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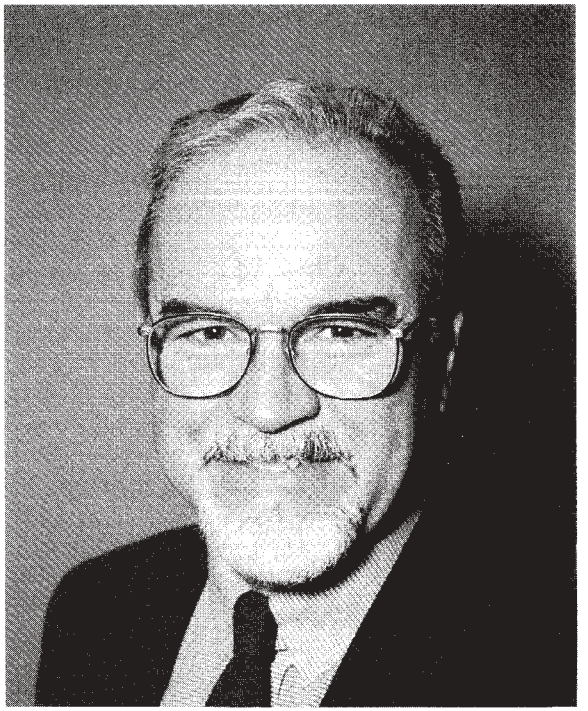

Understanding Messianism in Brazil: Notes from a Social Anthropologist

Lecture by

Roberto Da Matta

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UNDERSTANDING MESSIANISM IN BRAZIL: NOTES FROM A SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGIST*

by Roberto Da Matta

Within the social context of Brazil, messianism provokes the same uneasiness that is produced by the familiar Brazilian expression—***Você sabe com quem está falando?!*** **(Do you know who you're talking to?!**), which is usually put into use when someone is asserting social privileges in an anonymous context before some abstract, universal law. For just like the phrase, **Do you know who you're talking to?!**, messianism implies an attempt to impose a radical distinction between social groups since it reveals deep-seated, and often repressed ideas about social and religious distinctions and privileges.

The association of messianism with Brazil is unusual because one is immediately bound to ask the following questions: How could the tropical society that invented *Carnaval* and instituted roguery (*malandragem*) as a way of life; a culture that discusses issues at the beach, which abhors extreme measures, which deals with modern dilemmas with apparent ease; how could that culture ever be associated with such an extreme and uncompromising social movement as millenarian messianism?

Millenarian messianism is a movement that rejects this world and proposes a radical transformation of society. It claims to have a direct connection with God and does not permit the basic tools of society, i.e., negotiation, compromise, goal definition, and planning. It takes all that should be contemplated inside religious temples, within well-defined boundaries, out into the world, where it rashly and intolerantly denounces the injustices and miseries generated by the very fabric of society. It is a movement, in sum, that fundamentally denies a basic part of our ideological legacy, and that is that series of norms that commands us to deal with difficult situations with utmost care. The norms of society make us sort out objective from subjective facts, and help us never lose sight of the links between the means and ends. We call that tradition **rationality,** and it doesn't allow us to mix apples and oranges, or bears and barbers—rationality rejects ambiguity and axiomatically defines the world as a manageable, meaningful place.

Thus, the association of messianism with Brazil—which may be a backward problematic country, but is, after all, a society on the

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road to modernization—is as appalling as its association with the United States. In the cases of both nations, messianic and millenarian movements appear as unclassifiable events, fish out of water, social slips that can be blamed on class exploitation, unjust elites, and repressive agencies, as was the recent case of the Branch Davidians who perished in Waco, Texas in April of 1993.

In the Brazilian case, messianism connotes the dark side of a society deeply committed both to hierarchy and equality. It is a system like that of Jorge Amado's heroine, Doña Flor, who decided not to decide and resolved to stay with *two* husbands, who created a space in society far away from the common sense logic that usually forces us to say only "yes" or "no" to every problem.

