

## Chapter 6

# Devouring the Other: cannibalism, translation and the construction of cultural identity

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*Echte Polemik nimmt ein Buch sich so liebevoll vor, wie ein Kannibale sich einen Säugling zurüstet.*

(Walter Benjamin, *Einbahnstraße*)

### Cannibalism as a cultural metaphor

I was at a mathematical school, where the master taught his pupils after a method scarce imaginable to us in Europe. The proposition and demonstration were fairly written on a thin wafer, with ink composed of a cephalic tincture: This the student was to swallow upon a fasting stomach . . . As the wafer digested, the tincture mounted to his brain, bearing the proposition along with it. But the success has not hitherto been answerable, partly by some error in the quantum or composition, and partly by the perverseness of the lads; to whom this bolus is so nauseous, that they generally steal aside, and discharge it upwards before it can operate . . . (Swift 1988: 294)

In this passage from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, which describes one of a series of particularly bizarre pseudo-scientific rituals in a faraway colony thriving on the flying island of Laputa – which incidentally means 'whore' in Spanish – we witness what amounts to a perverse parody of the Christian sacrament of communion, and of the power structures of the academic world in general. Swift's use of detail is remarkable: the wafer, as the Host, is not chewed but just swallowed. During its digestion, the proposition written on it migrates miraculously to the brain, as the soul after death. However, the intended act of intellectual transubstantiation fails. The metaphor refuses to become flesh, revealing at the same time the physically aggressive, oral component of any process of knowledge acquisition. But there is more to it. The eating of the wafer recalls another, more worrying, form of behaviour generally associated with savage tribes:

cannibalism. In this short passage, science and religion, cannibalism and communion, learning and ritual, reading and eating, European and faraway colonial setting, all merge to create a complex site from which I would like to unravel the thread of my argument. Swift's ironical treatment of textual cannibalism has to be understood within a much wider cultural and historical context, which I would like to briefly discuss before concentrating on the main theme of this chapter: innovative aspects of the metaphor of cannibalism as it has been used by Brazilian writers in the 1960s and 1970s, together with its theoretical impact on constructions of cultural identity through translation and self-translation. The use of the metaphor of cannibalism touches upon deep-rooted cultural taboos within the Western world, not least the Christian ritual of communion, as we have just seen. From the early sixteenth century on, cannibalism was considered to be a defining trait of cultural inferiority and has been associated, above all, with the Brazilian coastal area. In 1557, the German mercenary and adventurer Hans Staden, who spent a year with a local tribe, wrote the first report on the wild, naked, grim cannibal: *Die wahrhaftige Historie der wilden nackten, grimmigen Menschenfresser* (1548–1555). This was followed by Jean de Léry's Brazilian journal *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil, autrement dite Amérique* (1556–1558), published in 1578.

Within colonial discourse, the perspective on cannibalism has been ambivalent through the centuries. The superior stance of the more culturally evolved was always accompanied by a profound fascination for this phenomenon, and has been employed by some writers as an expression of radical diversity from which to develop an internal criticism of Western civilization itself. The founding text of this tradition is unquestionably Montaigne's essay *Of Cannibals*, written some 15 years after his meeting, in Rouen in 1562, with a cannibal who had been brought to France by the French explorer Villegagnon. In 1925, the American ethnographer Ruth Benedict published a scathing essay with the programmatic title *The Uses of Cannibalism*, written in the tradition of Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729). Both texts use cannibalism with intent to shock, the way it was brought into play by the European literary Avant-garde, as for instance in Francis Picabia's *Manifeste cannibale DADA* (1920) read by Breton at the Dada soirée at the Théâtre de la Maison de l'Oeuvre, Paris, 27 March 1920.

