

Border, biography – biogeographies – as a decolonial¹ episteme for (trans)bordered bodies in scenic arts

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ABSTRACT

Art in the West is based on a coloniality built on top of a power matrix with *universalist pretensions*. Theories and theorists still approach Brazilian art in the same way they approach art produced in Europe or the United States: by importing and applying concepts from the “Western centers.” This paper wants to discuss, as a decolonization proposal for Brazilian artistic bodies, *another aesthetic possibility*—*bougre aesthetics*—to *decolonize biogeographical artistic bodies* from places outside the Western context and its hegemonic discourses in art and culture.

Keywords: Borders. Biogeographies. Bougre aesthetics.

RESUMO

A arte no ocidente está assentada na colonialidade edificada na matriz de poder com pretensões universalistas. Teorias/teóricos ainda tratam das produções artísticas brasileiras como as produzidas na Europa ou Estados Unidos: importando e aplicando conceitos dos “centros no ocidente”. Este trabalho quer discutir, como proposta descolonial para corpos artísticos brasileiros, uma opção outra de estética – Estética Bugresca – que oportunize descolonizar corpos artísticos biogeográficos de lugares fora do contexto ocidental dos discursos hegemônicos na arte e na cultura.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Fronteiras. Biogeografias. Estética Bugresca.

1. The terms “descolonial” (Portuguese) and “decolonial” (Spanish and English), according to the postcolonialist discussion, have problems because they present an understanding of continuity, of something that comes after colonization. It is worth noting that, in this discussion, I emphasize the translation *decolonial* (from Spanish, same writing as the English word), and refer to “descolonial” only in the sense of a Brazilian discussion. Therefore, no idea of continuity, of a “before and after” temporality, is maintained.

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If we agree that nature is always seen through a filter, i.e., the historical and cultural notion of landscape (according to Robert Smithson, nature is mostly a fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), then the body has to be understood as a localized cultural condition. When, as BRANDÃO (2004, p.11) puts it, a people persists in the mission of redefining the landscape, giving volume to the page, the *body* can no longer be thought of as separate from its set of *clothes*: social conventions, narrative representations, and political applicabilities that give epistemological appearance to the notion of the body. In addition, every body has to be *somebody*: the product of a microhistory, which is reduced to a holotype—a dead specimen, necessarily herborized—only in the context of an excluding science. One’s own body imprints *intention* and *tension* to the physical and biological body (MARQUEZ, 2011, p.161, self-translation).

The above excerpt, extracted from “Certa Geografia”, a register of *conversations* between Luis Alberto Brandão and Renata Marquez³, the latter a geographer, illustrates, if I may say so, the notion of body that I propose in this work. A body and its *biogeographical* place: biographical bodies comprise of, at one and the same time, intention and tension; with their *localized cultural condition* and their specific, enunciative, geographic territory. Similarly, I want to point out that the borders these bodies (*trans*) border have a physical character, belonging to the order of the real as a territory which has density, thickness, and is not merely surface (PORTO-GONÇALVES, 2011, p.199). This notion of border, therefore, differs from the idea of a frontier that exists outside the context of its geographical situation: simply a margin, the end of a space or, in other words, the border as the space that is an abstract place (RIBEIRO, 2011, p.199).

The body, from the perspective proposed here, has individual and universalist pretensions, simultaneously. It is a body that crosses borders and, inversely, is bordered by a geographical place, the triple frontier between Brazil (Mato Grosso do Sul), Paraguay and Bolivia, in the Brazilian Center-West region. A corporeal individuality that dresses itself with particular identitary pieces of clothing, but which, in the same manner, imprints images and landscapes on the bodies of others, bodies which make inroads into a geographical border between three countries. Bodies and borders, in this sense, are conditions of realities. Likewise, the border confronts and is confronted as a geographic territory: first, against the idea of imaginary, abstract space, a space that is *not* experienced by a corporeal subject, who speaks of the border as

3. Every time I refer to this text in quotes, the reference will be made via Marquez.

if he lived in it, even though he is distanced from its territorial reality; second, against a fictional space for the fetishization of the corporeal body—the fetishization process is concerned with endowing objects with a life of their own (MARQUEZ, 2011, p.162). The geographic territory of the border insists on separating bodies and places, but at the same time it promotes the approximation of biographies in these different places.