In the American case, the word "messianism" dissolves the Norman Rockwell view of a society ready to solve its problems with efficiency and liberal rationality, and instead reveals the deep and unconscious paradoxes provoked by color prejudice, segregation, individualism, the distancing between rich and poor, and the compartmentalization of life.

Messianism in America shows that despite the rule of super technologies and globalization, the United States is a human society like any other. It is not easy to realize that even in the land of the free, there is also this longing for exclusive, divine patronage and guidance, even when the price for it is death.

Messianism is part of the modern sociological picture. It cannot be exorcised from the human condition by pathologists, it is an intrinsic part of our lives. Like madness, perversion, dishonesty, and sometimes even presidential candidacies, messianism is a sort of uninvited guest ready to steal the scene and make us wonder about ourselves as social beings. For just like the violence waged against relative outsiders (blacks, Hispanics, Jews or Arabs) in America, and the ultra-Brazilian authoritarian form of addressing others, the well-known but little studied **Do you know who you're talking to?!**, messianism and its institutional cohorts (millenarianism, charismatic leadership, the view of life that proposes magical and miraculous solutions for fundamental social problems) do not seem to be mere exoticisms to be disparaged by fair Calvinistic discussion in a public forum, or by police agents or the national army, but rather it is to be understood as a kind of forgotten, but certainly basic, social code.

This is so for several reasons. Mainly, because the constitution of society is not characterized by messianic, millenarian, and magical elements, yet they are pervasive in our culture. In examining tribal, traditional or modern societies, we find arbitrary choices surrounding just about every domain of social life. The family and kinship social organization is dominated all too frequently by the patriarchal figure who demands utmost respect and obedience. In labor relations and government, dominance is often rationalized by the axiomatic superiority of the owner or official who is symbolically identified with a male, an old and wise figure.

The same is true in other basic social areas. A quick look at the advertisement and entertainment industries—with its myths, talking objects and animals, and millenarian products that will last forever—will immediately take us to some basic magical-messianic principles.[1] Indeed, in these domains we are free to create a space where beauty and

harmony substitute for the ugliness and clumsiness of daily life.

One can think of no better example of a charismatic personality than a movie star; just think of Errol Flynn, John Wayne, and Elvis Presley. In a world of searching individuals, who suffer from solitude and feelings of worthlessness, these charismatic figures can easily substitute for patron saints. In the world of entertainment, animals are humanized and humans animalized, small is big, and fierce competition and disenchantment are replaced by everlasting solidarity and enchantment.

The global production and consumption of goods is permeated by all sorts of arbitrary and magical devices designed to infuse a soul into a product leaving the production line. Advertising imposes a human mask on the impersonal automobile as it leaves the factory. By giving a mass product a name and some positive associations, it takes on distinction, elegance, and glamour—you name it—elements that make them indispensable for humans. An advertisement is nothing more than an elaborate bit of charismatic messianism telling us to consume this or that product because of its **magical** and **indispensable** qualities.[2]

The same set of notions surrounds our political life. Consider, for instance, the making of our modern nation states. What we see at the source of every national history is a fusion of selected empirical facts and collective fantasies, in which we articulate legends of "founding fathers," "conquering strangers" or casual "discoveries."[3] If ancient tribal groups had origin myths of Jaguars that used fire and ate cooked meat, or of a patriarchal and jealous God who had a covenant with a chosen people, then modern nations revere national heroes who never tell lies, and kings and queens who are able to cure and to perform miracles.

There are a number of messianic qualities inherent in the history of the United States, a country founded by a handful of fanatics who fled across the Atlantic from a world permeated by hierarchy, clientelism, and inequality, to live in exactly the opposite way . . . or in the history of France, where the royal messianic figures were displaced by an equally apocalyptic revolutionary leader that later became emperor.

To understand messianism, one has to make it relative. One has to cast it out of the shadows where it is in sharp contrast with one's basic values, and looks like sheer madness. Indeed if we say that messianism is in fact a consistent set of links between a group and a leader that is believed to be inspired by the highest values, then the relationship between Sir Winston Churchill and the British people during the Second World War was classically messianic, as was that of Lenin and the Communist movement.