This double appropriation of the image within European thought was taken up and counteracted by the 'movimento antropófago' – the cannibalistic movement – a faction of Brazilian modernism initiated by writer Oswald de Andrade, who published a 'Manifesto Antropófago' in the first number of his *Revista de Antropofagia* in May 1928 (see Andrade 1968). Andrade's ironical re-appropriation used cannibalism as a 'verbal weapon', not only to scandalize and intimidate the general public, but also to replace the image of the passive and submissive Indian – put forward by

*Cannibalism, translation and the construction of cultural identity* 111

another Brazilian author of the time, Plínio Salgado – with that of the aggressive and rebellious cannibal. Andrade’s aim was to respond to the country’s cultural subservience by reversing ‘the historically imitative stance of Brazilian literature and the one-directional flow of artistic influence by creating a poetry for export . . .’ (Johnson 1987: 44). Although criticizing the simple imitation of European solutions, Andrade was not fundamentally opposed to modernization. In his view, the solution had to be a dialectical synthesis of past and present, to take advantage of all sorts of influences, wherever they may have come from, devouring and critically re-elaborating them in terms of local conditions, all the while trying not to be culturally submerged in the process. At this early stage of the use of the cannibalistic metaphor, the translational aspect does not play a role yet.

### Cannibalism as a metaphor of translation

Since the 1920s, the polyvalent cannibalistic image has been a major cultural metaphor, as well as an exemplary mode of symbolic struggle against neo-colonial dependency within Brazilian culture (see Bellei 1998; Stephanides 2001; Vieira 1992). Several re-evaluations have occurred in the following decades – for instance, in the films of Joaquim Pedro Andrade, as well as in the writings of Darcy Ribeiro, Márcio Souza and Benedito Nunes<sup>1</sup> – but it is only with the group of the *Noigandres* poets of whom Augusto and Haroldo de Campos were members,<sup>2</sup> as well as in the writings of Vilém Flusser (who was well-acquainted with Oswald de Andrade’s text and its importance for the ensuing tradition within Brazilian culture), that the translational aspect has become central. Furthermore, a comparative genealogical analysis would evidence that their use of the cannibalistic metaphor represents a convergence of different theoretical strands, all with a history of their own. The works of the de Campos brothers and Flusser have assimilated and digested these disparate elements and the history they belong to, fusing them into a unique creative and critical vision born at a specific socio-political juncture of Brazilian culture. To put it another way: their theoretical positions on translation are the best illustration of the functioning of one of their key metaphors, cannibalism.

In his essay, *The Translator: From Piety to Cannibalism* (1977: 53–62), Serge Gavronsky posits two self-exclusive metaphors to explain the role of the translator unhappily caught between original and translation. Gavronsky’s analysis relies heavily on Freudian psychoanalysis, in particular on the Oedipus complex and Freud’s description of primitive culture in *Totem und Tabu* (1913), a text that was also of primary importance to Andrade’s *Manifesto Antropófago*. Gavronsky, however, seems to ignore the Brazilian tradition and does not explore the cross-cultural dimension of the

metaphor. The first attitude is dominated by a deep respect for the original, which possesses a semi-sacred status, and so is worshipped from a distance. The second rejects the passive role that goes with it and develops a self-affirmative stance transforming translation into a creative act. The use of the term cannibalism, for Gavronsky, 'emphasizes the disappearance of the slightest trace' of the original, creating a 'perfect' (Gavronsky 1977: 59), that is, self-sufficient text.

The symbolic disappearance and reemergence under another form of the primal totem is a structural analogy that illuminates what I believe occurs in the case of the aggressive translator who seizes possession of the 'original', who savors the text, that is, who truly feeds upon the words, who ingurgitates them, and who thereafter enunciates them in his own tongue, thereby having explicitly rid himself of the 'original' creator. (*ibid.*)

Through cannibalistic translation the new text becomes a primary one, that is, a new original text, and the translator a creator in his/her own right, negating in the creative act any debt s/he might have towards the first act of creation. As I intend to further explore in what follows, total absorption and negation of the original by cannibalistic translation is only one very specific way of dealing with the metaphor.