And thus *biogeographies* emerge: subjects located in a specific geographic territory with specific bodies that support *other* configurations of the body, territory, space and biographies. That is, *biogeographic* subjects – I take as an example the people from Mato Grosso do Sul, settled in the triple border – aim for the constitution of bodies that are against the hegemonic discourse and concepts of a Western art that insists on the well-reasoned idea of coloniality and power, based on the notion of a universalization of individuals and places. The national artistic production, almost generally, is constituted of the understanding of art as a production of non-knowledge. Worse still is this idea when we refer to the artistic productions of places within the national territory that are marginal in *the geopolitics of knowledge* (MIGNOLO, 2011). Through the dominant artistic culture in the Brazilian Southeastern region, bodies inhabiting marginal places are, in the best-case scenario, submitted to variations of *the totalitarian matrix of modern reason*. A matrix that regards such *biogeographies* as incapable of producing art and knowledge out of their own volition.

What is most valuable in the work of art is not its emotive or contemplative status, but its prospective quality. Art has a simple definition: to make us see the world differently. The nature of learning through art consists in the recognition of the Other rather than the instauration of the Same; in the otherness of the stranger instead of the order of things. It is a **movable epistemology**, certainly, but one which does not fail to seduce us with its possibilities of infiltration and dissemination into hegemonic knowledge. In other words: art as a form through which knowledge can realize itself: a paradoxical knowledge indeed (MARQUEZ, 2011, p.165, my emphasis, self-translation).

The *movable epistemology*, about which Renata Marquez speaks so eloquently, appears also as an alternative to the *totalitarianism of modern reason*, as I have tried to establish by proposing the notion of *bougre* “aesthetics,” to decode the idea of body construed by modernity and maintained even in contemporaneity. For if, on the one hand, modern scientific, formal, dual and epistemic knowledge has developed in Europe (I do not take refer to the

constitution of the great European Modern Project born in the Renaissance, but to the Cartesian methods), on the other hand, we have in Brazil the survival of “dichotomic” relations between body, mind, individual and spaces, as if all thinking, especially in contemporary art, stemmed from modern thought. Black, poor, genders other than the male, places outside the centers of geopolitical power or economically disadvantaged individuals and places, remain objects to be dissected or, as Marquez put it, holotypical objects⁴ of interpretations construed from modern knowledge.

In this sense, I prefer to regard my proposal as a *bougre* epistemology: since, like the *movable epistemology*, it *does not fail to seduce as an epistemology that can possibly spread and infiltrate into hegemonic knowledge*. It is important to note, however, that beyond spreading and infiltrating into hegemonic discourse and knowledge, *bougre* epistemology—or a diversity of Brazilian, Latin, city, state and, therefore, *biogeographical* epistemologies—will emphasize the plurality of places and subjects as possibilities for the construction of artistic knowledge. Consequently, bodies will no longer be thought of as marginal to borders, but as bodies living on an eternal state of frontier, absent guilt or rancor, idolatry or fetish. They will be agents of knowledge of their own making, indistinguishable from the places and biographical creators that they are.

I do not intend – in proposing a *bougre* “epistemology” as a counterpoint to modern “aesthetics” – to simply exchange between the terms that support this discussion. On the contrary, what I propose is an alternative etymological (or terminological) possibility – a word that contemplates the *diversities* of Latin American peripheral cultures that (trans)border *biogeographical* frontiers. Those have always been cultures and knowledges rejected by the prevailing discourses of high art and science. A high art and science which, if not for the idea of colonization, would not have been able to interfere with other discourses, from other cultures and worlds. As such, another question is in order. The concept of aesthetics, in the sense given to it by modernity, refers fundamentally to the notions of beauty and pleasure, both experienced by an individual with a scientificized intellect; that is, only an artistically or scientifically-educated individual would be able to “sensitize” him or herself and others, i.e. to access the contents of art and the knowledge of science.

As such, the originary, classical concept of aesthetics, formulated since Aristotle—*aisthesis*, from the Greek *aisthetiké*, “sensitive”⁵—later in the Renaissance period would erroneously be interpreted as strictly corresponding to the sensation of beauty and pleasure. This is especially true for the European Modern Project,

4. Zoology: designates the unique, original specimen a discoverer of a species (or subspecies) uses to formally describe it. From the Greek *hólos*, “complete” + *týpos*, “exemplar; type.” Cf. *Holótipo* in *Dicionário Infopédia da Língua Portuguesa com Acordo Ortográfico* [online]. Porto: Porto Editora, 2003-2016. Available on the Internet: <<https://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/lingua-portuguesa/holótipo>> [accessed on: October 28, 2016].

