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Spectacles and Specters of Indigenous Peoples in *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman*

Katherine D. Johnston

Celebrated for its crafty political subversion in the face of strict military control, Nelson Pereira dos Santos's 1971 film *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* is both a strategic allegory for colonial and imperialist resistance and a metatextual declaration of Brazilian national cinema. In the spirit of Oswald de Andrade's modernist "Manifesto Antropofago," whereby society constructs its own body by cannibalizing and incorporating the tasty pieces of other cultures, Pereira dos Santos uses European encounters with the Tupinambá as an allegory for neocolonial invasions. Andrade's famous aphorism, "Tupi or not Tupi: that is the question," embodies this ethos by inserting Brazil's people into Shakespeare's prose and ostensibly bringing Brazil's past to bear on its present.¹ Dos Santos adapts German adventurer Hans Von Staden's 1556 captivity narrative into a "quasi-documentary" that sustains his allegory of cultural cannibalism intended to foster a new understanding of Brazilian national identity.² Staden's book recounts his nine months of living among Brazil's anthropagic Tupinambá tribe and his escape from death and consumption.

Unlike Staden, however, the captive in *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman*—referred to only as "the Frenchman"—does not escape. After capturing the Frenchman and deciding he is Portuguese, the Tupinambá chief announces that he will be killed and consumed in eight months; in the meanwhile, he welcomes the Frenchman into the community and, as an interim spouse, bestows him with Sebiopepe, the widow of the Frenchman's war victim. In the following months, the Frenchman paradoxically integrates into the culture while trying to contrive his escape: he is fed by his hosts

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while they simultaneously identify him as their eventual “host” or food offering, thereby blurring the boundaries between self and other, inside and outside, and that which feeds and that which is fed upon. Ultimately, in an elaborate ceremony, Sebiopepe eats the Frenchman.

Dos Santos’s revisionist ending to the Frenchman’s story offers cultural cannibalism as a mode of resistance and self-nourishment; however, in establishing an “eat-or-be-eaten” order, such a system also justifies how foreign markets brazenly devour Brazil. Specifically reacting against the construction of the Trans-Amazonian Highway that would decimate the habitat and Native communities, as well as the cultural colonialism of Hollywood on the Brazilian cinema market, dos Santos takes cannibalism not only as his subject matter, but also as his method of subversion.³ Although the film uses ironic juxtapositions of image and text to expose colonial hypocrisy, these ironies also expose the film’s own hypocrisy. Most troubling is the film’s exclusion of actual Tupinambá presence in favor of an ironically stereotypical simulacrum of the people. Indeed, the film depends upon on the absent presence of a Native referent.

In general, *How Tasty* exemplifies the Cinema Novo movement’s simultaneous successes and failures. This film is hailed internationally as an icon of Brazilian cinema, circulates widely in film studies, and is recognized stylistically and technically as a filmmaker’s film; nevertheless, the movement supposedly of the people, for the people, was hardly viewed by the people. For this reason, scholarship and academia might reconsider the relevant issues of the film and stimulate discussions and studies surrounding the actual subjects shouldering the ideas in Cinema Novo. Ultimately, I argue that beyond film studies and discourse, this film should be considered critically across disciplines, and especially by cultural studies and American studies.

Understanding the greater project of Cinema Novo is critical for grappling with this film that, by many accounts, sits at its epicenter. As film scholar Michael Wintroub writes, dos Santos “devour[s] the words of Villegaignon, Léry, Staden, Thevet, Montaigne, Gandavo, Soares de Souza, Nóbrega, Anchieta, etc. (as well as the woodblock and engraved images by Theodor de Bry), digests them, and incorporates them into a new body and a new cinema, that is Brazil’s Cinema Nova, of which, of course, he was one of the ‘founders.’”⁴ In his book *Playing Indian*, Philip Deloria explains that “it should come as no surprise that the young men and women of the 1960s and 1970s—bent on destroying an orthodoxy tightly intertwined with the notion of truth and yet desperate for truth itself—followed their cultural ancestors in playing Indian to find reassuring identities in a world seemingly out of control.”⁵ Dos Santos himself describes “Cinema Novo [as] a group of auteurs who share a collective practice in cultural politics,” but he also clarifies that “in relation to principles of filmmaking, each director has his own isolated dominion and there is thus no common esthetic position among [them].”⁶ Critics Lisa Shaw and Stephanie Dennison contest this, arguing that “cinema novo represents the only occasion on which a relatively cohesive group of intellectuals, filmmakers and producers with a common ideology strove towards a common set of cultural and artistic goals.”⁷ Moreover, Randal Johnson describes dos Santos as the “presiding spirit of Cinema Novo.”⁸ The Brazilian poet and scholar Haroldo de Campos tellingly describes Cinema Novo as “heading towards a