How could it be otherwise in a system that until just a few centuries ago was governed by popes and kings who ruled as God's representatives on earth? For many the world revolved around a central article of faith, that God had a pact with humanity, and based on our prayers and sacrifices, we were granted His protection. For others the creed was that some were chosen and some were biologically superior. This is a world that still longs for the return of the Messiah and in which millions believe in an apocalyptic millennium when the categorical divisions between men, nature and things will dissolve.[4]

We should not forget that our universe is

permeated by messianism, and that our system is pervaded by deep contradictions. On the moral level, individual freedom and collective obedience are simultaneously taught. In the economic sphere, incommensurate wealth is generated alongside immense and abject poverty. These are the very conditions that specialists point to as the conditions out of which messianism emerges and flourishes.

From time to time, some isolated individual will reproduce the old messianic paradigm, and construct a radical perception of the system. By doing so, he or she will think that there is moral justification to attack or destroy the system. To understand messianism we have to realize that what is routine or plausible about the "facts of life" for us, can be taken out of context and shown to be unacceptable by some individuals and groups. And once they are entrenched in their strangeness, they will try to change the system.

One of the most difficult reactions to messianism is the realization that some people reject the values that guide the world as we know it. We ask ourselves, why did David Koresh, leader of the Branch Davidians in Texas in the 1990s, and Antonio Conselheiro, leader of the famous Canudos messianic movement of Brazil in the 1860s, not want to share equally in the moral principles, and economic and religious systems we live by? It seems to me that it is this renunciation of the world proposed by every kind of messianism that we moderns find hard to understand.[5]

From this perspective, the history of heresies and messianic and millenarian movements can be taken as an expression of society's most important problems. One of which is, of course, the very ambiguous nature of religious life in a world dominated by secularism and colonial expansion. Thus, once Christianity transformed itself from a marginal religious creed into a powerful Church, it started to be plagued by dissent of all kinds, including messianic movements.

As Norman Cohn tells us, one of the basic inspirations for these movements derives from the apocalyptic views of St. John in his Book of Revelation. If the coming of an Antichrist is to be expected, then all powerful persons misusing their authority and prestige could be perceived as incarnations of the Antichrist. With the elevation of Christianity to the center of the Roman Empire in the 4th century, past religious leaders who were all poor and outcast became transformed into popes, bishops and priests, able to control a great deal of power.

Many messianic movements were radical reactions against political behavior understood as "a" or "anti" Christian. They consisted of groups that were against the transference of sacred duties and obligations to layman or nobility by the Church; or they were against the sexual abuses allegedly committed by high and low ecclesiastical authorities; or they were expressions of deep political differences that at the time could only be manifested through a religious idiom.

These considerations reveal that "messianic" movements can cover many types of social institutions. If we agree that messianism and millenarianism refer to the coming of God, to the presence of a very special and unusual person—the messiah—and to a consequent reordering of the social system, then messianism manifests itself with many masks and ideologies, for the simple reason

that virtually all that is human can be elevated and acquire sacred state and status.

We find messianic movements created by the poor and oppressed, as well as movements created by the rich; some that propose change and others that are against it, some are for universal brotherhood and others are nationalistic; some are reactions against rulers and laws, others are progressive. Their distinctive feature is a search for coherence, and an obsession with a narrow set of moral, religious and magical principles. The reordering of the world that specialists talk about when they look at messianic movements, has a direct relationship with their search for absolute coherence that is part of fictionalized or mythical worlds. That is what makes these movements attractive, and that is what kills them.

Messianic Movements in Brazil

Brazil has been the stage of many messianic movements. So many, that I propose to view messianism as a fundamental part of Brazilian culture. Indeed, historian Robert M. Levine, in his recent book on the Canudos messianic movement—*Vale of Tears: Revisiting Canudos Massacre in Northeastern Brazil, 1893–1897* (1992)—mentions seven relatively well documented "messianic movements" happening in Brazil between 1800 and 1936; and sociologist Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiróz, in her classic, *O Messianismo no Brasil e no Mundo* (1965), not only speaks of old Iberic "Sebastianist" beliefs, alive in Portugal from the 16th century on, but also mentions nineteen "messianic movements," eight of which are well-documented.