5. Cf. *Estética* in *Dicionário Infopédia da Língua Portuguesa com Acordo Ortográfico* [online]. Porto: Porto Editora, 2003-2016. Available on the Internet: <<https://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/lingua-portuguesa/estética>> [accessed on: October 21, 2016].

from which the shared experience of a unitary Western world would be constructed, having Christianity as its most important contributor. A unitary world in communion with the idea of a European monarchic power, to assert its might in colonies “(dis) covered” by ships that were, invariably, adrift in the seas. Last but not least, and fundamental in the context of this discussion, both concepts of aesthetics, the modern and the classical, stand ramified in contemporary culture. This is true both for the countries in which these concepts developed—European countries and the United States—and their former colonies, including São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the geopolitical centers of Brazil, which insist on being exclusive proprietors of knowledge and power.

Dussel emphasizes, giving no leeway to doubt, the unconsciousness or blindness that Vattimo sustains in relation to the other extreme of modernity: coloniality. The violence that Vattimo (or Nietzsche or Heidegger) attributes to modern instrumental reason still hides the coloniality of power imposed on the non-European cultures that have been silenced, denied and excluded. The colonial difference spreads under the mantle of this invisibility. If coloniality is constitutive of modernity, to exploit the vicissitudes of modernity without recognizing the consequences of this coloniality has to be either an unconscious posture or the product of a bad conscience. Dussel’s call for a decolonization, through ethical and philosophical liberation, is based on a double movement that has similarities to the strategy of African philosophers. On one hand, there is an appropriation of modernity and, on the other, a movement towards *transmodernity*, understood as a strategy of liberation or a project of decolonization that, according to Bernasconi, includes all, both colonizers and colonized (MIGNOLO, 2011, p.42, self-translation).⁶

This essential excerpt from Walter Mignolo illustrates all the basis of the supposedly modern Brazilian national project. Conditioned by the issues of artistic production in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, artistic practices that take place in the triple frontier in Mato Grosso do Sul, for example, must be supporting actors, in the best case scenario, to the protagonists that are the repertoires of artistic knowledge from the centers of the country. From the established Brazilian modern perspective, the symbolic, biographical and lived experiences of the individuals who inhabit the border, in their relationship with the passers-by from the three countries and the three cultures that converge there—a biogeographical place due to its (trans)positional nature—end up being disqualified as rural or regionalized creators, staging their plays exclusively in those places and unable to produce repertoires relevant, for example, to dance, theater or visual arts happening elsewhere.

6. “Dussel subraya, sin lugar a dudas, la inconsciencia o ceguera que Vattimo tiene ante ese otro extremo de la modernidad que es la colonialidad: la violencia que Vattimo (o Nietzsche o Heidegger) atribuye a la razón instrumental moderna, oculta todavía la colonialidad del poder que se impone sobre las culturas no europeas que han sido acalladas, negadas y borradas. La diferencia colonial se propaga en esa invisibilidad. Si la colonialidad es constitutiva de la modernidad es por lo tanto o inconciencia o mala conciencia explorar los avatares de la modernidad sin hacerse cargo de las consecuencias de la colonialidad que le es constitutiva. La reivindicación que Dussel hace de la descolonización, de una liberación ética y filosófica, se basa en un doble movimiento similar a la estrategia de los filósofos africanos. Por un lado, existe una apropiación de la modernidad y, por el otro, un movimiento hacia la *transmodernidad* entendida como una estrategia de liberación o un proyecto de descolonización que, según Bernasconi, incluye a todo el mundo, tanto a los colonizadores como los colonizados” (MIGNOLO, 2011, p.42).

It is as if, in such a place, people could only be considered to have roots, in the pejorative sense of something that binds or affixes them. After all, the triple frontier is a place where weapons and drug trafficking serve as cathartic illustrations for plays and plastic productions made in the southeastern Brazilian center: exaltations of the exoticism of places relegated to marginality. The Southeast produces interpretations that extirpate the knowledge and practices of the border from the general Brazilian context of art and the production of knowledge. In this sense, a *bougre* or movable episteme, or even a particular epistemology—hence, a *biogeographical* epistemology, seemingly better equipped to contemplate the transitory character of individuals and places—would emphasize not the dependence of margins in relation to centers, but the primary relationships of creators with places and their production of art and knowledge. A production that emerges from locality, and is forced to concentrate itself there, in a place of non-unicity that carries all the meanings of the Brazilian national character. In fact, we emerged from the confluence, the clash and the fusion of the Portuguese invader with forest and rural Indians as well as black Africans, all taken as slaves (RIBEIRO, 1995, p.19).

