

AMERICAN CULTURE IN BRAZIL: THE SEARCH FOR STRATEGIES OF READING

Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei

Introduction

My purpose in this paper is to discuss two Brazilian interpretations of American Culture which I believe are representative of two strategies of reading. The first of these interpretations was produced by Alceu Amoroso Lima after he visited the United States in the early 50's; the second by Henrique Souza Filho, better known as Henfil, who also visited the United States some twenty years after Lima.

Alceu Amoroso Lima (1893-1984) got a degree in law in Rio de Janeiro and then studied in Europe in 1913, when he met Graga Aranha and became interested in the Modernist revolution in art and literature. After 1919 he gradually builds up his reputation as a student of modernism and as a critic of literature and culture. In 1929, after arguing for some time with Jackson de Figueiredo, he is converted to Catholicism and becomes the most important representative of Catholic intellectuals in Brazil and one of the most influential critics of our literature and culture. His *Collected Works*, published in 1954, comprise thirty-five volumes dealing with literature, literary criticism, sociology, religion, politics, philosophy, history and economics. In the last volume of the *Collected Works* Alceu discusses *The American Reality (A Realidade Americana)*, which is the text I chose to read as representative of a particular strategy in interpreting American Culture.

Henrique Souza Filho's approach to American Culture is as different from Lima's as one could possibly wish, as he is a different kind of writer and has a different education and different readers. Perhaps I can briefly suggest the nature of this difference by saying that whereas Lima is the Catholic conservative intellectual writing about culture for the elite and the ruling classes, the "mineiro" Henrique Souza Filho is the cartoonist who came from Belo Horizonte to Rio where he worked for the *Pasquim* in the company of humorists like Jaguar, Millor and

Ziraldo. Of course he is also the creator of *The Mad Monks (Os Fradinhos)*, the story of the irreverent and perverse short monk who is always nagging at the saintly tall monk. The cartoons were published in Brazil and also, for a while, in the United States, where Henfil lived from 1973 to 1975. Upon his return to Brazil in late 1975 he writes the *Diary of a Cockroach (Diário de um Cucaracha)*, which is the text I chose to interpret as representative of a second strategy in reading American Culture.

Alceu Amoroso Lima: The Strategy of Complementarity

Alceu Amoroso Lima goes to the United States in 1951 and returns to Brazil in 1953. During this period he travels widely in the country, gives lectures in universities and other institutions, and perhaps most importantly, occupies the position of Director of the Cultural Department of the Pan-American Association. He would later return to the United States, in 1959, as Professor of Brazilian Studies in the University of New York. But *The American Reality*, written immediately after his first visit, remains his basic work on the culture of Americans. The book is, as the author himself explains, an "impressionist interpretation" of America, that is, an interpretation that aims at the elaboration of his own subjective reactions to what he sees. "I have not studied the United States," he says. "I have not really been involved in American life... I spent two years involved in occupations which made it impossible for me to study in depth this incredible laboratory of the future."¹ And yet he had to write out of a "compelling necessity of expression" produced by the power of what he sees around him: "The United States," he continues, "represents a reality that is so alive, it invades our soul in such a pervasive way and by means of impressions so varied and powerful that we are compelled to tell others what we think and feel about it in order to get rid of an obsession. This book is an act of liberation" (pp.223-224).

The epistemological basis for the production of this kind of discourse on American Culture is obviously Romantic in nature, as it results from the author's desire to open himself to powerful impressions which will eventually be expressed. Lima is very much aware of the significance of the Romantic epistemologic context for the defini-

tion of the grounds and limits of the knowledge he is about to submit to his reader. In his "Introduction" he explicitly refers to Wordsworth's theory of poetic expression as applicable to his own writing. "In the following pages," he says, "what is recorded about the friendly foreigner is not a response produced immediately after the observation of the fact, but rather a commentary written in the removed quietness of impressions experienced again from a distance, just like the feeling transformed into poetry described by Wordsworth: 'emotion recollected in tranquility'." The book is therefore an attempt to put into practice the romantic belief that self and nature, imagination and reality stand in interdependent and coherent relation and that, therefore, in the production of knowledge the expression of reality is inseparable from the expression of the self. In the case of Lima, his expression of America is inseparable from his expression of his own self.