If one broadens the picture of messianism, taking it out of narrow definitions and the consideration of movements that resulted in massacres or that have failed or provoked an explicit reaction of the government, one soon perceives that there are many areas of Brazilian social life dominated by what can be called a "messianic ethos." Some of these areas have such an omnipresence in Brazilian daily routines that, at first glance, they are not perceived as being messianic at all.

In the field of politics, populist movements are formed and sustained by charismatic leadership and a following of the masses. In the field of popular religion, the so-called "Afro-Brazilian" and "Spiritist" cults, as well as the "rustic styles" of Christianity, we found the following classic "messianic" features:

1. An absolute charismatic leader (a "Mother," "Father" or "Saint") who is spiritually responsible for his "family" of followers, in a community based on personal links and governed by nepotism or particular rules that are in contrast and opposition to the universal laws of social life in a national society and in big cities.

2. The belief that this person is in direct contact with supernatural forces due to some extraordinary experience—usually an incurable illness or some tragic experience such as the loss of close relatives.[6]

3. The acceptance that the rules established by the leader will be followed by all. Usually the movement will be named after the leader, and will disappear when the leader dies.

4. The belief that the leader has supernatural powers, such as healing the sick, foreseeing the future, and is in possession of an infallible understanding of the nature of life and death—these are elements that give

him (or her) the power to guide followers either to establish a new cult or to make political proposals.

5. A rejection of some basic social rules or interpretations which demands the setting up of a special space—a temple (*terreiro* or *casa*) which serves as a stage for the sect's rituals.

Some of these groups are so much a part of Brazilian social life that they are not included in the studies of "messianism." But as a matter of sociology, classical messianic movements such as Canudos should be studied together with Spiritists and *Umbanda* groups because they can be classified under the same structural matrix. They are all organized around an intimate, personal and impossible-to-transfer bond with an incarnate messiah whose authority is based on mystical links. The group knows of his or her wanderings and sufferings and, perhaps and more importantly, that they will never abandon the group. In a very concrete way, this deep personal link reminds us of the intimacy and exchange relationship that Brazilians have with their devotional saints to whom they offer candles, masses, alms, flowers and even food and drink as a sign of confidence and gratitude for having obtained a favor.

Thus, every Church, *Umbanda*, *Candomblé* and Spiritist Center can be perceived in a continuum, along with the landmarks of Brazil's messianic movements such as the old Sebastianist beliefs demonstrated by the shoemaker Bandarra in the 16th century, a man who foresaw the coming of a great prince, the *Encoberto* (The Covered One) who would give Portugal its old place as a leader among the world's nations. Sebastianism or the waiting for the coming of the Portuguese king that disappeared in the battle of Ksar al-Kebir in 1578 in Morocco, penetrated Brazil via colonization and soon became part of the religious universe.

From this 16th century source, several movements took shape in Brazil that boldly combined old Christian doctrine with contemporary ideas. In direct contrast with the Protestant universe that abolished all mediators and means of releasing anxiety about salvation, Brazilian Catholicism maintained and increased the possibilities of mediation between this world and the other. In the Iberic universe, religion continued to be accessed by mediators and accompanied by all kinds of magical beliefs in priests, mediums, saints, spirits, angels, relics, objects, and prayers. Heaven is permeated by hierarchical relationships, just as this world is controlled by a gradation of patronage links, uniting the top with the bottom of society.

Besides, and perhaps more importantly, Iberic Catholicism remained a traditional religion in the sense that it proposed that sainthood and salvation could only be achieved out of this world, whereas the triumph of Protestantism (above all its more radical forms such as Calvinism) put religion everywhere. As a consequence, in the Reformed world, religious ideas permeated every sphere of life, while in Catholic countries, the reverse was true. There the Church was an institution that paralleled the State, and religious values where far from certain areas of social life, such as commerce, education and industry. It is my thesis that the thrust of Ibero-Brazilian religiosity was always to flee from this world and try to reach the other by bringing it to this earth.