For all these reasons, this paper proposes a number of fundamental points for critical and artistic production (which can also be considered for pedagogical production), and for art in general, regarding the *decoloniality* of artistic *biogeographic* bodies as an epistemology of/for the production of knowledge through Visual Arts⁷. To a certain extent, these discussions should and always will go through “aesthetic” matters, understood as the production of knowledge and the “judgment” or “qualification” of artistic productions by a modern system of “evaluation”. This is to say that, in one way or another, discussions in the field of arts are always based on certain premises intended to improve the understanding of the production of art as a form knowledge. In this paper, I make use of reflections on “*Aiethesis decolonial*” (Walter Dignolo, 2012) and on “*Aiethesis (bio)descolonial*” (Bessa-Oliveira, 2013)⁸ to formulate my idea of a *bougre* epistemology, absent the pejorative sense of the idea of the “bugre” (Portuguese) maintained by dominant discourses.⁹ The discussion takes as its starting point a colonial aesthetic that has a modern-historical nature, established by European discourse during the colonization of Latin America; more precisely, the colonizations that took place after the sixteenth century, carried out by Spain and Portugal’s missionaries.

Since its beginnings, therefore, colonization is dominant

7. The choice of Mato Grosso do Sul as an object of study is due to my academic background. I consider the border of Mato Grosso do Sul with Paraguay and Bolivia, with its artistic productions made from and as artistic bodies—whether plastically or literally, in a scene that uses human bodies, for example—as a biographical and geographical condition.

8. My initial reflection on *other* aesthetic possibilities for Visual Arts employed the term *decolonial*—in Spanish as quoted by Walter D. Mignolo—however, it is worth noting that the Portuguese version of this paper uses the Portuguese writing of the term, in my free translation: *descolonial*. This is in order to bring the reflection closer to the Brazilian cultural locus, in Mato Grosso do Sul.

9. The notion of “bugre” in Mato Grosso do Sul, especially in the region of the triple frontier, takes as a principle the historical idea of the Brazilian Indian: lazy, dirty and vagabond.

in the artistic and theoretical productions of Brazilian art. As such, I propose to discuss a decolonial epistemic proposal that seeks to reintroduce an old notion of *Aesthesis*: that of *biogeographical* sensitivity. I also propose a critical discussion of the conceptual relationships established here.¹⁰ Although not exposed in this paper, the idea of *Decolonial Aesthesis* is critically discussed in Spanish language (MIGNOLO, 2012). I intend to contrast this discussion with my epistemic thinking of the “*Aiesthesis (bio)descolonial*” (BESSA-OLIVEIRA, 2013), seen as a *Bougre* Epistemology, to reflect on Brazilian artistic production, which is, evidently, thought of in Portuguese language. Since Brazil is located geographically inside a Latin block of foreign language (Spanish), I want to think about Brazilian artistic and critical production in regard to the Brazilian post-colonial Latin-American status. In this sense, another passage of Mignolo, illustrative of this question, is justified:

Also some time ago scholars assumed that if you “are from” Latin America you must “talk about” Latin America, which in this case should mean a show of your culture. Such expectations do not emerge when the author comes from Germany, France, England or the United States. In such cases it is not assumed that you should speak of your culture; you can function as a theoretically-minded person. As we are aware: the first world has knowledge, the third world has culture; the Native Americans have wisdom, the Anglo-Americans have science. The need to inaugurate a political and epistemic decoloniality comes to the fore, as well as the need for a decolonial knowledge. These are necessary steps to imagine and build non-imperial, non-colonial, democratic and just societies (MIGNOLO, 2009, p.10, self-translation).¹¹

Modern aesthetic assumptions have for a long time ceased to contemplate “interpretations,” whether analytic or not. This is true whether critical practices were developed in Europe or the United States (centers of modern and postmodern thinking, respectively). It is even worse when it comes to Latin American practices. Studies based on restrictive or classificatory analysis had their epistemological place in structuralism, and in a long post-structural period (in the Brazilian case). While this is due to the multiplicity of techniques, theories and differences in current artistic practices, it also stems from the fact that the biographical subject, with its diversified cultural identity, its *geospatial* locus (local cultural history, or geographic local of enunciation, as I prefer), transforms any traditional interpretation that can be made of contemporary artistic-cultural practices or even of Brazilian historical practices.

10.

This is an important consideration, especially in view of certain issues, that will also be addressed, present in theorizations of Latin-American artistic production.

11.