Who is then the self that expresses both himself and America? Alceu Amoroso Lima is the Catholic, European-educated Brazilian for whom the world we live in should ideally be thought of as a totality resulting from the harmonious integration of individual differences by means of complementarity. It is from this perspective of the universal as the integration of particulars, or of multitude in unity, or of *discordia concors* that the "American reality" must be understood and evaluated. The perspective of course pre-determines the steps to be taken in the interpretive act: first to see particular differences and then their integration. Thus America, when compared to Europe, is simultaneously different from and an extension of its origin. This notion of differences co-existing in a continuum is beautifully expressed in chapter one, when the author recollects in tranquility his arrival in New York. From the ship on a cloudy morning he sees the towers of Manhattan and observes that, to the left of the towers and buildings, the Statue of Liberty was hardly visible. "The 19th Century symbol," he remarks, "had disappeared in the confrontation with the symbol of the 20th Century. As if freedom had been swallowed by power" (p.17). This shift of emphasis from freedom to power leads gradually to a reflection on America as an expansion of the European concept of feudal power: "Facing New York I was reminded of Saint Geminian, between Siena and Florence. I was irresistibly reminded of its towers built close together on top of a small hill, remainings... from a past of

glory and... symbols of feudal power in medieval Europe... Now, on the other side of the Atlantic, facing the most powerful nation of the 20th Century, the center of technology and wealth and of the power of the new feudal lords of capitalist economy, what I saw was only, as if viewed through a magnifying glass, the old stone tower of that hill in the Middle Ages" (p.18). America is then different from Europe but the difference is of degree, not kind, as the dream and the achievement of power is only magnified.

The United States is then an extension and a complement of Europe. But this complementarity in degree is perhaps of secondary significance, the most important being complementarity in kind. The latter, Lima claims, exists or should exist between the Americas and, more particularly, between the United States and Brazil. Here again the interpretive procedure depends on finding differences which should eventually merge. Lima takes pains to find these differential aspects of American culture in his observations on the American people and on their education, economy, culture, politics, and religion. In the final chapter most of the differences found between American life and culture and their Brazilian counterparts are discussed in terms of complementary forces producing balance, unity and harmony. "What I want to stress in concluding these pages of liberation," he says, "is that we are two complementary nations, two civilizations in which there is a balance of opposing forces. We should not therefore oppose each other, or imitate each other, but complement each other, as we have what they lack and they have what we need" (p.227). He then proceeds to discuss briefly the list of these opposed and complementary qualities.

Perhaps the central opposition in Lima's list of complementary qualities is expressed in the duality of *ethos* and *logos*. A civilization of *ethos* is a civilization in which all thought must be directed towards action. *Ethos* is *productive* thought in the sense that it produces not only behaviour, but also machines, cars, televisions, that is, *ethos* ultimately generates technology. A civilization of *logos*, on the other hand, tends to see thought in itself, independently of its relation to action, as a value. Thus a civilization of *logos* privileges contemplation rather than action, the brain and its cerebral constructions rather than the hand which ultimately needs the brain only as a guide to the correct produc-

tion of things. American civilization, as opposed to Brazilian civilization, is characterized by the emphasis not on the brain that thinks, but on the hand that constructs and produces. Although as a Catholic Lima must necessarily believe that in the ideal civilization logos should be viewed as hierarchically superior to ethos, he realizes that the excessive emphasis on one of these polarities would inevitably lead to distortions. Thus whereas the predominance of ethos and pragmatism leads naturally to materialism, selfishness, exploitation and imperialism, the predominance of logos, contemplation and lyricism leads naturally to anarchy, laziness, poverty, political chaos and in short to everything that the failure to exercise the practical way of life can bring to the social organization. These two opposing cultural forces should therefore be complementary: if there is an excess of logos in Brazil, American pragmatism could be of some help to Brazilians, and if there is an excess of ethos in the United States, Americans would do well to learn about the possible advantages inherent in the Brazilian logos.