I also have to mention that Brazilian society never got rid of a hierarchical style of life that many social and political commen-

tators refer to as familism, clientelism or patronage. In such a system, the organization of society into social orders or states, was little changed and able to survive and adjust to the liberal-bourgeois ideology of equality and individualism that came with the French and American Revolutions.

The system, then, operated in terms of double ethics, a situation quite familiar to all that closely follow the Latin American, and especially the Brazilian scene. I am referring to the fact that in Brazil, universal laws made for all are often twisted in favor of friends and clients, to the point that we say: "To our friends, everything, to our enemies, the law..." Hence the sociological and ideological division of Brazilian society into *casa* (house) and *rua* (street), two spaces with opposite, but complementary ethics and values.

Within this ideological and institutional framework that always oscillates between the rigid universal and abstract laws of the "street," and the warm hand of kinship and clientelism in the "house," contradictions are a fact of life and a structural feature. The elite wrote constitutions that guaranteed liberty and equality for all, and yet had slaves. Even after the proclamation of the republic, social life was still structured in terms of a hierarchical code of behavior.

It seems that the cultural environment associated with Brazilian messianism can be better interpreted as a social universe where renunciation of the world is basic. Renunciation is the integral point where the many Brazilian religious experiences meet. Sociologically, one is struck by the structural similarities, from Catholicism to Afro-Brazilian cults; the great leaders are all persons able to abandon this world. From the *peregrinos*, *ermitãos* and *penitentes* that with or without religious education or authority decide to leave their well-established positions in the social structure and wander as renouncers of this world, distributing universal good to fellow human beings in the backlands, to the contemporary mediums, political, and spiritual leaders that in the poor areas of Brazil's big city slums, bring consolation and emotional and spiritual relief to their followers. It is the sincerity of the leader that makes a charismatic personality a success.[7]

From that perspective, Brazil can be studied with India, in the sense that their religious fields are both marked by the presence of omnipresent creeds—Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam in India, and Catholicism and Protestantism in Brazil—but they all can be blended and dissolved by a number of sects organized around personal and charismatic bonds. The religious dynamic of such societies is one that oscillates between a central religious and ritual core, and a series of powerful marginal alternatives, all based on the ethos of renunciation. It is renunciation that allows one to escape social responsibilities and imperatives.

The study of religious messianic leaders in Brazil reveals a tradition of renunciation. Thus, Silvestre José dos Santos, called the Prophet, founder of the first well-documented messianic movement in Brazil, in Pernambuco, was an ex-soldier that, after much wandering in the backlands, established himself in 1817 in a place called Rodeador and there founded the City of Terrestrial Paradise. There, so he preached, would come King Dom Sebastião with his army. There he dominated his followers using Catholic religious codes and symbolism. By 1820, they were massacred by the governor of the State.

A second messianic movement happened on the eve of 1836, also in Pernambuco, this time around two enormous rocks, in a place called Flores. Again, it was created by another *peregrino* who preached that Dom Sebastião was just about to disenchant and bring a great amount of wealth to his followers. Soon a community with its own rules was formed, the most choking of which was polygamous marriages for men. They also held festivities and marriages that were celebrated by a priest who admitted that the "King," João Ferreira had the right of the first night with the bride. One of the basic elements of the cult was the drinking of a substance that made the "King" see Dom Sebastião's treasures. On May 14, 1838, Ferreira decided to begin sacrifices in order to "break the enchantment" and he beheaded his own father, washing the enchanted rocks with his blood. By the following day, several members of the sect had been killed and the rocks had been wet with the blood of thirteen children.