Brazilian vision of the world as ingestion, towards a critical assimilation of the foreign experience and its re-elaboration in national terms and circumstances, allegorizing in this way the cannibalism of our savages.⁹ First, Campos's use of the possessive and pejorative "our savages" presupposes the Natives' subjugation, which is apparently a precondition to their "incorporation."¹⁰ Next, by touting this "re-elaboration" of "our savages," Cinema Novo apparently accepts an a priori elaboration of Indigenous people. Ultimately, descriptions such as these betray the ways that Native peoples are too often already reduced to fictional characters, even before they are "assimilated" into such allegories. In the words of Native film scholar Michelle Raheja, Native Americans are thus "ascribed the value of absence through assimilation and disappearance and the value of excess through the compulsion in Hollywood media [or in this case Brazilian cinema] to return continually to the scene of Indian-white contact."¹¹ In this way, Cinema Novo traffics in the simulacra of Native peoples, and, to be sure, this contributes to their further erasure from Brazil's national narrative—not their inclusion.

Nevertheless, critics such as Theodore Robert Young applaud the film for "juxtapos[ing] official history with revisionist questioning."¹² Michael Wintroub, for example, describes the film as a "marvelously versatile" "teaching tool," and expresses appreciation for "how the movie illustrates some of the ways history is made, recounted, incorporated and transformed by groups with very different interests, needs and agendas."¹³ I agree that the film is pedagogically useful, but suggest that we not overlook the more insidious ways that it undermines its own anticolonial project and teleologically reinscribes Native peoples as the living dead, forever trapped in the past.

The Tupinambá are central to dos Santos's allegory, but are also portrayed as an absent presence and reduced to symbols in the filmmaker's present-day political and social allegory. In other words, *How Tasty* remains a revision of an illusion—excessive, but also devoid of a Native referent. The film self-consciously questions the historical record, and yet the Tupinambá remain citations of citations. Their past is painted over with red makeup and broad strokes in order to create the illusion of "Tupiness," or in Gerald Vizenor's words, "the real without referent to an actual tribal remembrance."¹⁴ The saying, "Tupi or not Tupi: that is the question" is emblematic of how Indigenous people are often regarded as tropes or placeholders to inhabit (or not)—robbing them of a present and a presence. I agree with Michelle Raheja that "Jean Baudrillard's work on the 'hyperreal' serves as a useful critical paradigm in thinking about how persistently these images bleed into the fabric of Native American lives off the page or screen as the Hollywood Indian has come to stand in for self-generated representations of Indigenous people."¹⁵ Although *How Tasty* is not a Hollywood film, it is still evident how, to the extent that its retellings of colonial history begin with the stereotype, it also traps "indigenous peoples in a timeless past, or as curiosities," thereby eliding the present-day lives and futures of Native Americans.¹⁶

And so, the image of the Tupinambá—or Tupiness as it were—becomes the trodden territory and contact zone for expansive colonial histories. J. Hillis Miller's influential deconstruction of the dialectic host/host provides an apt description of this triangular relationship:

Both readings, the “univocal” one [here, Staden’s captivity narrative] and the “deconstructive” one [dos Santos’s postmodern film], are fellow guests “beside the grain,” host and guest, host and host, host and parasite, parasite and parasite. The relation is a triangle, not a polar opposition. There is always a third to whom the two are related, something before them or between them, which they divide, consume, or exchange, across which they meet.¹⁷

Thus, the Tupi become this third “gift.” Both Staden and then dos Santos’s portrayals of the Tupi negotiate and negate the Native presence, while communally consuming and reproducing their facsimile. “The Native” is, thus, preceded by the model or, in other words, “born at the intersection of models.”¹⁸ As we will see, the film’s emphasis on mimicry and performance, especially in the scenes surrounding the final anthropophagic feast, further exposes this “intersection of models.”

In revealing the film’s foregone conclusion, the title of *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* invites analysis. Before we applaud the apparent subversiveness of this utterance, we should acknowledge that Sebiopepe never actually speaks these words in the film. In fact, the filmmakers only ventriloquize the utterance by using both a visual cue—a closeup on Sebiopepe’s eyes pauses to imply what is unspeakable—and a title card across the screen. By ascribing these thoughts to Sebiopepe as she crouches, masticating and mute, the film draws intense viewer attention to her appearance to see if in fact these words are written all over her face. Young notes, approvingly, that “it is the woman who literally eats the man,” and, given that *comer* (to eat) can also signify sexual penetration in Brazilian vernacular, the scene thereby represents a reversal of sex-gender hierarchies.¹⁹ Yet this critical interpretation of this important moment overlooks not only the film’s own penetrating gaze, but its telling censorship as well. If we allow ourselves, as liberal viewers, to be seduced by the spectacle of a woman apparently expressing her sexual preferences (or “taste”—*gostoso* also means “sexually desirable”), we ignore how the film is framing her as dependent upon the colonial other to complete and translate her thoughts. Furthermore, the Frenchman still gets the final word in the film when he assures viewers that his people avenge his death and the Tupinambá are annihilated.