In addition to ethos and logos, several other oppositions are discussed by Lima as complementary cultural forces which should be well-balanced both in individuals and in society as a whole. Thus whereas the American man is naturally interested in facts and in individual, separate things, Brazilians are naturally inclined to abstractions and generalizations, to general principles and final conclusions. Whereas Americans are eminently rational, organized and capable of planning for the future, Brazilians are more passionate than rational, more heart than head, more feeling than thought. If in America the social unit is the individual, in Brazil the family is the social unit and the individual exists only when explained in terms of his position in a family. As a result, ours is a country of persons, theirs is a nation of individuals, the person being characterized by the emotional, personal, human attention we devote to him, the individual being only that social unit as a part of the State that has the right to be treated as equal to everybody. Persons and individuals, moreover, use language differently, as the person tends to be an extrovert, the individual an introvert. Americans use language precisely and concisely, never getting lost in digressions; we, on the other hand, tend to love digressions, rhetoric, without much concern for the distinction between what is essential and

what is accidental or ornamental. Ours, in short, is a nation of poets, theirs, of prose writers. The citizen of the ideal nation, in Lima's view, should of course be both a poet and a prose writer.

The complementary forces in the individual traits of character of Brazilians and Americans, Lima claims, correspond to similar forces in the two social groups. The strength of Americans as a social group lies in their ability to produce specialized, practical knowledge; ours lies in our ability to generalize and expand imaginatively our view of things. We tend to see knowledge as superficial erudition, as the superficial knowledge of many things. Americans on the other hand tend to privilege specific knowledge of particular facts in depth. This knowledge of particulars, moreover, is in the United States an asset to planning for the future and for controlling the future, whereas ours is a civilization of the present, without any careful planning for the future. The lack of purpose and objective, the preference for the enjoyment of the possibilities of the present are evidenced even in our walking habits, as opposed to the walking habits of other nations. Lima remarks that a foreign military instructor had found it difficult to teach Brazilian soldiers how to march in a parade because their march was too musical, they marched as if they were dancing. We tend to walk as if we had no purpose, enjoying curves and digressions; Americans on the other hand have a stiff walk and go straight ahead in search of their objectives. We love freedom without restraint (somehow, one is tempted to say, "order and progress" does not quite describe our way of life); Americans believe in freedom within the law. Once again, of course, each of these opposing qualities is viewed as a force of integration, not of separation.

Lima's view of the Americas as complementary cultures and as extensions of Europe is quite openly idealist and depends, as I have observed earlier, on a Romantic theory of knowledge in which the eye that sees half-creates what it sees. This idealist view recollected in tranquility deconstructs and reconstructs the discourse of the real and finally produces a theory based, as I tried to show, on the principles of difference and complementarity. The activity of deconstruction and reconstruction implies a careful selection (whether conscious or unconscious on the part of the writer) in which what does not fit is excluded. Naturally the convenient inclusion and exclusion of "facts" is a

basic procedure in every discursive formation which must necessarily produce ideology by cancelling the "irrelevant facts." In Lima, however, the procedure of exclusion is never concealed from the reader or explained by means of an appeal to the necessity of dismissing what is irrelevant. The text reveals quite openly the underlying ideological forces by referring specifically to a theory of knowledge (Impressionism and Romantic epistemology) in which subjectivity is of primary importance. It is nevertheless a kind of subjectivity that cannot be dismissed as unacceptable because it is often limited to the function of ordering imaginatively the material to be interpreted and because, in accounting for the discourse of the real, there is the honest intention to include as much as possible. "I have tried in this essay" [on the United States], he says, "to be objective and to speak both the good things that I found there, and about the errors and dangers that I believe are part of the American civilization" (p.245). There is evidence in his text of this fundamental intellectual honesty in one brief fragment that should perhaps have been excluded from his idealist theses, but was not. This (perhaps involuntary) inclusion of what should be excluded is all the more important because, in a way, it questions the validity of the pervading thesis of complementarity which characterizes the book.