### Devouring and chewing

In an early essay about translation as a form of creation and criticism – *Da tradução como criação e como crítica* (de Campos 1992) – Haroldo de Campos distinguishes three different forms of information. Whereas documentary and semantic information can be easily translated into other codes and different languages, aesthetic information withstands this process because of its very fragility, that is, because of the impossibility of separating form and content, which are inextricably intertwined. Poetry can only be codified in the way it has been transmitted by the author himself, in other words: aesthetic codification is always identical to its original codification. It is because of this fundamental untranslatability that aesthetic information can only be recreated by working out isomorphic poetic bodies in different languages. In this way the aesthetic information embedded in the two texts will still be distinct, but the two texts will belong to the same isomorphic system. De Campos uses a metaphor to describe this process. The translation creates a sort of delicate crystalline twofold structure recalling the fragility of the aesthetic information itself: '... serão diferentes enquanto linguagem, mas, como os corpos isomorfos, cristalizar-se-ão dentro de un mesmo sistema' (*ibid.*: 34).

*Cannibalism, translation and the construction of cultural identity* 113

The translation of a poetic text is therefore always recreation, or parallel creation. Although this early text – written in 1962 – is still pervaded by the essentialist conception of the absolute primacy of the original, the latter's very untranslatability is already taken as the starting point for a radical re-evaluation of the act of translation; an act seen not so much as a simple process of reproduction, but as an autonomous form of artistic creation.

The metaphor of feeding and nourishing plays only a very marginal role in this early text. Furthermore, Haroldo de Campos (1992: 35f) mainly quotes from Ezra Pound's *Literary Essays* (1954) and T. S. Eliot's *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920) without making any direct reference to Oswald de Andrade. English literature, according to Pound, has lived on translation ('foi alimentada pela tradução') (H. de Campos 1992: 35), being nourished by it all along. Criticism by translation (on this subject see, in particular, Gaddis Rose 1997) has a double meaning: to both anticipate the creative act, as well as define the overall form and expurgate unnecessary repetitions. T. S. Eliot, on the other hand, stresses the importance of renewal through translation and the necessity to appropriate the work of great authors by systematic digestion and assimilation. 'Necessitamos de uma digestão capaz de assimilar Homero e Flaubert.' (H. de Campos 1992: 36) ('We need a digestion which can assimilate both Homer and Flaubert') (author's translation). Criticism by means of translation is seen here as the fuel on which the creative impulse is driven.

In Haroldo de Campos' *The rule of anthropophagy: Europe under the sign of devoration*, written in 1986, the metaphor of cannibalism and its Brazilian origins take centre stage. Devoration and mastication have become the universal laws of a rapidly connecting global network. The process of translation and its cultural implications are not dealt with directly, but the text should be read as an account of multiple, complex forms of cross-cultural interaction. The metaphor of cannibalism has not only absorbed a vast variety of foreign influences, including Jakobson's 'transmutation' (Jakobson 2000: 11) and Derrida's 'deconstruction' (see, for instance, Davis 2001), but has also successfully masticated and digested the whole of the Brazilian, South American and European past, rediscovered through the eyes of the translating cannibal, the bad savage 'devourer of whites'. This conception involves

transculturation, or, better, 'transvalorization': a critical view of History . . . capable of appropriation and expropriation, de-hierarchization, deconstruction . . . 'all suggestions, after being broken down and mixed, are prepared for a new remastication, a complicated chemistry in which it is no longer possible to distinguish the assimilating organism from the assimilated material.' (H. de Campos 1986: 44f)

Universal cannibalism is a form of syncretism and eclecticism, in which the concepts of plagiarism and originality lose their meaning. De Campos speaks of an 'irresponsible hybrid spirit, unable to be either one thing or another' (*ibid.*: 48). The division between the first and third world, industrialized and underdeveloped countries based on a progressive linear time sequence, collapses. If Machado the Assis regurgitates his reading experiences, enriched by his own ability as a writer, other South American literary 'cannibals' seem to anticipate cultural events that happen much later in Europe: 'Sor Juana, in Mexico, is another example . . . her differential Baroque . . . 'in a single gesture, anticipates German Romanticism and the Surrealistic dreamworld . . . ' (*ibid.*: 49). Haroldo De Campos calls this multilayered and complex system of correspondences across cultures and ages a 'constellation', which successfully abolishes the consequences of colonial history and proceeds to create an alternative cultural network. As I will shortly attempt to illustrate, this conception is very close to Flusser's own idea of a reticular community created by numerous, successive acts of cannibalism (see also Baitello 2007).