The third movement, the largest and most complex, was Canudos, a movement of large proportions (at its peak Canudos had 25,000 inhabitants, being the second largest city in Bahia State), started by Antonio Vicente Mendes Maciel, called Antonio Conselheiro. Like his antecedents, his biography reveals the typical profile of a renouncer; unhappily married twice, his second wife ran away with a police soldier, and he wandered the backlands of Bahia, fixing cemetery walls and churches, dressed in a long robe and with typical long hair and beard. A myth was created around his biography.[8]

Other messianic movements included the "Muckers" (a "religious hypocrite" in German or *santarrão* in Portuguese), that happened from 1868–1883, in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul State; the Padre Cícero movement in Juazeiro, 1870–1892, founded by the pilgrim priest Father Cícero; the *Contestado*, that occurred between 1912–1916 in Santa Catarina State which also ended with a massacre; the *Caldeirão* or *Pau de Colher* movement founded by the *beato* José Lourenço, a former aid to Padre Cícero, that occurred in the mid-1930s; and many other movements that have in common the same ethos of renunciation and rejection of the world.

The elements of renunciation can throw some light into the nature of these communities. The majority of these movements are pre- or post-Republican movements. The Republic can be understood as a messianic movement itself. It was created by a military coup and among its central purposes was the unity of Brazil as a nation. The liberation of slavery was a serious issue in a country that had cities with more slaves than Rome, as was the case of Rio de Janeiro in the mid-19th century. To transform this mass of ex-slaves without jobs or education into modern citizens was the main goal of the Republicans who had as their messianic leader, the French philosopher and founder of Sociology, August Comte.

The Republican political goal was to transform a hierarchical, slave-based society and economic system into a modern nation-state based on territory, a written constitution and a set of conscious citizens equal before the law. No wonder some messianic movements reacted explicitly against some Republican propositions.

In 1889, the State and Church decided to exert more control over its personnel and institutions, in sharp contrast with the past.

This meant the enforcement of written rules over personal authority which contradicted old forms of social behavior. The unpopular recruitment law of 1874, which enforced universal military service, ran against the local patterns where people ordered their lives around the family's goals. It was perceived as an authoritarian invasion of the home and a symptom that one of the aims of the Republicans was the destruction of the old social mores.

According to Robert Levine:

> Angry crowds attacked draft registration offices and burned registration records across Minas province and the entire Northeast. In one place a mob composed of sixty women [probably mothers] "armed with clubs" invaded the church, where the draft commission sat, forcibly took the enlistment records, ripped them up, and threw the remnants into the holy water font and into the town square's fountain.

Closely associated with this recruitment law was the federal institutionalization of civil marriage by the Marriage Act of 1891. This was taken by many as a suspension of old marriage preferences (such as marriage among close relatives) and was also interpreted as a form of subversion since the new law made religious marriages illegitimate without the civil formalities. A series of written laws and formalities were now controlled by government agents, not the traditional priest or the boss. It is not by chance then that Conselheiro reacted against this law. The institution of civil marriage made personal relationships federal government business.

The accelerated construction of railroads created the means for the penetration of new forms of commerce and lifestyles into the interior. New forms of commerce produced standards in weights and measures, as well as the normalization of bargaining and direct exchange, creating prices and other mechanisms of measure, and accounting for poverty and wealth. With all this, came a series of new taxes.

One could no longer live in a community of "persons," made up of kin, godfathers, close friends and well-known enemies; but rather, one was faced with a new and complex social structure, with strangers and transient individuals who did not care about local politics, but who just wanted to do business. Thus communication brought more impersonality and, for Brazil, this was problematic, above all, in the interior.

In sum, the impersonality of government broke the old family morality. Between the wishful thinking of Republicans, and their naive presupposition that a series of decrees would be enough to transform the nation simultaneously, there existed a number of ways for citizens to deal with life, and one of them was to follow someone who renounced it all.

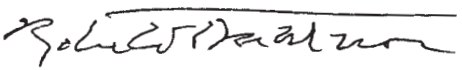
In fact, the many messianic movements illustrate the fact that Brazil is a society profoundly marked by personal relationships, a social dimension that makes people prone to following "personalities." In this social universe, it is easier to believe in the "trail of miracles" of Padre Cícero, in the grace of a messiah who will return and bring salvation for society, and in the power of the spirit of an ex-slave *Preto Velho*, than in an abstract and impersonal authority. Messianism reveals the fundamental importance of this "personalism" and the links determined by

it in the case of Brazilian society in particular and, perhaps, also in the Iberian cultural universe in general.[9]

To study messianism, one should attempt to pay close attention to the sociology of personal relationships, a code of relationship that modern ideology[10] tends to domesticate and/or reject. Clearly the reverse of the "messianic tradition" of miracles is the democratic consensus.