In one of the final paragraphs of the book the thesis of complementarity is presented as a force unifying humanism and pragmatism:

We should preserve our *humanism* as the basic trait of our culture and use their *pragmatism* in its healthy, strong and uncontaminated aspects. It is exactly because we are two complementary civilizations that there is, between us, a natural alliance which we must cultivate and develop. Let us not imitate, then, the United State if we wish, as we should, to live in close connection with them. It is not by means of our similarities, but by our differences that we should approach each other. (p.245)

And yet, a few paragraphs before this moving and optimistic plea for complementarity, there is a disturbing statement which I think functions as a powerful deconstructive force questioning not only the previous quotation, but the main thesis of the book as a whole:

Let us have no illusions. No American will ever come to Brazil, or to any other country in Latin America, to search for models of civilization. They have gone too far in a direction in which there is no way back. They are too big. Too strong. Too egocentric (just like any other civilization), despite their undeniable heterocentric qualities. (p.243)

This last passage is repressed in the text because it is no more than a brief, displaced remark lost in the middle of a pervasive, overwhelming argument in defense of complementarity. It is an almost invisible part of a text in which the main thematic force to be made visible involves the belief in the possibility of differences coexisting in unity. If all texts can be thought of in terms of a *theme* which represents its main concern and a *horizon* or *horizons* which represent its hardly visible, supplementary and secondary concerns, Lima's remark on American arrogant self-sufficiency is certainly a far-away, hardly visible horizon. And yet, when we concentrate our attention on this horizon, or when we try to bring it closer to our eyes perhaps with the help of a magnifying glass, it becomes a powerful deconstructive force threatening the stability of the text as a whole not only because it suggests that complementarity is impossible, as only one of a pair is willing to complement, but because there is an ominous suggestion of the reason for the impossibility: powerful, arrogant nationalism. This almost invisible undercurrent of meaning which is suddenly made visible by a deconstructive reading makes Lima's text ambivalent: it can no longer be said to mean only, as was arguably the author's intention, the belief in the possibility of complementarity. It means both this belief and its opposite, the certainty that complementarity is impossible. Or, to put it differently, it means both the belief in complementarity and co-existence and the belief that only supplementarity exists, the idea of the supplement implying always the notion of a secondary, less important addition, by means of subordination, like the supplement of a dictionary.²

At this point one begins to realize the conditions of possibility of a discourse of complementarity and what it must exclude if it wants to be consistent. It depends for its existence and self-consistency on the exclusion of the notion of power and of relations of subordination based on power. Cultures may or may not be complementary in terms of value but, as the relations between these values is always determined

by power, values tend to be either supplementary or central and essential. Lima realized perhaps unwillingly that cultures tend to make irrelevant the idea (or ideal) of complementarity because they are always involved in a process of exclusion. By means of exclusion, as Edward Said has reminded us not long ago, "cultures designate and isolate their opposites, and its obverse... [they] designate and valorize their own incorporative authority".³ Cultures, in other words, are always at pains to make other cultures into supplements. This possibility of reading American culture (or any culture) in terms of the notion of supplementarity, which is a repressed thematic horizon in Lima's text, becomes the central concern of Henfil's interpretation of the United States.

Henfil: The Strategy of Supplementarity

Henrique Souza Filho goes to the United States in 1973 and stays there for two years. During this period he writes to a few friends approximately six hundred letters which, upon his return to Brazil, he publishes in book form. The *Diary of a Cockroach* presents these letters in chronological order, from October 4, 1973 through June 30, 1975.⁴ In addition to the letters, the book contains his interview to the *Pasquim*, in which he explains among other things his reasons for visiting the U.S., a translation of a brief article by Michael T. Kaufman, published in *The New York Times* (Sunday, March 1, 1975), in which there is a reference to the only person, among 6,000 foreigners living in the United States, who had decided to return to his native country, and a letter from James F. Andrews, the Editor of the Universal Press Syndicate, who congratulates Henfil for his happy return to Brazil.

One does not have to read Kafka's *Metamorphosis* in order to understand Henfil's cockroach, although that could prove to be an interesting possibility of interpretation. But one should perhaps also avoid dismissing the book as just another piece of humour of the kind to be expected from the *Pasquim* group, even though the book is also that, as the very choice of two alternative covers shows: there is an edition for men, in which the cover displays a cockroach, and an edition for women, in which the picture of the cockroach is covered by a blotch on which one reads "special edition for women." I believe that Henfil is

not just poking fun at everything, including himself. There is an undercurrent of scious, political and ethical criticism directed toward cross-cultural relations which is worth examining. And there is also a strategy for reading American culture not in terms of complementary, as in the case of Lima, but of supplementarity.