The concrete poetry of the *Noigandres* group is another constellation within this egalitarian universe of multiple reciprocal cannibalisms: a universe without a true origin, dominated by the rule of destruction and recombination. It is representative of

[a] moment of absolute synchrony. It not only can speak the difference in a universal code ( . . . re-combining the Greco-Latin heritage . . . like Oswald de Andrade 'Brazilwoodzing' Italian Futurism and French Cubism). Metalinguistically, it rethinks its own code, the poetic function itself. (H. de Campos 1986: 51)

Concrete poetry is 'the space of the new synthesis of the universal code. More than a heritage of poets, this is the case of assuming, criticizing and "chewing over" a poetics' (*ibid.*). By linking all cultures together, the workings of universal cannibalism abolish the differences between centre and periphery 'by means of an almost subliminal solidarity', a constellation existing 'beneath the linearity of conventional history' (*ibid.*: 52). Concrete poetry is the Brazilian version of a new poetics, at once national and universal, 'a planetarium' of 'signs in rotation' created by a group of writers from 'a supposedly peripheric literature' that 'suddenly appropriated the whole code', reclaiming it 'as their patrimony' (*ibid.*: 51-2).

Brazilian cultural cannibalism is not only an answer to the experience of the colonial and post-colonial world (see Gentzler 2003: 24-33 and Niranjana 1992) but also a model that, according to Haroldo de Campos, is capable of explaining all sorts of cultural re-combinations, rewritings, translations and recycling processes. In short: the marginalized position of

*Cannibalism, translation and the construction of cultural identity* 115

Brazilian culture and its dependency on the colonial motherland are transformed into a model for present and future cultural exchanges in an increasingly globalized world in which the rule of anthropophagy seems to be the only viable answer. In this way, the peripheral cannibal mutates into the universal recycler of a 'polytopic and polyphonic planetary civilization' (1986: 57). The devouring jaws of the new barbarians

have been gnawing at and 'ruining' a cultural heritage that is ever more global, in relation to which its ex-centrifing and deconstructing attack functions with the marginal impetus of the carnivalesque de-sacralizing, profaning anti-tradition evoked by Bakhtin . . . the combinatory and ludibrious poly-culturalism, the parodic transmutation of meaning and values, the open, multi-lingual hybridization, are the devices responsible for the constant feeding and re-feeding of this Baroque . . . carnivalized transencyclopedia of the new barbarians, where everything can coexist with everything. They are mechanisms which crush the material of tradition with the teeth of a tropical sugar-mill, changing stalks and protective coverings into husks and cane syrup. (*ibid.*: 55)

### Digesting and absorbing

Vilém Flusser, who knew Haroldo de Campos well and dedicated to their friendship and collaboration a short chapter in his philosophical autobiography *Bodenlos* (Flusser 1992: 151–8), wrote in the early 1970s a book on Brazil – *Brasilien oder die Suche nach dem neuen Menschen* – calling it a 'phenomenology of underdevelopment'. In the section dealing with the project of a Brazilian language still to come (Flusser 1994: 145–56), suggesting by analogy the shape of a new Brazilian culture, Flusser makes use of the metaphor of multiple successive digestions, an image we will come across again when considering his own writing practice. The Brazilian language is made up of a series of African, Indian, Asian and European influences that it has ingested in the course of its history, and forms three specific strands interacting with each other: the language of the archaic interior, as well as the proletarian and bourgeois variants. Each group in turn feeds on the language, passing it on to the next group, after having chewed and digested it. 'Die an diesem Verdauungsprozeß mitarbeiten – und das tut eigentlich jeder, der schreibt und publiziert – werden von einem wahren Taumel der Sprachmanipulation ergriffen . . .' (*ibid.*: 150) ('Those who contribute to this digestive process – and this holds true in a way for everybody writing and publishing – are truly seized by a rapture of language manipulation . . .') (author's translation). In this way, through a constant collective feeding and re-feeding that echoes Haroldo de

Campos' view, the Brazilian language, and with it, the Brazilian of the future, will slowly branch out and diversify, assimilating and elaborating the cultures of other social classes.