While the title foregrounds the impending death of the Frenchman, the film nonetheless buries its final word—namely, the haunting decimation of the Tupinambá people. In other words, *How Tasty* stages the exceptional death of a colonial figure—“proving the law through transgression”—while simultaneously masking the unexceptional absence of any self-generated Native signifier.²⁰ In this way, the film’s ostensible reversal of power dynamics illustrates how, colonial “power can stage its own murder to rediscover a glimmer of existence and legitimacy,” if not redemption.²¹ “Playing Indian,” as Deloria argues, “has served as an ultimate tool for grabbing hold of such contradictions, and it has been constantly reimagined and acted out when Americans desire to have their cake and eat it too.”²² To be clear, I am not suggesting that dos Santos is secretly supportive of colonialism, but rather that the film insidiously perpetuates the erasure of Native peoples and the trope of the Vanishing Indian by the same means that it uses to draw attention toward them. The film ostensibly

challenges the colonialism of Staden's book by ironically juxtaposing image and text. For example, the film begins with a voiceover of an excerpt from a letter by the French colonialist Villegagon describing a mutineer throwing himself into the sea, while the film shows the man being pushed. Still, by undermining historical myths with ironic and self-reflexive gestures, the film seems to grant its own constructedness in order to legitimate itself, and, in the process, delegitimizes any sense of Native subjectivity.

Furthermore, the camera's "quasi-documentary distance" does not achieve the "making real of another" as critics have suggested, but rather offers audiences reckless gestures toward authenticity and an insider's peek at what never was.²³ For example, the film makes use of the actual Tupi language as its primary language, but without accountability. While it may constructively disarm Brazilian audiences to be forced to read subtitles in a Brazilian nationalist movie, the floating Tupi signifiers are also disarmed when their meaning is only imparted through colonial translation. Likewise, in accordance with Cinema Novo's aesthetic of discomfort, the (presumably Tupinambá) war cries played over etchings of cannibalism from Staden's text may assault or irritate audiences; however, like the Tupinambá bodies and language, this aural signifier has been severed from its signified meanings and now only refers to other, non-Native signifiers. In other words, the specific messages of the war cries become entirely generic and can only be interpreted as "war cries"—as loud, as irritating, as "Indian."

How Tasty brings the same sense of hyperreality and excess to the Tupi characters. For instance, upon being captured, the Frenchman begins to transform himself physically into a member of the tribe, painting his skin red and donning their hairstyle. The Frenchman's self-fashioning as a Native—"playing Indian"—underscores replicability and interchangeability of the Tupinambá characters in the film. After all, aren't they all "playing Indian"? Not unlike the Frenchman, the "Tupinambá" in the film are themselves fashioned as "Natives," partially mimicking Staden's representations, who were themselves mockups. In other words, the Frenchman is mimicking the Native characters while the "Natives" are mimicking a colonial image of Indigenous people. The Tupi are effectively reduced to a copy of a copy without an identifiable original.

Presumably to *become* more authentically Tupi, dos Santos requested that the cast remain nude throughout filming. This gesture toward realism parallels the film's insistence on sublimation, wholeness, and coming full circle, expressed directly in the film's fateful conclusion; ultimately, Pereira dos Santos undercuts any discomfort he might have intended from the nudity by systematically restoring hegemonic power relations. Yet ironically, and offensively, the supposed authenticity achieved through nudity in the film is highlighted by red body paint: as *The New York Times* critic observed, "The Indians are middle-class white Brazilians (ordinary men and exceptionally beautiful young women) stripped down and reddened up for the occasion."²⁴ Hyperexposed, the Tupi are presented as more nude than nude, more real than real. While Sebiopepe, the Frenchman's wife, is rehearsing the upcoming ritualized cannibalism scene, she describes how the women will paint the Frenchman's head red, and then smears red clay on his face, the same shade of red as her body, and rubs her cheek to his.

In blending their matching body paint in this dress rehearsal, the scene visually collapses the present and future and thereby emphasizes not only that the Brazilian actors playing the Tupinambá roles are already painted in redface, but also how in the colonial imaginary, Natives are always already painted. As simulacra, the Native figures in the film (whether parroted by the Frenchman or “played directly”) supersede any conceptions of an authentic Native referent. Like corpses in make-up on display in funeral homes, “they are already purged of their death, and better than when they were alive; more authentic, in the light of their model.”²⁵ If “real” Tupinambá are imagined as the color red, then these Tupi characters will be more red—more real. Of course, under this implosive logic, the Native people fundamentally “no longer resemble anything, except the empty figure of resemblance, the empty form of representation,” and so, dos Santos’s simulacra of indigeneity *consumes* the original.²⁶