As the title shows, Henfil's book differs from Lima's both in terms of the perspective adopted to look at America, as he writes a diary, and in terms of the strategy of reading, as he adopts the point of view of the cockroach. The discourse of a diary written from day to day is related to experience in a more immediate way than a recollection in tranquility. Whereas the latter tends to make more visible the intellectual pattern to be imposed on experience, the former tends to give emphasis to a temporal pattern in which succession and evolution in time become paramount. Henfil's book is thus a chronological record of what he sees around him and of what he learns from what he sees with the eyes of a cockroach: the initial pleasure of learning about a different civilization, about the orderly traffic as opposed to the chaotic traffic in Rio, about the freedom of the press as opposed to the censorship of the revolutionary years in Brazil; the painful experience of learning how to deal with American hospitals in his search to be cured of his hemophilia, which was his second main reason to go to the States; the awkward experience of dealing with the Universal Press Syndicate in order to publish his comic strips in English, which was his first and most important reason to visit America. This progression in time implies a process of learning that finally amounts to the discovery of the relevance of the metaphor of the cockroach as a perspective for interpreting the relationship between dominant and dominated cultures. In this context, the notion of power which was repressed in Lima's idealist view becomes essential.

Henfil first explains the word "cucaracha" in a letter dated December 5, 1973, in which he is at pains to understand the relationship between Americans and other nationalities living in the U.S. The word should properly be applied only to the Puerto Ricans, as they seem "to breed like cockroaches" (p.91), but Henfil considers all Latin-Americans as cockroaches. "Brazilians living in the States," he says, "try hard to be different from the Puerto Ricans and so they look down on them. But that is because they feel the Puerto Ricans are our

cousins. Same blood, same culture, same smile, language is almost the same" (p.92). Surprisingly enough, Henfil does not behave differently: "I criticize these racist Brazilians here," he adds, "but I find myself practicing the same kind of rejection" (p.92). He then proceeds to tell the story of how embarrassed he was to be stopped at the entrance of an apartment building because, dressed in his rabbit fur coat, he looked exactly like a Puerto Rican.

Henfil seems at this point to be trying to give the reader the image of a cockroach, who is of course the author of the *Diary*, and who is ashamed of his cockroachness. He will later exploit this trend of humor by saying that, in order to go to the supermarket, he would take a shower and then get dressed up in order not to be taken for a Puerto Rican employee and to be asked to fetch canned food from the top shelves (p.265). But I believe there is more to this than humor. With the metaphor of the cockroach Henfil is first describing what I would like to call the irreducible difference of the supplement as opposed to the reducible difference of the complement in Lima. The *otherness* of the cockroach makes merging and integration hardly possible, probably impossible. The production of the universal by the aggregation of complementary particulars does not occur. For the cockroach as a symbol of irreducible difference in the relation with the other, in this case American culture, takes one or two mutually exclusive forms, the first resulting in a distorted kind of universality in which the stronger culture absorbs and cancels otherness, the second resulting in the radical assertion of separate identities.

The cockroach must then choose between the defense of cockroachness and the surrender of it. The surrender occurs when, for example, Henfil gets dressed to go to the supermarket, or when he feels compelled to answer "yes" to all questions in order not to feel inferior for not having a good command of English. It is this kind of surrender that, according to Henfil, characterizes the younger generation of Japanese in New York. "They manage," he remarks, "even more than the Americans, to have on them all the American products all at once: rayban glasses, Marlboro cigarettes, Lee jackets and slacks, digital watches, hippy medallions, cowboy boots, tape-recorders and a thousand other electronic gadgets. They look like imported robots" (p.90). The resistance occurs when, for example, Henfil decides he

