

ADA - Reading group: *This book is a classroom*
Rotterdam. March 2013

The text "Props: balancing legs, extended paint roller, a building" from Maaïke Gouwenberg presents the urban space, in this case the city of Sao Paulo, as a paper to write on; and the *Pixação*, as a type of calligraphy of rebellion. A corporeal gesture that it is rehearsed and performed as an untaught lesson.

I would like to respond to this text through the notion of body, as the *Pixação* could be understood as a subversive type of writing that becomes body and stands by itself within another body - the body of the city.

I will relate the *Pixação* as it is described in the text to the notion of *exscription* that Jean-Luc Nancy introduces in his book *Corpus*, together with the concept of *anthropophagia* developed in Brazil in the 1920's.

skin, toes, ankles, feet, legs,
knees, thighs, belly, thumbs, waist,
fingers, hands, arms, elbows, neck,
face, hair, body hair, nails,
eyes, ears, nose, mouth, teeth,
chin, tongue, shoulders, chest.

If I say body, what is the first thing you encounter in your mind? Is it something by itself? Is it something tangible? Is a body something to be touched? How do you recognize your body? And a group of bodies? Are they all the same? How to understand our own body? And how to approach the city as a body? Writing could be an answer. But how? And what type of writing?

A body is not something by itself, it needs to be sensed, recognized by others in order to be present. And to do that, a body needs to open up, to be built and to be announced, to take place in the space, to be exposed. But how do we expose our bodies? Again, writing could be a possibility, and *pixação* a type of answer.

Through writing we become audible, readable, we exist by *exposing* our own thoughts and feelings. In other words, by the modus of exposure, ourselves call, reach out to something else, which is there, outside. As if our existence would be addressed to an outside where it takes place in.

*“Writing in its essence touches upon body.”*¹

According to Nancy, when writing, our body is inscribed outside –*exscribed* is the word that he uses- when the text moves from the action of being written to the action of being addressed or read. This action, this movement is being placed outside the text; it takes its own space. And by so doing, we are also defining our space out there, as bodies, in this case in the urban space, which is a body as well.

*“We have to write from a body that we neither have nor are, but where being is exscribed.”*² We build our bodies by writing onto other bodies. We touch by addressing ourselves, by sending ourselves to the touch of something outside in the space, displaced. Writing is thinking addressed to the thing that displaces, that estranges it. Therefore, the body is actually being written when writing. Indeed, we are addressed to the body from the body. It is from our body that we have our body as a stranger to us – expropriated. We don’t own a body, it is not a proper thing to us, rather we could say we appropriate the body through writing, through *exscription*.

On the other hand, there is the idea of *touching*, this action or movement towards the outside, which is related to an interruption, to a suspension of senses. By touching upon the outside, by addressing to the thing that displaces, by announcing an existence, the text is in a way abandoned, suspended, left behind.³

Together with this action of touching the outside, we can think of emotions, of a space of emotions. Emotion could be defined as to be in movement, to be affected. Therefore, when it comes to writing, the action of being addressed or read, the *exscription*, through touching, means to be moved, affected, disturbed, interrupted, and suspended.

But how is this specific notion of body connected with the idea of *anthropophagia*?

The notion of *antrophofagia* is related to the cannibalism that was practiced by the biggest tribe in Brazil, called the *Tupi* tribe. The *Tupi* were divided into many smaller tribes, which in turn fought among themselves. When the enemy was captured, it was killed within cannibalistic rituals, in order to absorb its strength. In addition, when the *Tupis* were fighting on the battlefield, they also wanted to show strength and give the best of themselves to die in honors, because they knew that the winners would eat the strongest.

1 Nancy, J-L., *Corpus*, translated by Richard A. R., 2008. Fordham University Press. p. 11

2 *Íbid.* p. 19

3 *Íbid.* p. 11

Oswald de Andrade and other intellectuals and artists in Brazil rescued the notion of Anthropophagia as a type of cultural cannibalism in the *Manifesto Antropófago* published in 1928. The *Manifesto*'s iconic line is "*Tupi or not Tupi: that is the question.*" The line is simultaneously a celebration of the *Tupi* tribe, and on a metaphorical level of cannibalism: it eats *Shakespeare*. Cannibalism became a way for Brazil to assert itself against European post-colonial cultural domination.⁴ But instead of using the notion of Anthropophagia as a tool for decolonizing the mind, I would like to use it for the process of writing itself. Anthropophagia as a pivot between writing and body.

Coming back to Nancy, bodies are open spaces, places of existence without an outside or an inside, they are neither full nor empty, they are just a skin. From this exteriority, from this body that we neither have nor are, how do we touch ourselves and other selves? How are we sensed and how do we sense? Nancy proposes that we touch ourselves from an outside, and only through the *skin* is that we touch ourselves.⁵ It seems nothing comes from the inside, from a full self but rather the body is created when things are overstepping that skin. Therefore, a body penetrates another body when killing it, allowing the body to become permeable through death.

Writing together with *anthropophagia*, can be connected through the process of dying. As the *pixador*, by the modus of exposure, offers part of her or his written body to be devoured by the casual passerbys.

In the idea of moving, displacing through the text, touching outside in order to be exscribed, there is an exposition of the self. And again, by being withdrawn, subtracted, you extend, you expose yourself to the others. You take your body out there, to be devoured. It is a matter of contact. The *pixador* and the reader encounter themselves somewhere in the city. The *pixador* writes the passerby and the passerby reads the *pixador*. Both bodies touch each other and juxtaposed by each other, they *devour* and *exscribe* themselves.

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4 Source: wikipedia.com

5 Nancy, J-L., *Corpus*, translated by Richard A. R., 2008. Fordham University Press. p. 128