Raheja also usefully clarifies how “performing in redface has allowed individuals to test out new and politically oppositional ideas and has helped to assuage white guilt about, among other things, the destruction of the environment.” This tactic is neither new, nor has it ended:

From the Boston Tea Party to New Age members of “rainbow tribes” to OutKast’s Indian-themed 2004 Grammy extravaganza to Ke\$ha’s ridiculous appearance in full headdress in 2010, these performances have served to bolster the popular misconception that it is acceptable, even admirable, to “play Indian” since few Indians exist to represent themselves. When European Americans “play Indian,” they project an edited version of their own colonial history on the body of the Indian.²⁷

This latter tenet is critical for understanding how even self-professed progressive artists, such as dos Santos, can come to embrace redface and to reconcile that choice. Moreover, the supposedly transgressive gesture of nearly constant male and female nudity in the film (a decision that barred the film from consideration at the Cannes Film Festival), does not desexualize the Tupinambá, as some critics have suggested.²⁸ Rather, it hypersexualizes the women and “emasculates” the men, all in order to castrate the Frenchman more fully and to make his fall more biting, the national allegory more trenchant.²⁹ To this end, the Tupi women are all young and attractive by traditional western standards and their nudity is consistently eroticized.

If the film’s teleology points to the Frenchman’s “tastiness,” then the film’s momentum arguably depends upon his wife’s sex appeal and appetite. Sebiopepe’s intense and voracious gaze into the camera, her “hunger” for sex, as well as the double entendre of the title (“*comer*” means “to penetrate” in Brazilian sexual slang)—all position her as a whore figure who is both desiring and aggressive. Perhaps most blatantly, the European coin in her navel attaches her to currency, rather than aspects of maternity and fertility—and currency received from another man, from another land. Whether or not Sebiopepe is aware of the coin’s exchange value, this ornamentation symbolically supplants a possible child after the eight months (just shy of full gestation) that she spends “wed” to the Frenchman. Additionally, her interest in the coin’s ornamental value, rather than its monetary value, seems to convey narcissistic or childish navel-gazing. In fact, the way the film portrays her “hunger” for sex, which

often seems to identify her with the infantile oral stage of Freudian psychosexual development, trivializes and reduces her aggression or potential power to a kind of toddler's temper tantrum.

The film amplifies and creates excess with a portrayal of intersecting lust, gluttony, greed, and narcissism that debases and collapses the Tupi women's sexuality even as the camera indulges in Sebiopepe's sex appeal. Consider, for example, the slow tight erotic shot of Sebiopepe peeling a banana for her husband, or the still and quiet mise-en-scene that swells with anticipation before she pounces on his neck. Here, despite the unerotic occasion, the "quasi-documentary" focuses and magnifies the woman's sexuality and "to-be-looked-at-ness."³⁰ As she lies in the cave, naked, and gyrates on the ground with a circle of men standing above her, the sexual excess clearly becomes "hysterical": the camera joins and directs the male gaze with a slow slight zoom towards her bouncing breasts. Yet, despite the excessive sexuality loaded onto the Tupi women, the film has no sex scenes. In the film, sexual signifiers are paradigmatically severed from reproduction and only refer to other signifiers of sex, such as orality. In this hyperreal representation of the Tupi, sexuality proliferates without sex as part of an economy of imitation and replication.

Some have marveled at the lack of a pornographic gaze, given the amount of nudity in the film. While it's true that there is no explicit sex in the movie, I argue that nonetheless, the film is often sexually objectifying. Unsurprisingly, the on-camera scenes that most closely approach depictions of sexual acts feature the Frenchman and Sebiopepe. As part of its sexual objectification, the film portrays the men as impotent, at least symbolically, which helps account for the lack of intercourse. Notably, as the Frenchman assimilates into the Tupi tribe, his emblematic necklace of nuts becomes gradually shorter, and eventually the Tupi chief severs them completely. Especially compared to the Tupi women's excitability, the Tupi men show no indication of sexual arousal, with male homosocial sexual innuendo limited to jeering between the French colonialists. Here, Dos Santos undercuts any discomfort he might have intended from the nudity by systematically restoring hegemonic power relations. Importantly, the impotent hypersexuality in the film is played against a powerless hyperactivity that can only be read as childish. Nina Gervassi-Navarro provides helpful political and cultural context for understanding this portrayal:

Rather than seek to open up one's territorial frontier to the European civilization in order to ensure progress as Sarmiento and Juan Bautista Alberdi among other Argentine intellectuals had advocated during the nineteenth century, the members of the Brazilian Cannibalist Movement considered the primitive to be the more pure and innocent cultural element. Barbarism in turn was identified with the corruption European modernization had imposed upon Brazilian culture. In this sense, Andrade advocated the return to a mythical past, an age of innocence that lay within the indigenous cultures of Brazil, to reclaim Brazilian identity.³¹