“También hace algún tiempo los académicos tuvieron como supuesto que si ‘eres’ de América Latina debes ‘hablar acerca’ de América Latina, que en ese caso debías ser una muestra de tu cultura. Tales expectativas no surgen si el autor viene de Alemania, Francia, Inglaterra o Estados Unidos. En esos casos no se presupone que debas hablar de tu cultura, puedes funcionar como una persona de mente teórica. Como sabemos: el primer mundo tiene conocimiento, el tercer mundo tiene cultura; los Nativos Americanos tienen sabiduría, los Angloamericanos tienen ciencia. La necesidad del desenganche y la decolonialidad política y epistémica se pone en primer plano, así como la instauración de conocimientos decoloniales, pasos necesarios para imaginar y construir sociedades no-imperiales/coloniales, democráticas y justas” (MIGNOLO, 2009, p.10).

It is from this point of view that a decolonial epistemology, therefore a “*bougre* episteme,” does not corroborate the totality of post-modern ideas, let alone the post-structuralist and modern structuralist formulations, in which a great part of artistic production in Brazil is anchored. To put it in another way: it is no longer common practice, in the contemporary world—irrespective of the mode of “interpretation” of individuals, objects or artistic practice one opts for—to ignore the creator as the living body of the “analyzed” artistic work. The creator, in this sense, bearing in mind its diversified cultural identity, its *geospatial* locus (local cultural history, or geographic local of enunciation), as mentioned before, constitutes what I call a *biogeographical* creator.¹² Similarly, it is impossible to conceive contemporary theoretical discourse, or even critical historical discourse, without going through the “*bios*” and the “*opinion*” of the investigating critic. It is therefore impossible for us to disregard the different enunciative geographic locations from which these epistemological “interpretations” are made.

The artistic bodies that stage in the contemporaneity are no longer contemplated by discussions that establish dichotomies in terms of modern premises. Contemporaneity has urgency in thinking, for example, of the relations between borders, through which scenic bodies, in their liquidity, (trans)border, in the attempt to resignify their *biogeographies*. These are spaces with a biographical and geohistorical nature disregarded by a world-system that inscribes sensations, emotions and artistic experiments, unable to recognize, with its modern concepts, anything beyond the idea of separated bodies. Equally to this understanding of the artistic body as a passer-by between opposing sides of a border, always approaching and touching, the concept of border itself must be understood by contemporary epistemologies—an obvious case for “*bougre* episteme”—as a place for the *self* to move¹³ in between, beyond and below the supposedly delimiting places built by the discourses of power (in art and politics) that establish the ends and beginnings of bodies and spaces.

While in modern aesthetics the creative subject behind artistic processes was almost always set aside, the enunciative place was not observed either, and the work of art had its own fetishistic “aura”. In contemporaneity, *other* possibilities of critical interpretation and artistic practices—anchored in the *biogeographical* being, feeling and knowledge—emerge. The cultural, biographical, geographical identities of the creators (artists or critics) are presuppositions necessary to better

12.

The notion of biogeographic creator is best discussed in *BIOGEOGRAFIAS OCIDENTAIS/ ORIENTAIS: (i)migrações do bios e das epistemologias artísticas no front*, in issue number 15 of the *Cadernos de Estudos Culturais: Ocidente/Oriente: migrações* (first half of 2016). As an illustration to the reader, the concept is formulated from the idea that the creator, their identity and their geographical space migrate and are always associated/seeking association with the places from which they leave or to which they arrive, and with their memories and stories.

13.

Here is an idea that illustrates well the relationship between biographical bodies and geographic spaces at the border in question. To move oneself is to be on both sides of the border at the same time. Belonging, being, feeling and knowing, as a biogeographical belonging, the opposing sides that the colonial capitalist system insists on dichotomizing: I belong to one side at the very moment I am in it.

contemplate and understand the artistic-cultural practices of places marginalized by the (European or North American) historical hegemonic discourses, which view them as subordinate. Especially because in these places (for instance Mato Grosso do Sul, my enunciative locus), artistic practices and critical formulations about these practices are still susceptible to the conceptual productions of the hegemonic centers, as we previously said. All the above, therefore, shows that it is not a single notion of aesthetics, especially one anchored in the beautiful, that will produce knowledge of places that are marginal in relation to the borders built by dominant discourses. That is why it is possible to think of epistemes or at least aesthetics in the plural, in order to better contemplate the different artistic productions in Brazil. It should be remembered, however, that aesthetics always implies “stylistic” categories and is almost always construed by a certain discourse from the ones who are in power or belong to it. Elitist discourses, reinforced by historicist or *a priori* conceptualizations, which I do not intend to emphasize in this work, break conceptual relationships.

