Discussion Questions (10/23)

Discussion Questions on Dunn, chs 1-2: (submitted by Sefalana)

1. During the early 1960s, there seemed to be “great promise for those who hoped for, or were actively involved in, the progressive transformation of Brazilian society,” (Dunn, p. 40) and at the forefront of this struggle was the Centro Popular de Cultura (CPC), a left-wing cultural organization with national scope. Why did the CPC, the vanguard of cultural activism during that time, fail in its attempts to be the great promise of social transformation? What contradictions did the project harbor within itself that ultimately hindered its own success?

2. There are multiple discussions in the book about the concepts of “pop” and “popular”. What is the difference (if any) between “pop” and “popular”? How did the advent of a “pop aesthetic”, as proposed by Veloso and Gil, significantly shift the meaning of “popular” as it had been understood in Brazil up to that time?

3. In the book, Caetano Veloso defends Jovem Guarda and the Brazilian rock movement as a whole, reasoning that “Just as the inventors of bossa nova had creatively appropriated jazz, young artists could absorb and transform rock.” (Dunn, pp. 61) Why were the creators of bossa nova able to appropriate jazz music with much more ease and acceptance from the social urban milieu, as compared to the leading proponents of Brazilian rock who met with hostile opposition to their movement? What other underlying factors invited such a reaction to the emergence of Brazilian rock? How might the reactions from MPB artists have differed, if at all, had the proponents of the Brazilian rock movement been middle class, university-educated youth?

4. Dunn's book has been celebrated for making explicit the connection between Brazil's cultural formations and transformations, and the circumstances surrounding these phenomena, particularly the repressive rule of the military regime from 1964 to 1985. What evidence do you see of political resistance and reactions to the repressive military regime manifesting themselves in the cultural struggles of that time?

5. Consider the title of this book, "Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture"...How does it convey the essence of what the Tropicália movement is all about? What paradoxes and inconsistencies does this oxymoronic title, "Brutality Garden," conjure up in light of the social, political, economic, and cultural circumstances in Brazil during this period of time?

Discussion Questions on Dunn, chs 3-4: (submitted by Mónica)

1. While keeping the use of satire and irony of Tropicália in mind, what were the manifestations of the current political atmosphere in Brazil that were present in this music/culture? How did these artists help form a part of Brazilian national identity?

2. Dunn points out Veloso's "Tropicália" as being one of the best examples of allegoric
representation in Brazilian song. Noting Schwarz criticism and alternative belief in the "systematic character of this co-existence", and not the "cultural variety of Brazil in which it is true that one finds African religions, indigenous tribes, workers sometimes sold as slaves, share-cropping and industrial complexes", what significance does the song have for political representation, and socio-cultural and economic realities of Brazil during this time?

3. How did censorship and the military regime affect the progression of Tropicália? What elements of Tropicália, if any, were promulgated due to these factors?

Discussion Questions on Schwarz: (submitted by Amber)

1. Schwarz seems to claim that a “deformed Marxism” which “specialized in discussing the invalidity of capitalism, but which took no steps towards revolution” (132) was able to dominate the cultural scene because of its “dubious” nature. He emphasizes the “deformation” of Marxism as the “un-pure” ideology that governed the nation under Goulart and then dominated the cultural scene of Brazil under the military regime. He then goes on to say that, “it was only to the extent to which it broke with the system of compromise in which it had become enmeshed, and which was nevertheless a source of impetus, that the work produced by the left could be regarded as anything more than pure ideology” (133). What is Schwarz’s argument about this “un-pure” or “pure” ideology? Does there exist a “pure” ideology in reality (as shown in the case of the PT, parts of the ideology have to be given up in order to rule)? In their deconstruction of iconic images, are the Tropicalia artists arguing that nothing is pure and sacred and that society is not based on indestructible pillars? Does Schwarz agree with that or is he saying something else?

2. “…to obtain its artistic and critical effect tropicalism works with the weird combination of the archaic and the modern…” (142). Dunn refers to this “atemporal” reality of Brazil several times in his book in reference to the Schwarz piece, and Schwarz himself focuses on this atemporal existence where the modern and archaic live side by side, an idea that seems to reflect the erasure of time embodied by JK’s plan of “50 years development in 5”. Does this make Tropicalia an atemporal movement that has relevance in the past, present, and future of Brazil, or can it only exist in its historical moment? If this movement is born from a “atemporal Brazil”, what are its limitations (like the limitations of JK’s development plan were that the elimination of time didn’t let reality catch up with progress)? What is its effect on the culture developed in this state? Is it only in this imaginary state that the imagined national identity can be formed?