And so, in order to ostensibly flip the script and depict the Indigenous characters as "pure and innocent" (even as they hold the Frenchman captive and prepare to kill him), dos Santos casts the Tupinambá as puerile. In the film, for example, the men

play tug-of-war over the Frenchman's body, squabbling and calling dibs; the women and children excitably fawn over the Frenchman like a toy or pet; the men stand in the bushes, taunting and teasing the Frenchman for liking a girl; and the women giggle at the possibility of sex. Gervassi-Navarro's analysis clarifies the parallel ways in which, under settler colonialism, Native people are demeaned as primitive and underdeveloped and portrayed as innocent and childlike. Beyond the film's patronizing portrayal of Indigenous childishness and focus on their voracious appetites for human flesh and foreign ornaments, the Natives function as little more than props to uphold dos Santos's allegory. The childishness both excuses and exposes their lack of agency and authority, while their hyperactivity distracts viewers from their underlying powerlessness.

The film's interplay between sexualization and infantilization, specter and spectacle, are staged most sharply in the final scenes concerning the ritualized cannibalism. In particular, the film's construction of the Tupi as simulacra emerges most clearly as the couple rehearses their roles in the coming ceremony. The scene begins with the wife encountering her husband by the shore as he attempts to make gunpowder in order to secure his escape or buy time:

SEBIOPEPE. Why did you come here?

FRENCHMAN. I came to make gunpowder for my master.

SEBIOPEPE. It will not rain before the feast.

Immediately, Sebiopepe begins staging the film's foregone conclusion. First, she must teach him his part in the ceremony. Throughout the scene, Sebiopepe unwaveringly sticks to a fixed script. She stage-blocks and directs the Frenchman through the rehearsal, which oscillates between child's-play and grave seriousness, but she always upholds the framework.

According to Maggie Kilgour's study, the cannibalism ceremony carries ambiguous distinctions between *host* and *host* that parallel the biblical Last Supper. The ceremony "restores primal unity . . . ideally not through absolute identification but through the obfuscation of identity and rigid role-playing."³² Predicated on performance and imitation, Sebiopepe's dress rehearsal likewise complicates the terms of identification, and further dismembers the Tupi into parts (i.e., roles). For example, Sebiopepe asks the Frenchman if he will weep at the ceremony. He looks to her for a cue on how to answer, and asks, "What about you?" She replies, "Yes, I'll feel unhappy," as though *her* performance is a reflection of how she really "feel[s]." The fact that Sebiopepe does *not* weep during the actual ceremony reminds viewers that she too is performing a role—in this case the role of Nativeness. Trying to fill what he perceives as logical gaps between her words and her actions, the Frenchman responds, "But then you'll eat me?" True to form, Sebiopepe's demure affirmation is spoken in Tupi with a lowered nod, but significantly, this confirming utterance is not subtitled. Unlike every other line in the scene, it remains untranslated. Just as the Tupi themselves function in this film, even as this unspeakable act structures and sustains the story, it remains suspended, neither here nor there.

The scene's tension between inevitability and imitation, specters and spectacles, illustrates the Tupi's lack of past, present, or future. By asking Sebiopepe what he "must" do during the feast, the Frenchman seems to accept the given roles. Standing strong and trotting to the top of the rock, she ambiguously responds, "show yourself a brave." Leading by example, her instructions carry dual meanings—reveal yourself to be brave, but also appear to be brave. Arguably, the film creates the effect of Tupi subjectivity in precisely this interplay between revealing and appearing. In this scene, embodying her husband's role, the wife becomes his future-anterior (pretending to be him later pretending to be her pretending to be him) without an "original." Like the history presented in the film, they are caught in a loop and "must" be what never was. She dictates and demonstrates the Frenchman's roles ("You have to run and then all of us shall run after you"), in effect *playing* Tupi. Here, she embodies the act, play, spectacle, and specter the Tupi always already were.

Notably, her demonstration refers to other forms; for example, "Run fast *as a warrior does*. You can't escape but you'll be respected." Here, the juxtaposition of a stereotypical Native figure, "the warrior," with the ideal of a "model minority"—one who successfully assimilates while still marking a permanent foreignness—attests to the impossible paradox of emulating a simulacrum. On the one hand, this inverts the colonial logic (i.e., one can never be "Native enough," instead of the all-too-familiar slur that one can never be "quite white"). But on the other hand, the same is true of the Natives themselves. They are always both overdetermined as excessive and too Native, while simultaneously never Native enough and called upon to prove their Nateness. This doubling—modeling after a model—is analogous to the film's doubled use of redface: superficially, the red clay incorporates the Frenchman and marks his otherness, but ultimately, merges with the actors' own redface to represent the Tupi people as the mark of otherness.

