagia*, a Brazilian aesthetic notion coined by the modernist poet Oswald de Andrade in his "Manifesto Antropófago" (1928; "Cannibalist Manifesto"). Drawing from myths and early historical accounts of Europeans being eaten by native Brazilians, Andrade encouraged artists to "cannibalize" Europe's culture, simultaneously digesting its creative energies and questioning its priority, as a strategy to overcome Brazil's cultural dependency. Taken up again by Brazilian cultural movements starting in the postwar period, this powerful metaphor remains a reference in Brazilian culture to this day.

In the introduction that lays out the scope, questions, objectives and methodology of her book, Santos proposes to understand *Antropofagia* as "um conceito de vanguarda que veio dialogar com a produção contemporânea como método de crítica e criação" (15). Santos is clearly aware of the critical overuse that this concept has perhaps been subjected to when she cautions that her book "não vê antropofagia como um conceito exaustivo no estudo da cultura brasileira" (17-18), especially given its emergence in a historical avant-garde

context specific to the urban center of São Paulo. Still, the approach appears justified in the case of Antunes, whom she sees as a direct heir to the various incarnations of *Antropofagia*: from modernism of the twenties to the 1970s and 80s Tropicalist and post-Tropicalist movements, passing through the seminal concrete poetry of the late fifties and beyond. Her first chapter, “Poética da deglutição: A antropofagia como método,” is thus devoted to reviewing the historical and theoretical background of *Antropofagia* at considerable length. The study then unfolds as a series of chapters focusing on Antunes’s forays into poetry, music, and the visual arts.

In the second chapter, “Poética da percepção: Arnaldo Antunes e a poesia,” Santos tackles Antunes’s poetry, taking as springboard the concept of *Antropofagia* but eventually laying more emphasis on the interaction of the senses in the texts, particularly as a “produção trans-semiótica com base linguística,” or what she calls “um formalismo renovado que leva em consideração as percepções” (86). She meticulously surveys Antunes’s poetry, from his self-published *OU E* (1983; OR AND) all the way to *ET EU TU* (2003; ET I YOU), published in collaboration with the visual artist Márcia Xavier. Other books Santos examines include *Psia* (1986; Psia), *Tudos* (1990; All of Them), *As Coisas* (1992; Things), *2 ou + Corpos no Mesmo Espaço* (2 or More Bodies in the Same Space, 1997). She offers close readings of individual poems, which are often reproduced in their original format, helping the reader grasp how the material aspects (layout, typography, sound, etc.) are foregrounded to the point of defamiliarization. Although Antunes’s texts are highly indebted to the concrete poetry movement (and cannot be seen as something *radically* different), Santos suggestively claims that the changed context in which they emerge renders his proposal distinctive: in the face of new media, “a obra de Antunes reivindica o retorno dos sentidos, lembrando ao leitor sua presença física em uma época de intensa tecnologia e consumo” (148).

“Poética da bricolagem: Arnaldo Antunes e a música” is perhaps the most historical and contextually informed of the chapters and also where the aesthetics of *Antropofagia* seem most suited to the object of analysis: Antunes’s musical output. Perhaps Brazil’s most powerful cultural expression, popular music is closely linked with constructions of national identity. Throughout the twentieth century styles such as samba, bossa nova, Tropicália, and rock, among others, presented competing visions of Brazilianness. Antunes emerges as musician/lyricist in this already richly complex milieu, producing, as Santos suggests, a

“bricolage” of styles with wide popular appeal. In fact, to greater audiences in Brazil, Antunes is better known for his music than for his poetry or visual work. The chapter focuses less on the musical compositions than the song lyrics, which, as Santos demonstrates, “oferecem material tão rico quanto sua poesia” (158). Santos traces a panorama of Antunes’s musical career from his 10-year collaboration with the rock band *Os Titãs* to solo albums such as *Ninguém* (1995), *O Silêncio* (1996), *Um Som* (1998), *Paradeiro* (2001), to the Grammy-nominated hit album *Tribalistas* (2003), which he launched in collaboration with pop stars Carlinhos Brown and Marisa Monte. As Santos demonstrates, the degree of hybridity Antunes achieves is remarkable, as is seen in the song “Inclassificáveis”, which invents a series of words to thematize the irrepressible force of “mestiçagem”: “aqui somos mestiços mulatos / cafuzos pardos mamelucos sararás / crilouros guaranisseis e judárabes / orientupis orientupis / ameriquítalos luso nipo caboclos / orientupis orientupis / iberibárbaros indo ciganagôs” (182).

“Poética da apropriação: Arnaldo Antunes e as artes visuais” provides insights into Antunes’s further explorations of the visual arts, through what Santos terms conceptual formalism. While the chapter on poetry had already explored visibility as it appears in print media, here the author focuses more on issues that could be related to performance or conceptual art. Santos touches on Antunes’s dada-inspired performance art in collaboration with other artists and in his own musical performances, where he invests heavily in the design of his outfits, the backdrop, as well as the gestures, movements and props. She also briefly discusses conceptual aspects of Antunes’s work such as the creation of ideograms and (false) taxonomies, but more attention is paid to the 1993 book/CD/DVD *Nome* (Name). According to Santos, the most striking characteristics of this 30-segment video-art project are “o movimento, a dinâmica dos elementos” as well as “explorações no campo linguístico, nas representações do signo, nos índices urbanos” (224), with many videos making use of street signs. Antunes’s work in installation art, calligraphy and digital art also examined to demonstrate how his engagement with new media, through *Antropofagia*, tries to reinvent the project of the avant-garde.

Overall, Santos provides a comprehensive and attentive introduction to Antunes’s work. Generously illustrated and beautifully designed, the book also matches the style of its subject matter. Santos’s study is daring in its attempt to tackle one of Brazil’s most versatile artists, someone who is constantly crossing boundaries and consistently defies classification.

In this regard, perhaps the only drawback is that the discussion divides Antunes's work into categories, while showing how these boundaries are constantly blurred. This division has the advantage of providing some methodological coherence, yet one wonders whether, a chronological or even thematic study might not have rendered other insights. For instance, given the dearth of criticism (even in Portuguese) on this fascinating figure, tracing his development from rock countercultural icon to experimental poet to global media artist, one might also indirectly chart Brazil's cultural development from the 1980s to this day. Still, Santos's contribution is timely: her study of this key multimedia artist serves to prove how Brazil is emerging as powerhouse not only on the economic but also on the artistic global scene.