The Brazilian communication theorist Norval Baitello Junior (2003 and 2005) has recently tried to expand the field of application of the cannibalistic metaphor by distinguishing four different forms, this time applied to the relationship of image and the body. Baitello makes a distinction between anthropophagy and iconophagy on the one hand, and pure and impure forms on the other. This distinction could be easily adapted to the cannibalistic relation of bodies and texts as Vilém Flusser and Haroldo de Campos understand it: bodies feed on bodies (pure anthropophagy), texts on texts (pure bibliophagy), bodies feed on texts and texts devour bodies – the last two being the impure forms. If in translation processes texts are nourished by other texts, the following example taken from Flusser's work, gesturing at the earlier passage from Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* – with which it shares its fundamentally ironical stance – is all about bodies feeding on texts.

Flusser (1989: 63–6) took up the idea of a collective circular process of rumination and digestion in one of his 'Philosophiefiktionen', philosophical and ironical texts on the border of fabulatory essayism and scientific fiction dedicated to a bizarre insect, the *bibliophagus*. As the name suggests, it feeds on the written word. The bibliophagus' preference goes to alphanumerical printed texts on which it feeds mainly for the information content. When chewing on the pages, the insect secretes an enzyme called 'criticase' that, together with the printer's ink, triggers off a chemical reaction leading to the substance 'informasis'. The paper morsel being chewed on is rolled over and over in the insect's mouth until it forms a ball, which is then vomited into the mouth of another *bibliophagus*. During this process, fractions of informasis are ingested, entering the digestive system of each insect. This process goes on until all *bibliophagi*, as knots in a connecting net, have been duly informed by feeding on the circulating paper-ball. In this version of the collective process of remastication, the drawback – the dystopian dimension – is that the information is simply carried on without being re-elaborated and enriched in the process.

With Vilém Flusser, and this could be seen as his particular contribution to the discussion, anthropophagy becomes autophagy, cannibalism becomes self-cannibalism. Over the years, Flusser developed a writing strategy based on multiple successive self-translations, using four different languages in the process: Portuguese, German, English and French. He may, for instance, begin with a Portuguese text, translating it into French, and then move on to an English or a German version. There is neither a privileged language from which to start out, nor a predefined path for these translation processes. The resulting text of such a sequence may



*Cannibalism, translation and the construction of cultural identity* 117

even be fed into another translational cycle. Each new text has, to use his own description, 'the previous one in his belly'. Every new text feeding on all the preceding ones is, however, only a temporary variant, as it can always be retranslated into one of the idioms that already compose it. Flusser considers this reversible dialogical cannibalistic relationship between the four different languages, as well as the complex texts arising from it, a metaphor of cross-cultural exchange and of a possible multilayered cultural identity.

Whereas Haroldo de Campos focuses mainly on the act of cannibalistic absorption itself (see also Vieira 1999), the deconstruction of the foreign by chewing and swallowing, as well as the relationship arising from this interchange, Flusser concentrates on the act of digestion and its possible consequences. In his view, the incorporation of new components into a pre-existing unity – for instance English words into German – leads only in part to complete absorption, as some foreign elements are simply irreducible to the logic of the assimilating body. They will remain an alien element, functioning as a sort of catalyst triggering off new destabilizing developments within the absorbing body. For Flusser, untranslatability, that is, indigestibility, is the most essential aspect of any cross-cultural interaction.

A particularly interesting example of the feeding metaphor can be found in Flusser's *A duvida – On doubt* – (1999: 61–2), where he describes the intake of new elements in terms of an amoeba sending out a pseudopodium which engulfs the foreign element with the intention of assimilating it: no disruptive penetrative violence here, as with Haroldo de Campos, but a quiet, slow, quasi-static process of continuous absorption and osmosis. Some of the foreign elements refuse to become integrated into the body of the amoeba and remain undigested, a constant challenge to the unity of a system that tries in vain to break them down in order to assimilate them, liberating new creative forces in the process. It is the very impossibility of an ultimate satisfying translation that keeps the process going. Each translation is, thus, never a final destination but only another stage on a nomadic open-ended journey.