All this informs Brazilian society to such an extent that it is fundamental to establish a dialogue between the Brazil that tells stories of miracles within a "messianic tradition" and the other Brazil that represents itself by means of modern, egalitarian, and contemporary institutions.

What is the deeper relationship that exists between tendencies such as messianism and the difficulties of consolidating the Brazilian democratic order? This is the question to which we currently seek solutions.



ENDNOTES

[1] Disneyworld is a good example of a messianic-millenarian site, where people go to get in touch with their folk heroes and the eternal values they represent. In this context, I submit there is not much difference between the folk heroes of the imagination or the religious heroes of the great faiths and their sacred sites.

[2] Edmund Leach called attention to the links between magic and advertising in the early 1960s. In the 1980s Brazilian anthropologist Everardo Rocha revealed the importance of myth and magic in advertising. In other words, advertising is a privileged area where myth and magic have penetrated our rational civilization. Instead of praising sobriety and thrift, advertising praises exaggeration and wishful thinking as a way of life.

[3] The three foundation myths of the Americas are that the United States was founded, Central and South America were conquered, and Brazil was discovered.

[4] Two years ago in Peru, just about eighty miles from Lima, I visited with Israel, a prophet and messianic leader who has gathered thousands of followers. Like in many other messianic movements, they believe they are the chosen people, that Israel is a reincarnation of Jesus Christ, and that the world is in imminent danger of collapsing and all will perish—except, of course, those in the sect.

[5] From this perspective, every messianic movement is first interpreted as "heresy"—as a stubborn refusal to enter the mainstream, and instead rejects modernity. The same rejection and the violent reactions to it can also be seen in the history of the indigenous populations of the Americas, where the natives refused to enter the main and dominating culture, in contrast with the immigrant groups.

[6] Such is the case of the urban messianic leader, Gentileza, who died last year in Rio de Janeiro, and used to preach kindness and civility in urban public spaces, such as in the waiting lines of the ferry boat connecting Rio and Niterói, under the sound axiom of *gentileza gera gentileza* (kindness generates kindness). Gentileza had the typical look of a messianic leader: long beard, a blue or white robe made of rustic material, and he used to preach with tablets in his arms, as if they were the "tables of law." He left several inscriptions on the walls of Rio's viaducts, all telling us to love one another and to disregard exaggerated futile consumption. The rumor was that Gentileza was a well-to-do man who lost his beloved wife and children in a circus fire in Niterói in the early 1960s.

[7] When I mention political leaders I am thinking of people such as Brizola, Chico Mendes, Bet-

inho, Jânio Quadros (who actually renounced the presidency of Brazil) and Vargas, founder of Brazilian populism, known as "Father of the poor," and "Mother of the rich," who committed suicide as a way out of a complicated national crises in which his political enemies asked for his resignation. He preferred to renounce than to be pushed out of office.

[8] In his famous book *Os Sertões*, Euclydes Da Cunha tells that in one version of his biography, Conselheiro was accused of having murdered his wife and his own mother. "The story is a hair-raising one," comments Da Cunha. In his words:

> The mother, so the tale runs, had a violent dislike for her daughter-in-law and was bent upon doing away with her. With this object in mind, she informed her son that he had been betrayed; and when the latter, taken by surprise, demanded proof, she promised him that he would have it shortly. She then advised him to pretend that he was going away on a journey somewhere but, instead, remain in the vicinity so that he might, with his own eyes, see the seducer, the man who dishonored his wife, entering their home. This plan having been agreed upon, the poor fellow rode out a little over a mile from the town, and then, reining in, he stealthily turned back and returned by little frequented paths to a spot he had chosen, from which he might be able to observe what went on and be in a position to act promptly. Here he remained for hours, until finally, late in the night, he did in fact see someone approaching his home. The stranger approached cautiously and was about to climb in one of the windows. The husband, however, did not even give him time to do so but brought him down with a bullet. Then, at a bound, he rushed into the house and fired upon his faithless spouse, who lay sleeping. After which, he turned to see who the man was he had slain. He saw with horror that it was his mother, who had disguised herself in this manner in order to carry out her diabolical plan. Terrified by what he had done, he took to his heels like a madman, abandoning everything, and fled to the backlands. (Da Cunha, 130)