So, when Sebiopepe explains to the Frenchman, "you have to dance for a while tied to a rope," and then pretends to lead him around by a rope, we should again note how clearly the the Tupi character models the union of performativity and captivity. In addition, we hear on the soundtrack imaginary diegetic music that underscores their self-conscious metadrama and merges the fictionality of this embedded play with that of the film itself. Similarly, when blocking the ritual scene, the wife positions the Frenchman near the top of a rock where a convenient white circle functions as a spotlight. Ultimately, of course, the director is playing with the fact that neither cannibalism scene is real. Consistent with the film's pseudodocumentary style, and with the goal of deconstructing certain historical narratives, this staging of a ceremonial performance inside the film destabilizes any sense of authenticity for the viewer. And so, as a result of being swept up in this play of performativity, the Tupinambá function as floating signifiers devoid of any actual Native referent. These postmodern aesthetics of semantic play, however, carry serious implications for Native peoples, many of whom were victims of genocide. Crucially, the postmodern politics of Cinema Novo and this film fail to consider how and why Native culture is so often appropriated while Native peoples are so often disregarded. As feminist critics such as Sabina Lovibond have pointed out, metafiction (and postmodernism more broadly) conveniently pronounced

the end of history at the same moment that feminism, postcolonialism, and critical race theory were working to recover lost histories.³³

To outline the next steps of the ceremony, Sebiopepe then drops back several steps and repositions herself from the director to both spectator and performer. Facing the Frenchman and announcing, “Cunhambebe will bring the ‘iverapema,” she mimes Cunhambebe’s role in a mock-serious tone. She informs the Frenchman, “You’ll be allowed to throw fruits and stones on those who are going to eat you.” Within the confines of the ceremony, the Frenchman is “allowed” to simulate futile resistance—just as she is “allowed” to simulate futile aggression within the confines of cinema. To be sure, in this shared fictionality, both resistance and aggression are an act: for a few moments, both like smiling children, she enacts the Frenchman by throwing stones at him and he enacts a Tupi participant by playfully batting them away and dodging. Then Sebiopepe quickly slips back into playing the role of Cunhambebe. The film’s childish, hyperactive portrayals of the Tupi not only distract viewers from their cultural and political disempowerment, but seem to offer a rationale for this lack grounded in individual traits of token characters. Moreover, the levity and brevity of this moment refigure Tupi struggle as a playful game, masking its actual seriousness and persistence. The reversal of the usual power dynamics between the “Indigenous” woman and the white man seems deployed to excuse this flippant treatment.

Sebiopepe might be instructing the Frenchman on how to become Tupi; however, as she reassumes Cunhambebe’s role, the film now exposes its own put-on parody of Tupiness:

SEBIOPEPE. Then Cunhambebe will say: “I’m here to kill you, because your people have killed many of ours.” “When I die my friends will come to revenge me.” Say it again!

FRENCHMAN. My friends will come to revenge me.

SEBIOPEPE. No . . . “When I die my friends will come to revenge me.”

FRENCHMAN. When I die my friends will come to revenge me.

Notably, the wife orders the Frenchman to “say it again,” although it is the first time he speaks his line. This dialogue creates awareness of the “re-venge” that has always already happened. As we have seen, in dos Santos’s hyperreal portrayal of the Tupi, signifiers only refer to other signifiers; likewise, in this economy of revenge, acts of violence that are specifically colonial only refer to other acts of violence, draining the supposedly postcolonial discourse of significance. The wife corrects her husband for leaving out “when I die” precisely because, according to the logic of revenge, it is that “thing always left over which obliges someone to give yet another gift, and its recipient yet another, and so on and on, the balance never coming right.”³⁴ This exchange insists “upon a nostalgia for total insideness, for a fable of identity involving the total identification with opposites.”³⁵ In order to maintain the “fable” of a Tupi identity in the film, the Frenchman must remain the outsider. That he gets his lines wrong and needs them fed to him, combined with this emphasis on his inevitable death (“when I die”) helps close the circuit of nostalgia around the Tupi people—carving out the “fable of their identity” through his exclusion.

After this initial run-through, the camera cuts to the Frenchman standing in a sacrificial pose, more earnestly performing his lines. He breaks in and out of character, but within the film's simulated space of "the Tupi," any gestures toward a nonperformative reality are empty. Even when the Tupi wife is supposedly not "in character," she still seems to be playacting, because the film itself seems to presume that Native people are always in character—always either mimicking or opposing other, non-Native representations such as Staden's. As the surrogate director, the wife positions the Frenchman lying on his back on top of a rock and then crawls on top of him in an apparently "dominant position." Yet of course dos Santos, the real director, has directed the actions of both characters in the scene; indeed, *How Tasty* uses the Tupi as props in its own storytelling just as the wife positions the Frenchman as a prop in her staged performance. Significantly, the film diminishes Sebiopepe's position of authority as merely untamed drives or an uncontrollable appetite.