Overcoming the notion of beauty of modern aesthetics, begun with the classical notion of “taste” of the Greeks and Romans, I believe that taking biographical subjects and geographic places of enunciation as a starting point, but replacing aesthetics with episteme, changes our own, traditional notion of aesthetics, still prevalent in contemporary times.¹⁴ From the perspective outlined in the “*bougre* epistemology,” the creator should not be seen as the artificer of antiquity, nor as the author, non-existent in modernity, and still less as the creator who produces his work paying no heed to his geographical and biographical surroundings. These are relevant points for a critique that does not want to practice a modern aesthetic. In this sense, what is the aesthetic that allows us to better reflect on productions of Visual Arts, Scenic Arts, Music and so on, in contexts where *biogeographical* stories are in evidence? That is, how to critically approach artistic practices (scenic, plastic and pedagogical) that are not inscribed in this historical notion of aesthetics? The answer to these questions is based on the proposal of *biogeographical* decolonization—made possible by *other* epistemes, such as “*bougre* epistemology”—as an alternative to decolonize the being, the doing and the knowing of Western art; especially in regard to the many local arts and creators inscribed in the Brazilian enunciative locus, which no longer simply “somatize” issues imported from Europe or the United States into their *biogeographical* bodies.

14. Even if this contemporary aesthetic does not rigorously follow the concept of beauty built by the Greeks and Romans, it is common in the critical analysis of artistic productions, and in various artistic productions, the emphasis on a relationship of proximity with this historical aesthetic. Be it from reading Aristotle or Plato, Descartes, Kant or Nietzsche. Also, we have in the classrooms a pedagogy based on History of Art as the only possible starting point for approaching art.

To speak of somatization and exteriorization as artistic practice is a way of emphasizing differences of this practice in relation to modalities of internalization, important in constituting the identities that prevail in modernity. Currently, intimacy turns outwards in order to find a glance that recognizes it, giving it meaning and value. It ceased to be a secret refuge to become a material produced in the explicit presence of the other (ORTEGA; ZORZANELLI, 2010, p.68, self-translation).

The Latin “being,” so to speak, carries in its womb an idea of exclusion, constructed by the hierarchical discourses. As emphasized previously in the excerpt from Walter Mignolo, we are culture; we do not tell great stories and we do not produce knowledge. Yet, in terms of an *alternative* notion of “aesthetics,” we are cultures that are not unconscious of others; being Latin is to propose other geographical places as staging grounds for the articulation of critical or artistic reflections, productions of knowledge. Therefore, latinity, as hegemonic extradiscourses, has characteristics that emancipate it from the elitist, hegemonic or binary aesthetics forcing us to inquire about other epistemic possibilities everyday. Modern aesthetics was and is classificatory and elitist by historical nature. It always takes as its point of departure—artistic and critical—a classical, white, phallic and bourgeois predecessor located in Europe or the United States, to judge other productions, from places outside the centers of the world.

Postcolonial theoretical postulates thought in and for the “off-axis” places of criticism and theories of the Visual Arts, can revert—decolonize—artistic criticism and practice, without maintaining the old binarisms—center *versus* periphery; art *versus* non-art. It is also possible to say that these postulates are useful for the practices and productions (artistic and critical) of Brazil and its specific cultural sites, such as Mato Grosso do Sul: always reinforced as my geographic locus of enunciation, since I defend a biogeographical and historical situationalization as a means of thinking critically and differently about the artistic productions of many national sites. From this geographic locus, for example, we can speak of *bougre* aesthetics, as I started to (BESSA-OLIVEIRA, 2013), *borderland* aesthetics (ANZALDÚA, 2007) or good-neighbour aesthetics, as well as *biographical sensitivity* or *geographic locus of enunciation*, which characterize part of the *bios* and artistic geography of Mato Grosso do Sul’s borderland.

From the perspective of biographical creators carrying *open wounds* (ANZALDÚA, 2007) caused by the colonizing, homogenizing and border-establishing processes, indian diaspora, slavery,

slaughter and murder mark the Brazilian biographical trauma, opened by the colonizing discourse and kept open by modern aesthetical and political discourse. In this sense, relying on interpretations that propose a “post-westernization” of peripheral places, and therefore of the practices and subjects that live and produce from these places, this *alternative* notion of “aesthetics”—which we term *bougre* aesthetics—also takes as its starting point the idea of *biographical sensitivity* and *migrant locus of enunciation* to show that, despite referring to specific subjects and places, it does not focus on a single place, creator or practice as the only possible object of interpretation. Therefore, thinking in terms of *bougre* epistemology requires the awareness that the One is not the whole and the idea that alterities and identities are increasingly mobile and unstable, and never bipartite. As such, if *bougre* aesthetics emerges from the Mato Grosso do Sul borderland (with some creators and specific artistic works serving as its examples), and considering the primary condition that *other* “aesthetics” should always bear in mind that biographical sensitivities and different locus of migrant enunciation, i.e. *biogeographies*, are many and varied in the national territory, how can it be articulated in other place in Brazilian geography?¹⁵