### Internal translation: creating a meta-language

Both the de Campos brothers and Flusser conceive the translated text as the site of an ongoing internal process of translation, which does not stop once the translation has taken place. In order to describe the complexity of the translator's effort at synthesis, they use the metaphor of the palimpsest. The cultural contamination taking place in cannibalistic translation can lead to total absorption, fusion, overlapping, or juxtaposition of disparate elements in the same text. In most cases, however, the aim lies

essentially in the staging of difference by introducing foreign elements into the translated text without cancelling out the disparities. This holds true for both writers, even if in some texts they seem to waver between complete absorption in a unifying synthesis, and fragmented hybrid variant. In an unpublished essay on the gesture of writing, written in the early 1970s, Flusser calls the final outcome of his self-translating practice ‘a palimpsest of sorts’<sup>3</sup> (see Guldin 2004a). As with Haroldo de Campos, these texts, even if only monolingual, are an attempt at creating a many-layered meta-language. Although the varied multilingual traces of all previous versions have been erased, they are present in the final version as quotations without quotation marks.

In *Deus e o Diabo no Fausto de Goethe* (de Campos 2005) – which stages the presence of an intertext in its very title, being also a reference to Glauber Rocha’s film *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* – Haroldo de Campos describes what he calls ‘plagiotropia’ – plagiarism by translation – in terms of a palimpsest attained by adding new intertextual strata on top of an already multilayered text. As with Flusser, the single layers of this palimpsest are not to be understood as fixed stratifications, accumulated over time, but as constantly shifting and interacting planes. Augusto de Campos has called this irreducible juxtaposition of elements from different linguistic or cultural origins ‘intradução’, intranlation, a combination of ‘introdução’, introduction, and ‘tradução’, translation (see Robinson 1997: 100–3; Vieira 1994: 67), and probably intending a double meaning: translation within, that is, an internal form of translation due to the interpenetration of the dissimilar elements constituting a text and the final impossibility of this process ever coming to an end. With this, the simple dualisms of foreign and familiar, outer and inner, original and translation, central and peripheral culture, homeland and colony, are definitively overcome and inscribed within the text itself in the form of a dynamic creative principle that subverts any idea of conclusive meaning. In their translations, both Augusto and Haroldo de Campos have made frequent use of what might be called double sources, inserting an autochthonous input in their foreign imports, cannibalizing foreign as well as local sources, ‘nourishing from two reservoirs, the source text and the target literature’ (Vieira 1994: 72).

Augusto de Campos incorporated ‘a passage from a native popular song into his translations of John Donne’s *The Apparition*’ – (see Vieira *ibid.*: 66) and Haroldo de Campos created multilingual patterns in his *Galáxias* (see de Campos 2004 as well as Guldin forthcoming) moving through different languages, from Portuguese to Greek, English, German and back to Portuguese. The different linguistic codes do not stand side by side but are meant to interact, subverting the authority of the original and celebrating the autonomy of the translated text. Flusser’s method of systematic self-

*Cannibalism, translation and the construction of cultural identity* 119

translation as a way of creating new texts, of inventing oneself in the process, always leads back on to itself, chewing what has already been 'chewed', thus negating any linear development: a point in common with the conception of the de Campos brothers (see also Guldin 2004b). Flusser (2000: 199) self-deprecatingly comments on this in a letter to his friend Alex Bloch: ' . . . wie Sie es einmal mitleidlos sagten: das eigene Kotzen lecken' ('as you once put it mercilessly yourself: licking one's own vomit') (author's translation). The final self-translation leads the text, duly altered and enriched through successive stages of re-translation, back to the very beginning. If the first text was written, for instance, in German, then the last language to be used, after French, English and Portuguese, would again be German, in order to test the soundness of the final product, meaning here not so much its semblance to the original, but its richness in insight and style. The quality of a translation is not gauged by its fidelity to the original, but by its density and complexity: as Flusser is basically using translation as a mean of criticizing his one writing practice, each new version carries all the previous improvements and changes with it. As with de Campos's global cannibalism, the process of self-translation negates linearity by bending back on itself as the 'ouroboros' does, feeding on its own tail. The basic structure of self-translation is a self-reflective involution. But there is more to it.