Dos Santos's presence is also felt in a shifting of agency in Sebiopepe's description of the ending ceremonial acts: "Women will pour hot water on your body; both your arms and legs will be cut . . . and everybody will eat a piece." While subjects "the women pour" and "everybody will eat" are active, the act of "cutting" is pushed to the passive voice. This construction erases the Tupi as the subjects and focuses on the Frenchman's body, reflecting how the film in general omits Tupi subjectivity in favor of depicting their function as signifiers. Again, amid the sedimentary layers of performance that help to narrate this "fable of identity involving the total identification with opposites" (with postcolonial artists reenvisioning colonial imaginaries), the film disavows and supplants any original Native referent.³⁶ To realize that it is only the symbolic functions of the Tupi people and anthropophagism that structure *How Tasty* illuminates why the scene conflates communion, cannibalism, and sex to reflect a sense of unity and sublimation that perpetuates Cinema Novo's faulty logic that they must eat or be eaten.

After this detailed rehearsal, the final cannibalism ceremony seems contrived; the precession of the model effectively makes both scenes appear simulated. In the case of *How Tasty*, of course, neither ceremony is authentic or original, and the film is self-consciously reworking Staden's preceding model. In the final ceremony, the Frenchman fails to speak and is fed lines by his wife, but he also seems to remember new lines without understanding their fateful significance. This trickery on the part of the director seems "to make the ends coincide with the means, create an enclosure . . . balance the equation."³⁷ In dos Santos's neat metaphor, cannibalism and European encounters with the Tupi create a sense of teleology, which is *re*-remembering itself again in modern Brazil. Yet, in order to keep his metaphor neat, dos Santos un-encounters the Tupi and severs them from his system of signification.

Importantly, the camera zooms out when the chief finally strikes the Frenchman, pulling back from the violence against the colonial figure and effectively reducing it in scale. Then, supporting Diana Fuss's assertion that "violence encoded in cinematic form finds its most dramatic articulation with the historical invention of the close-up," the camera cuts quickly to Sebiopepe's eyes.³⁸ Next, the camera pans over the faces of Tupi men; their mouths are still, but the heads are accompanied by the sounds of chanting.

This ghostly effect “decapitates the subjects” while simultaneously documenting or memorializing their empty form,³⁹ accurately reflecting how, in Baudrillard’s analysis, “these savages are posthumous: frozen, cryogenized, sterilized, protected to death, they have become referential simulacra.”⁴⁰ The director’s shot of the empty beach, set to the lingering chanting, is no less impoverished than the dance scenes or the “Last Supper.”

I have been arguing that in this film, the Tupi are always frozen, always disappeared—in Raheja’s words, “spectral entities” or “apparitional figures.”⁴¹ Despite the film’s utter dismissal of the Tupi as people and its use of them as mere abstract figures, in a cursory moment of silence that is a side note before the definitive “The End,” dos Santos displays an intertitle that appeals to viewers’ empathy for these spectral Tupi. As Kilgour clarifies, such pathetic appeals “can be used as a weapon against the other as well, a draining of its difference,” adding, “All ideals of identification border on colonial discourse, in which the inside/outside opposition is not escaped but covertly reversed.”⁴² The pathetic appeal of dos Santos’s intertitle resorts to lingering on the words of the Portuguese governor general of colonial Brazil, Mem de Sá: “I fought on the sea so that no Tupiniquin remained alive. Laid along the shore . . . the dead covered almost a league.” This side note confirms that *How Tasty* is not invested in the Tupi, but merely their ghosts. In the end, the film’s metaphor or sublimation could not recuperate the loss, which becomes a remainder that exceeds and overwhelms the film.

As spectacular specters, both hyper-present and entirely absent, the filmmakers use the Tupinambá as the prologue to their present-day political struggles—“a necessary detour of meaning”—or a means toward their own self-actualization.⁴³ Taking cannibalism as both the subject and methodology, the film consumes and serves the Tupi in a metaphor of sublimation that undermines its ostensibly anticolonial position. But as Ismail Xavier reminds us, “Allegory is not a one-way process” and the stories told about the Tupinamba are not exhaustive.⁴⁴ Perhaps, the filmmakers’ most duplicitous incorporation of the Tupinambá is their implied alliance or consent in telling this story, in hosting this event.

NOTES

1. Oswalde de Andrade, “Cannibalist Manifesto,” trans. Leslie Bary, *Latin American Literary Review* 19, no. 38 (1991): 38–47, 38.

2. Virginia Higginbotham, “Fast Frames: Insights into Mexican, Latin American, and Brazilian Cinema,” *Latin American Research Review* 40, no. 3 (2005): 273–82, 282. Also, it is worth noting the obvious anachronism and irony of making a “quasi-documentary” about the sixteenth century.