The question that was established at the beginning of this work can be rephrased as follows: what is the “aesthetic,” considering I am proposing epistemologies in the plural (instead of a singular aesthetic), that better contemplates the production of arts (artistic, theoretical, critical and, why not, pedagogical), in view of the *diversity* of Brazilian national production and our status as a peripheral, postcolonial and subaltern place? From now on I do not take Latin America as a reference. It is hereby established the concern with the specificity of artistic production in Mato Grosso do Sul. Yet there are different places, biographies, geographies, *biogeographies* and practices, in other relationships, that are also important: I intend to emphasize the specificities that these diversities imprint on different productions and how, based on them, we can understand ourselves as *craftsmen* and producers of knowledge.

Contrary to the abstract universals of Eurocentric epistemologies, which subsume/dilute the particular in the undifferentiated, a “radical universal decolonial anticapitalist diversity” is a concrete universal, respecting the manifold local particularities in the struggles against patriarchy, capitalism, coloniality, and eurocentric modernity, stemming from a variety of decolonial ethical-epistemic historical projects (GROSGOUEL, 2008, p.22, self-translation).

15.

Our reflection on artistic production comes from the notion that the (artistic and critical) articulation that we consider aesthetics has as its main point the historical idea that the West is the center of the world. Therefore, the epistemological proposal now considered is certainly another, but not because it is new: since it is not a continuation of any previous epistemic proposal considered sovereign and referenced exclusively in the past. If on the plane of Arts little can be explained by semantic information, on the plane of objectivity (where information is the act of directing something to somebody), aesthetics would leave something to be desired. Thinking about this disparate and dichotomous relationship between semantic information and aesthetic information, it is possible to say that aesthetics would better “exemplify,” with subjective information, the practices of the Visual Arts, while semantics would have the goal of providing the creator with more information or a higher degree of understanding of that information. After all, we do think of Art as taste and information as education, one depending on the other: art on education or education on art. That is, at the level of semantics—where, theoretically, there is a greater number of uninformed parties (uneducated receptors of the message/information)—the path between information and objectivity is reduced, given the simplified and inferior degree of the contained information. Whereas for aesthetics, this path would require a supposedly apt (educated) individual to understand the information that is on a plane of subjectivity, a non-layman and a “good reader” of aesthetic information. This, of course, without considering that the subjectivity of each is variant and different and without taking as parameters other possibilities of interpretation. In any case, this is not the thinking of one who is based on a reflection that considers only the historical-modern nature of aesthetics. For modern aesthetics takes as its starting point the knowledgeable and educated individual, able to perfectly receive information. Seen from the point of view of the Visual Arts, this is an individual who knows the History of Western Art from beginning to end, or at least the version that has been told us as the history of world artistic production. So, from my point of view, that is why art supposedly must come with education and vice versa, and why the individual is demanded education when looking at art.

We all know that our production, whether in Visual Arts, Performing Arts, or in any other artistic or practical language, is of an ex-colonial nature. I also recognize that the Brazilian, both in criticism and in artistic practices (especially artistic theory and work), is good at assimilating the different critical proposals that (i)migrate and anchor themselves in our artistic-intellectual reflections. Generally, there is a receptibility of Brazilian critics and artists in relation to the critical and artistic innovations that find their way here daily, coming from elsewhere. However, it is possible to assert that this receptibility (theoretical and artistic) does not stem from a *cultural translation* of these outside productions.

Brazil is the only former Portuguese colony that becomes, by its own language, more peripheral in the context of the Spanish-speaking cultural bloc.¹⁶ There is also a “coexistence” between Brazil and the Spanish Latin-American language block, marked by a difference in relation to countries in which the majority of ethnic groups are Indian. Therefore, our reflections and those of other Latin-American countries must be specific in comparison to those of Europe, the United States and Latin America itself; all thanks to the respective colonial influences (Portuguese or Spanish) that “let themselves” be made. If in the Latin American bloc, *peasant* forces are dense and strongly intellectualized, in Brazil the Indians (by the way, the term ‘Indian’ is also a creation of the West) are considered savages, “*bugres*” (a pejorative term used by the Europeans), and almost always illiterate. Indians in Brazil fight and are killed due to land disputes, as it happens in my own geographical locus, still using wild weapons (bows, arrows and wooden spears) and, at most, firearms taken from the whites themselves, in armed reprisals and ambushes.