[9] In some Asian societies the personal and impersonal dimensions are in potential conflict or somehow repel each other. This is Talcott Parsons' Weberian opposition between "particularism" and "universalism" and shows these values may be combined in an intriguing way in societies that are part of the contemporary world scene.

[10] This ideology is discussed by Louis Dumont, who points to the following elements as basic for this conjuncture of values: (a) the fact that in modern ideology human beings are represented and valued as individuals, such that in this ideology social relations and the totality itself are encompassed by the individual; (b) "the relation of men to objects (things and nature) is more valued than relations between men," as Dumont points out, whereas in traditional or non-modern societies the reverse is usually the case; (c) "wealth constitutes an autonomous category centered on movable wealth but including, secondarily, immovable wealth." Again, Dumont reminds us that in traditional ideologies, immovable wealth is linked to power over men, "while movable wealth is disparaged and/or subordinated" (see Dumont, 1975: 158). Thus this distinction between modern ideology and non-modern or traditional ideology is not necessarily locked into a linear conception of history that speaks of a single path for the traditional. Instead it opens possibilities for examining different combinations of the traditional with the modern, as appears to be the case in Brazilian society.

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Roberto Da Matta was born in Niterói, State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1936, and received his B.A. in History from the Faculdade Fluminense de Filosofia, Federal Fluminense University, Niteroi, State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1959; his M.A. (1969) in Social Anthropology and Ph.D. (1971) in Anthropology, Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

From 1964–67 he was Assistant Professor at the Fluminense Federal University in Niterói, State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 1970 he became Professor in the Graduate Program of Social Anthropology at the Museu Nacional.

In 1978 he began a series of appointments as Visiting Scholar at the Centre for Latin American Studies, University of Cambridge, England; from 1979–80 he was the Tinker Visiting Professor at the Department of Anthropology and Institute of Iberoamerican Studies, University of Wisconsin at Madison; and in 1982, Visiting Professor in Anthropology at the University of California-Berkeley. In 1987 he was appointed as The Reverend Edmund P. Joyce, c.s.c. Professor of Anthropology at the University of Notre Dame (IN) where he continues to teach; and until 1996, he was a faculty Fellow of the Kellogg Institute. During the summer months, he is Visiting Professor at the Fluminense Federal University in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

His books include *Índios e Castanheiros* with Roque de Barros Laraia. São Paulo: Difusão Européia do Livro, 1967. Second edition, Editora Paz e Terra: Rio de Janeiro, 1981; *Ensaios de Antropologia Estrutural.* Second edition, Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1975; *Um Mundo Dividido: A Estrutura Social dos Índios Apinayé.* Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1976. English Translation: *A Divided World: Apinayé Social Structure.* Harvard University Press, 1982; *Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis: Para uma Sociologia do Dilema Brasileiro,* Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editores, 1979. Fifth Edition, Editora Guanabara. French translation: *Carnavals, Bandits et Héros.* Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983. English translation: *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes. An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma.* Translation by John Drury. University of Notre Dame Press, 1991; *Universo do Carnaval: Imagens e Reflexões.* Rio de Janeiro: Edições Pinakotheke, 1981; *Relativizando: Uma Introdução à Antropologia Social.* Petropópolis: Editora Vozes, 1981. Second Edition, Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1987; *O que faz o brasil, Brasil?.* Rio de Janeiro: Editora Salamandra, 1984. Second Edition, Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1986. Awarded the Prize, "Casa Grande & Senzala," for the best interpretation of Brazil, Fundação Joaquim Nabuco; *A Casa e a Rua: Espaço, Cidadania,*

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