The cannibalistic metaphor of translation questions the simple duality of 'original' and 'translation' and the related hierarchy of 'home country' and 'colony', introducing the idea of a possible reversibility. As Haroldo de Campos points out, referring to Bakhtin, cannibalism is a fundamentally carnivalesque device, playfully turning power relations upside down. In the case of retranslation, writes Flusser,

dreht sich das ursprüngliche Verhältnis der beiden Codes um; der Objektcode wird zum Metacode. Mit anderen Worten: Nachdem der französische Code einen Teil . . . des englischen verschluckt hat, wird er seinerseits vom englischen verschluckt, . . . sozusagen mit dem englischen im Bauch. (Flusser 1996: 343)

(the original relationship of the two codes is reversed: the object-code becomes now a meta-code. In other words: after the French code has swallowed part of the . . . English one, he is in turn swallowed by the English code, . . . so to speak with the English in his belly.) (author's translation)

In the course of translation processes then, a text – the meta-code – swallows and digests another text – the object-code – that is in turn feeding on a text it has previously ingested. The final version will end up having

the structure of a Russian doll, each doll containing all the ones previous, with the difference that they would all be dissimilar. In the case of retranslation, the structure would get even more complicated because a particular version could contain an earlier version of itself contained within still another version. The simple, hierarchical, unilateral and linear relationship of original and translation disappears behind a complex reversible circular mode of interaction. In self-translation, every new text is an original in its own right.

In a chapter of his seminal work *The Poetics of Imperialism* (1991) dedicated to the eloquent cannibal, Eric Cheyfitz quotes a passage from Montaigne's 1580 essay on cannibalism (see Montaigne 1993) which sounds like an apt comment on the point being discussed here. The captive cannibal sneers at his captors:

. . . Let them boldly come together and flock in multitudes, to feed ['disner'] on him; for with him they shall feed upon ['mangeront'] their fathers, and grandfathers, that heretofore have served his body for food and nourishment. These muscles, (saith he) this flesh, and these veines are your owne ['les vostres']; fond men as you are, know you not that the substance of your forefathers limbes is yet tied unto ours? Taste them well, for in them shall you finde the relish of your owne flesh ['propre chair'] . . . (Cheyfitz 1991: 148)

As translating cannibals, we are but knots in a global net of creativity spanning many generations and vast geographical spaces, constantly feeding on one another and ourselves.

#### Mutuality and hybridity: the construction of cultural identity as a form of cannibalistic (self)-translation

What is the relevance of Flusser's and the de Campos brothers' view of translation for the current theoretical debate? First of all, their account of cross-cultural interactions could be compared to Wolfgang Iser's concept of 'mutuality' (see Budick and Iser 1996: 301-2), focusing on the cultural self emerging from the translational processes involved. By concentrating on the relational side of cultural identity, rather than on the outcome itself, one may also avoid being ensnared by essentialist and tautological forms of argumentation. The similarity of some of the salient aspects of Iser's concept of *mutuality* to Flusser's notion of self-cannibalistic translation is indeed striking. The identity of cultures, but also cultural identities for that matter, says Iser, are born and constitute themselves out of continuous processes of mutual appropriation, assimilation, interpenetration and superimposition. This cybernetically structured self-regulative form of

*Cannibalism, translation and the construction of cultural identity* 121

cross-cultural exchange has liberated itself 'from any pregiven frames of reference in order to generate its own control by constantly shifting modes of reference . . .' (Iser 1995: 35). It is based on recursive looping, that is, on positive and negative feedback loops which lead to various forms of cultural production. As in Flusser's view of translation, inexplicable heterogeneous elements that cannot readily be explained in terms of the target language or culture do not hinder or stop, but tend to energize the operational drive of the transaction processes leading to further attempts at explanation. 'The mechanism of recursive looping is an appropriate operational mode for translating cultures into one another' (*ibid.*: 33). In Iser's view, the relationship between source and target culture is fundamentally a reversible two-way flow and therefore not a hierarchical. There is no privileged position from which to assess all other positions, as any position can be fed into the mentioned recursive loops of mutuality.