must return to Brazil (even though he could have stayed in the U.S.) because if he decided to stay he would have to change his name from Henrique to Henry and to become a xerox copy of an American. As he writes a friend on March 28, 1975, "I can stay here, and it could work. I know that. But I will have to change my name to Henry. After all this effort, I will become a xerox copy. Nobody can really become a native American. The foreigner has this immense capacity to assimilate only what is worst in other people's culture. It is not surprising that there should exist this enduring prejudice against the foreigner, as the Bible shows. Americans are more nationalistic than any country in the world. In this nationalism lies their strength. That is what I have learned, and I know it now. That is what really helped me to grow wise. It is impossible to be a foreigner for long. I am coming back, and I am starved. Of food, of people, of music, of stupidity, of the Brazilian way" (p.274). This is also the kind of resistance that Henfil sees in the Blacks, in the Italians and in the Jews living in the U.S., as they seem to him to be minorities that, unlike the Japanese, refuse to be Americanized and somehow manage to retain their blackness, their Jewishness, their Italianness. "The Italians", he jokes, "have even succeeded in changing American culture and society. They introduced and made widely known in America the methods of the Mafia (see Watergate), and now the bastards are going into politics. They used to give money to politicians so that the *cosa nostra* would develop without hindrances, but now they have their own politicians, and one day they will make an Italian president, as they dream" (p.90). There is of course in all this the exaggeration of humour and comedy, but there is also a serious, perhaps radical defense of irreducible, supplementary difference.

The choice between the surrender of otherness and the defense of otherness is then the choice that Henfil has to face as a man in the United States. But it is also and primarily the choice he has to face as an artist, although in this case it takes him more time to realize the necessity of choice, as the artist, more than the man, feels compelled to believe that in art at least the dream of complementarity might be actualized. When he decides to go to the United States, Henfil is already well known in Brazil as a cartoonist. But he wants more, as he frankly admits in his interview to the *Pasquim*: he wants to be known internationally. And if one wants to be internationally known, he thinks, there

are at least two requirements one must fulfill. First, one must be good enough to make one's art product universal. Second, one must also find the means to make this universal product known in as many parts of the world as possible. "My aim in going to the States," he confesses, "is to make my comic strips known in the world" (p.63). Moreover, he is convinced his art is universal in its appeal to the public: "What I am taking there, from Brazil, is also a little universal. It is universal because it is a social problem. Social problems are international" (p.61), as "the poor and the oppressed in Harlem, New York have a lot in common with the poor and the oppressed in the dry lands (caatingas) of the Northeast in Brazil" (p.62). As for making his universal product known, the U.S. is of course the ideal place, as America has developed an effective machine to sell anything written or printed all over the world. "I knew," he says, "that Snoopy was published in all newspapers in the world, and this made it possible for its creator to have the pride to see the image of Snoopy on the spacecraft that landed on the moon, not to mention the fabulous mansion with swimming pool, skiing track, a golf court and about three hundred letters to answer every day.... I wanted all this because I wanted also to spread my ideas around the world, to speak about my social ideas on the basis of equality. Using the same machine, the same medium. And then? Then to make animated cartoons. I could already imagine the sound track of Zeferino. The "Tico-tico no Fuba" would be used for the entrance of Grazna, dancing and showing the introductory words: 'Henfil presents - Canudos II!'... The anti-Disney shown on TVs, CBS, ABC, BBC, Rede Globo. Ha! ha! ha!" (p.211).

All this is of course a dream, as Henfil would eventually realize: the dream of becoming like Schulz because he presumably could, just like Schulz, combine the universal and the particular. If Schulz can sell his American comic strips all over the world because they are universal, why is it that a Brazilian cannot do the same with his Brazilian comics, for the same reason? This is the question that Henfil seems to ask. As in the case of Lima, the question implies the belief in complementarity. In the best of all possible worlds, Zeferino could complement Snoopy, or perhaps Donald Duck. In the real world, however, things do not quite work that way. Otherness tends to remain strange and excluded, difference tends to remain irreducible. Alceu Amoroso

Lima, as I have tried to show, does not quite realize this, perhaps because the impossibility of achieving complementarity is unacceptable for him. Henfil, on the other hand, understands it very quickly in his attempt to publish *The Mad Monks* in English. He learns that his belief in complementarity had been simply naive and that the proper understanding of the notion of universality could only take place in a context of power. This double understanding leads him to see that, as in the case of the man as cockroach, in the case of the artist as cockroach the choice is always between the surrender of otherness or the defense of it. Like Henfil the man, Henfil the artist finally chooses the latter.