What I mean is, in most Latin-American countries that are Andean, for example, indigenous ethnicity is still very marked in the *bios*, whereas in the case of Brazil the ethnic mix between Indians, blacks and colonizers, since the arrival of the Europeans here, is much stronger than their racial “purity.” Since the “discovery” of Brazilian lands, the arrival (and departure) of different individuals from foreign cultures has brought an unusual and unclassifiable mixture to Brazilian racial and cultural identity. Ethnic traits in some of these foreigners forcibly brought here are always seen with prejudice and in a discriminatory manner, even in popular Brazilian sayings. This was outlined in Darcy Ribeiro’s passage, in the beginning of this discussion. To a certain extent we can agree that critical articulation by Spanish-speaking Latin Americans does not fit our purposes, due to the

16.

To think about colonization, we must have in mind that, in Latin America itself, the situation of Brazilian national production, in relation to subalternization and questions of coloniality, is much more tense because of language reasons. I take language as a starting point to investigate why our practices and criticism in Visual Arts are still subaltern and contemporary, at the same time. It is necessary to bear in mind, when discussing Brazilian artistic practices in Latin America, that our Portuguese language puts us in a state of greater exclusion in relation to other countries of the American continent than in relation to European countries. Therefore, how can we theorize this Brazilian national production if, for many theorists, the theorization of Latin America as an enunciative geographic locus, made almost entirely in the Spanish language, is not adequate to us, even though Spanish-speaking countries in the south of the continent are as subaltern as Brazil?

linguistic difference. However, just as Brazilian critical and artistic discourse takes very good advantage of European and American thought, isolation in a *unitary* block does not seem to be the way out for places of a subaltern historical nature. We can have their Latinity “in favor” of ours. For if, on the one hand, the Latin-American critical discourse is linguistically different, the same subaltern condition prevails in it. In fact, if even European and American artistic and critical discourse is good for—insofar as we allow ourselves to be (historically and contemporaneously) colonized—then we cannot continue to agree that the episteme and artistic productions of Latinos are indifferent to us. Equally, it should no longer be common sense that the artistic and critical knowledge from Europe and the United States is especially adequate to be reproduced in our artistic practices, as if they were the only possible solutions.

I make this critical proposition regarding *other* “aesthetics” in order to reflect upon our national artistic production from the standpoint of a geographical *locus* of enunciation that was relegated to oblivion. This is also because this place, this *locus*, is only part of another *locus*, not least forgotten. I do not forget about Walter Mignolo’s warning: that the proposal of a *descolonial* thought, as a postcolonial aesthetic, has a particular political and social character, which is to critically reflect on places colonized by the Spanish crown. I have already outlined my concerns regarding this issue, so, for now, I want to focus on developing the alternative of a *bougre* epistemology or *biogeographical* episteme for understanding Brazilian artistic production.¹⁷ Even though, as the rest of Latin America, we have coloniality in our blood, I take geography, Brazilian artistic criticism and biographical critique as parameters, since these critiques were formulated almost exclusively by Brazilian thinkers.

The discussion of the differences between North and South also focuses on the theoretical question, considering that the production of theories—ideologically linked to abstract thinking and objective rationality—would take place in the more developed countries, with their practical application in the peripheral countries, endowed with irrationality and subordinated to the knowledge produced in the metropolis. This image rests on the feminine symbol, which, associated with body language and sensibility, is opposed to male discourse, to rationality, concentrated in the head, upper body (SOUZA, 2002, p.165, self-translation).

In a way, this passage by Eneida de Souza, as well as the passage by Walter Mignolo, both endorse what I presented earlier; especially when Mignolo asserts that the artistic practices of the coun-

17.

I must stress that this idea has no nationalistic character. Diverging from modern aesthetics, it highlights *other* “aesthetic” possibilities in artistic productions and local Brazilian criticism.

tries located in the lower part of the globe serve only as *examples* of knowledge erected in Europe or the United States. I am referring exactly to the idea advanced by the cultural critic Eneida Maria de Souza: *our* cultural and theoretical practices are subordinate to *their* knowledge: in the same way our practices always seem to be at disposal as objects of analysis from the standpoint of critical knowledge produced in foreign countries: as if our bodies were immersed only in ourselves and never *(trans)bordered* borders.

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