Secondly, the translating cannibal is fundamentally de-centered and 'hybrid' (Rocha and Ruffinelli 1999: 348), endlessly navigating between different cultures, forming a dialogical knot in a global nexus of translatabilities. This implies a nomadic, unstable cultural identity very much akin to Homi Bhabha's interstitial self. The cannibal does not deny otherness outright, but devours it in order to transform and absorb it. He is 'faithful in difference', as Else Vieira (1994: 65) puts it. In Flusser's case, this faithfulness in difference leads to a fidelity to the other in oneself, transposing the cultural variance of original and translation within the writing process itself. The cannibalistic self-translator can be faithful to his working principle only by continually being untrue to all his other selves. The fundamental split between cultures – an outside world to be ingested and digested and an inner absorbing dimension – is inscribed within the writing activity of the self-translator himself, multiplying his many selves like a hall of mirrors. For Vilém Flusser, as well as Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, the practice of translation, and the translator himself are sites of tension where an unending process of negotiation is enacted (see also Cronin 2006), creating and recreating an interstitial, hybrid cultural self.

### Devouring devoration

In this chapter I wanted to demonstrate how the use of cannibalism as a metaphor of cross-cultural interaction and translation, as it has been employed by the de Campos brothers and Vilém Flusser from the 1950s onwards, has come about by stages, integrating different cultural traditions and theoretical perspectives along the way. Although the de Campos brothers and Flusser share many beliefs and convictions about the use of translation in cross-cultural encounters – for instance their systematic attempt at breaking up all kinds of linear teleological narratives – they

have explored different sides of the phenomenon: the lovingly aggressive, deconstructing, dismembering aspect and the slow, digestive, assimilative side – mouth and teeth versus stomach and bowels – the playful carnivalesque subversion of the relationship between colony and motherland, and the production of translational feedback loops that critically feed on each other.

Flusser's originality lies in the fact that through self-translation he has basically applied the cannibalistic principle to the cannibalistic act of appropriation itself. A perceived danger inherent in the cannibalistic metaphor has to do with the sense that it might finally just invert the colonial power structure by exchanging roles, confirming the simple dichotomy of a familiar inner and foreign outer reality. Colonial appropriation tends to feed on the foreign, dissolving it in the familiar context and managing to abolish all traces of difference. As cannibalism appropriates colonial appropriation, it should arguably go beyond simple duality by translating de-centered positions into one another, inverting clear-cut oppositions, cultivating involution and mutuality, constantly bending back on itself in creating open-ended structures. To put it another way, it should devour the very border between the foreign and the familiar, devour the devourer and the act of devoration itself.

### Notes

1. For instance Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's 1969 film version of Mário de Andrade's novel *Macunaíma* (1928), Darcy Ribeiro's *Utopia Selvagem: Saudades da inocência perdida* (1982), Márcio Souza's *Galvez, Imperador do Acre* (1978) and Benedito Nunes' *Canibais Europeus e Antropófagos Brasileiros* (1968) (see Johnson 1987).
2. In 1952 Haroldo de Campos founded the literary magazine *Noigandres* together with his brother Augusto and Décio Pignatari. From this issued in 1956 the literary movement of Brazilian concrete poetry internationally linked to the other concretists around the world. The starting point was the publication of the manifesto *Plano Piloto para a Poesia Concreta* in December 1956. Other members were Ronaldo Azeredo, Jose Lino Grünwald, Pedro Xisto and Edgard Braga.
3. Cf. Flusser, 'The Gesture of Writing', p. 11 (unpublished typescript).