Henfil's account of his attempt to publish *The Mad Monks* in English suggests that, after a disappointing failure in the beginning of his American career, he got very close to what could be considered at least moderate success. Immediately after signing the contract with The Universal Press Syndicate, which would be in charge of distributing his strips to the newspapers, Henfil prepares 72 strips out of which the Syndicate chooses 17, the remaining 55 being considered either impossible to sell or "sick". Henfil's response is recorded in a letter dated September 22, 1974: "Fiquei sick da vida, mano" (I got really pissed off), he says (p.210). He adds that he thought the strips were so clean, so shy, that they would be considered weak in the *Pasquim*. Nonetheless, he tries to follow the advice of the editor, who recommends that he should simply write only funny, harmless stories, forgetting about politics and aggression. For Henfil this meant to write very poor comics. Even so he makes an effort to learn how to domesticate his own art and to make *The Mad Monks* "sweet, soft, controlled" (p.222). It is no easy task:

I started to read the comics in the newspapers to take in the colloquial, and the more I read, the less I believed *The Mad Monks* could be published side by side with those masterpieces of total alienation. All the strips were about little funny dogs, or funny little quarrels of funny married people. (p.210)

He seems to be rewarded by his effort in learning. By January 1975 the syndicate approves 36 out of 60 strips. But he also grows worried about what is happening to his art in this process of learning. He is reminded of what he believes had happened to Aragonés, the Mexican

cartoonist who was making money by publishing in *Mad* stories that had nothing to do with his own Mexican roots, and of what Aragones had told him about the right formula for success in the States: "When you write your stories, think of yourself as an American." Henfil believes Aragones had become, in his art, a "cosmopolitan without a country" (p.241). "What price glory?" Henfil seems to ask. His answer is nowhere better expressed as in a letter to José Eduardo Barbosa (March 28, 1975):

Sometimes I cannot translate into Portuguese a cartoon that I have produced in English. I have to use a dictionary. I am already two people. I am beginning to learn to do things for Americans. Of course they are useless in Brazil. If I stay here, Henry will wrap up Henfil in a cover, a skin which will become harder and harder. Because I am exposed to the radiation of their culture twenty-four hours a day. The necessity to survive here will put me in an envelope so thick and strong that the result will be a Brazilian cultural corpse wrapped up in an American cultural covering. It is not me, it is my body that writes this, and I am frightened with what I read. (p.248)

Having dreamed of complementarity, Henfil ends up by realizing its impossibility, as the process of achieving complementarity implies the denial of otherness, which is either absorbed in the construction of the "universality" of the stronger or rejected as a supplement. This impossibility seems to be a result of the context of power in which complementarity must necessarily take place. By "power" I mean not simply the traditional definition which sees it in terms of the domination of the slave by the master. Power must also be understood, as Michel Foucault has insisted throughout his career, in terms of a microphysics: as a network or a spiderweb which is present everywhere and which surrounds us in a thousand different ways, in the limitations of the discourse we use, in fashion, in manners, in the media, in schools. If complementarity exists only in the context of power as defined by Foucault, then the question of whether logos can complement ethos, or of whether Donald Duck can be a complement to, say, a parrot called Zé Carioca, is hardly relevant, as Zé Carioca and logos are always already supplements. Thus in the famous Disney production

called "Saludos Amigos" the Brazilian parrot is presented as a complement but is in fact a supplement. As most Brazilian middleclass children know, the production shows poor Donald Duck traveling in Brazil, going to Bahia, dancing the samba, and always being outwitted by the clever Brazilian parrot. What all children and most adults do not know however is that the production is part of an American national program to develop techniques for influencing foreign cultures, including South America, in the thirties and forties, and as part of this program the Disney studios agreed to produce the animated film. "This program," we are reminded in a recent study on the subject, was called by Nelson Rockefeller before a Senate Committee a "program of truth in answer to enemy lies," and was later described in a Department of State memorandum as "the greatest outpouring of propagandistic material by a state ever."⁵