3. Andrea Smith is especially clarifying here: “Borrowing from the work of Scott Morgensen and Hiram Perez, the confession of privilege, while claiming to be antiracist and anticolonial, is actually a strategy that helps constitute the settler or white subject. In Morgensen’s analysis, the settler subject constitutes itself through incorporation (or what Silva would term “engulfment”). Through this logic of settlement, settlers become the rightful inheritors of all that was Indigenous—land, resources, Indigenous spirituality, and culture. Thus, Indiogeneity is not necessarily framed as antagonistic to the settler subject; the Native is instead supposed to disappear into the project of settlement. The settler becomes the new and improved version of the Native, thus legitimizing and naturalizing the settler’s

claims to this land. Within the context of settler colonialism, Native peoples are the affectable others who become incorporated into settler subjectivity in order to establish settler claims to self-determination. Native peoples, by contrast, do not require self-determination because they are nothing more than the raw materials—the affectable others—of the colonial project.” See Andrea Smith, “Native Studies at the Horizon of Death: Theorizing Ethnographic Entrapment and Settler Self-Reflexivity,” in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 218.

4. Michael Wintroub, “Cannibal Histories: Some Comments on Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman*,” *Fiction and Film for Scholars of France: A Cultural Bulletin* 3, no. 5 (March 2013), <https://h-france.net/fffh/classics/cannibal-histories-some-comments-on-nelson-pereira-dos-santoss-how-tasty-was-my-little-frenchman/>.

5. Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (Yale University Press, 1998), 158.

6. Randal Johnson, “Toward a Popular Cinema: An Interview with Nelson Pereira dos Santos,” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 1, s.n. (1982): 225–38, 229.

7. Lisa Shaw and Stephanie Dennison, *Brazilian National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2007), “Cinema Novo,” 81.

8. Johnson, “Toward a Popular Cinema,” 225.

9. Theodore Robert Young, “Anthropophagy, Tropicalismo, and *Como era gostoso meu frances*,” paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association, Palmer House, Chicago, IL, September 1998, 5.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Michelle Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native American in Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2010), 15.

12. *Ibid.*, 6.

13. Wintroub, “Cannibal Histories,” 229.

14. Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 8.

15. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism*, 36.

16. Patricia Pierce Erikson, *Voices of a Thousand People: The Makah Culture and Research Center* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 16. For further discussion on how this is a product of a Western temporality that traps Indigenous people in the past as relics of a bygone time, see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 232.

17. J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host,” *Critical Inquiry* 3, no. 3 (1977): 444.

18. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 17.

19. Young, “Anthropophagy,” 8.

20. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 19.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 157.

23. Higginbotham, “Fast Frames,” 282.

24. Roger Greenspun, “Screen: *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman*,” *The New York Times*, April 17, 1973.

25. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 11.

26. *Ibid.*, 45.

27. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism*, 139.

28. For example, Roger Greenspun writes, "*How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* is the first absolutely non-exploitative (not nonerotic) movie I have seen to require almost total nudity from its cast, both sexes." See Greenspun, "Screen: *How Tasty*."
29. To be clear, I am not subscribing to the logic of emasculation, but rather suggesting that the film traffics in this colonial and patriarchal concept.
30. "Quasi-documentary" appears in Higginbotham, "Fast Frames," 282; "to-be-looked-at-ness" is quoted from Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (New York: Blackwell, 2000), 487.
31. Nina Gervassi-Navarro, "Turning Cannibalism Inside Out: Re-Reading the Chronicles in *Como era Gostoso O meu Frances*," in *Bridging Continents: Cinematic and Literary Representations of Spanish and Latin American Themes*, ed. Nora Glickman and Alejandro Varleri (Tempe: Arizona State University Press, 2005), 14 [*Chasqui; revista de literatura latinoamericana* 35, special issue no. 2].
32. Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 15.
33. Lovibond asks, "How can anyone ask me to say goodbye to 'emancipatory metanarratives' when my own emancipation is still such a patchy, hit-and-miss affair?" Sabina Lovibond, "Feminism and Postmodernism," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 395.
34. Miller, "The Critic as Host," 446.
35. Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism*, 10.
36. Miller, 446.
37. Kilgour, 241.
38. Diana Fuss, "Serial Killing, Close Up," in *Media Spectacles*, ed. Marjorie B. Garber, Jann Matlock, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 1993), 189.
39. *Ibid.*, 191.
40. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 8.
41. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism*, 107.
42. Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism*, 246.
43. *Ibid.*, 13.
44. Unfortunately, "we are all familiar with the typical mobilization of allegorical narratives in which the lives of particular individuals are presented as figuring the foundational moment or the destiny of a group, or in which the recapitulation of the past is taken as a disguised discussion of present dilemmas." See Ismail Xavier, "Historical Allegory," in *A Companion to Film Theory*, ed. Toby Miller and Robert Stam (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 334.