Like the notion of complementarity, the notion of universality always occurs in a context of power. One might ideally, as Lima tends to do, think about it as uncontaminated by power and as the fortunate conjunction of complementary forces. In the context of power universality is always ethnocentric and produced by procedures of exclusion. The universal tends to be the national discourse expanded by power, the particular discourse made universal by an exercise of force. Henfil came to grips with this exercise of force when he tried to use the power of the press in the U.S. to express himself and his otherness. He had originally and naively thought of this force as neutral, and found it was thoroughly ideological. In his attempt to use it he succeeded only in being used by it. His disillusionment is expressed in one of the last letters (May 7, 1975): "Our mistake is to believe that Americans will accept any kind of humour that is foreign. They are right in their exclusive interest in their own humour." But it is unfortunate, he concludes, that the same nationalism is not a reality in other nationalities. "It is unfortunate that the U.S. dominates the world and ourselves. For this reason it is important to have their signature to exist and survive even in our own country. We must find a way to do away with this dependence within ourselves, as we cannot do away with the Xerox Company" (p.255).

The Anxiety of Influence in Reading

As I suggested before, my interest in Lima and his idealism and in Henfil and his radicalism is not an interest in the truth value of what they have to say about American Culture. I am interested in their discourses as examples of discursive formations which reveal certain strategies of reading. Strategies are of course developed as a response to a problem. The obvious question then in dealing with strategies relates to the possible problems that gave rise to the strategies in the first place. In the case of the present discussion, what motivates the compulsion to read and to construct America in terms of complementarity and supplementarity? I would like to suggest that these two strategies of reading are developed in response to the typical colonial problem which, in a different context, is called by Harold Bloom the anxiety of influence. It is not only possible, but perhaps inevitable to read the history of our literature and culture as the long and painful process of coming to grips with this anxiety by developing strategies of reading foreign cultures. Of course, this is also true of American Literature and Culture, especially in the 19th Century, but in America the development of effective strategies was more successful and produced powerful discourses of autonomy and significant antidotes to the anxiety and its byproduct: the fear of copy and imitation. The United States succeeded not only in neutralizing the anxiety, but in becoming an alternative source of anxiety for other nations and other cultures. In Brazil, on the other hand, the fear of copy and imitation remains a powerful cultural force governing responses to foreign cultures which assume the role of source of anxiety. This means of course primarily Europe, but as the U.S. succeeds in overcoming its own anxiety in the second half of the 19th Century and becomes in turn a source of anxiety, it also becomes a target of interpretive discourses pervaded by the fear of copy and imitation and by the attempt to find adequate responses to it. This attempt, I believe, explains much of what we read in Lima and Henfil, despite their obvious differences. It explains, for example, in the effort to develop the strategies of complementarity and supplementarity, the insistent rejection of imitation (the emphasis on the need to privilege the differential aspects of the two cultures pervades both *The American Reality* and the *Diary*). But its explanatory

power, I hope, is not limited to these two writers. Indeed I think it may be helpful in our understanding of most traditional and recent interpretations of American culture written by Brazilians, like Vianna Moog's *Pioneiros e Bandeirantes*, or the recent novel by Silviano Santiago (*Stella Manhattan*). But if the attempt to deal with the fear of imitation is instrumental for the understanding of these interpretive discourses on America, it does not however say much about the effectiveness of the strategies of reading which derive from it in terms of the continuing construction of a Brazilian nationality in culture. But of course this is a problem that cannot be discussed within the limitations of this paper.

NOTES

1Alceu Amoroso Lima, *A realidade Americana* (São Paulo: Agir, 1954), p.223. Further quotations in the text are taken from this edition.

2For the notions of "supplement" and "supplementarity" see Jacques Derrida, in particular *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

3Edward Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

4Henrique Souza Filho, *Diário de um Cucaracha* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Record, 1983). Further quotations are taken from this edition.

5Reinhold Wagenleitner, "Propagating the American Dream: Cultural Policies as Means of Integration," *American Studies International* (April 1986), vol. XXIV, nº 1, p.67.