

APPROXIMATIONS AND DISTANCING BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY ART AND DECOLONIAL THINKING: DOCUMENTA 14 AND MASP¹

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze recent artistic proposals that work with categories such as post coloniality and decoloniality. The present research analyzes the institutional places and platforms of diffusion of this recent production, a dynamic process that is creating new cultural manifestations, in several geographies, with interest to question the remaining of the cultural submission, starting from a work of interpretation and visibility based on mechanisms linked to politics and resistance. We will seek a transnational dialogue, based on the public programs of *documenta 14* and the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), highlighting the commitment that these programs have in evidencing the emergence of new narratives starting from the booming of themes that involve histories, establishing the possibility of creating debates in which the remnants of colonial structures that are sometimes questioned, sometimes evidenced. Such programs can be seen as a set of elements that help to reflect on a new political, social and global order.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, Public Programs, Curatorship, Decoloniality.

Resumo

Esta comunicação tem como objetivo analisar propostas artísticas recentes que trabalham com categorias como *pós colonialidade* e *decolonialidade*. A pesquisa apresentada analisa os lugares institucionais e plataformas de difusão desta produção recente, processo dinâmico que está criando novas manifestações culturais, em diversas geografias, com interesse de questionar os restos da submissão cultural, partindo de um trabalho de interpretação e visibilidade com base em mecanismos vinculados à política e resistência. Buscaremos um diálogo transnacional, com base nos programas públicos da *documenta 14* e do Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), destacando o compromisso que estes programas possuem em evidenciar o surgimento de novas narrativas que partem da ebulição de temas que envolvem histórias, instaurando a possibilidade de criação de debates em que os resquícios de estruturas coloniais são ora questionados, ora evidenciados. Tais programas podem ser encarados como um conjunto de elementos que ajudam a refletir sobre uma nova ordem política, social e mundial.

Palavras Chave: Arte Contemporânea, Programas Públicos, Curadoria, Decolonialidade.

¹This text is the result of the debates generated in the XIII International Conference on Great Problems of the European Space in the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto (May / 2018) and in the Conversation Circuit of the Public Art Gallery Short Circuit, organized by the School of Fine Arts of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (October / 2018).

1. Crisis, Historiography and Erasure

This text aims to bring the reflection on the relation between public programs and decolonial thinking, discussing how some themes are inserted in museums' agendas and other important events related to contemporary art. Such questions are at the center of global debates about culture, and are highlighted here, so their relation with decolonial thinking can be understood. This objective of this text is to contribute to the reflection on epistemological interlacings, which contributes to the formulation of artistic and curatorial practices that question European colonial legacies explicitly. There is nothing new about dealing with the matters of identity and sense of belonging throughout the visual arts, especially when the dynamics of societies with colonial tradition are considered. The main focus of this reflection lies in the notion of 'Europe', considering its reverberations nowadays. These questions intensify after the second half of the twentieth century, with the independence movements that resulted in new countries that soon began to review their histories, in the words of the Portuguese researcher António Pinto Ribeiro,

No final do milénio, a queda do muro de Berlim e o surgimento, a Leste, de outros países que de certo modo constituem parte do movimento pós-colonial, impuseram novas interrogações sobre a noção de Europa e sobre o legado da filosofia ocidental² (RIBEIRO, 2006, 11).

One of the central concepts to this paper is the border epistemology, as postulated by the Venezuelan professor Arturo Escobar, in *Mundos y conocimientos de otro modo* (2003), the author understands border epistemologies as “o que emerge nos momentos de fratura dentro do imaginário do sistema-mundo produzindo uma dupla crítica (do eurocentrismo, ao mesmo tempo que das tradições excluídas). [...] é o deslocamento e ponto de partida como crítica e afirmação de uma ordem alternativa do real³” (ESCOBAR, 2003, 66). The world-systems theory originates in the ideas of the historian Fernand Braudel⁴, based on the study of the interrelations between the social system and the advance of the global capitalism between different countries. According to traditional approaches, the economic, political and sociocultural spheres are separated into distinct analysis, but this theory offers an unit for investigations based on the interconnection that permeates all processes. Immanuel Wallerstein continued these analyses⁵, postulating the formation of this system started at the 16th century and followed an expansion process that culminated in the current global system of economic exchanges. This system works according to a series of hierarchies that unequally establish the benefits and losses.

In his book *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (2007), Wallerstein approaches theses that defend the social and economic foundations of modernity, use rhetorical frameworks used

²Free translation: At the end of the millennium, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the emergence in the East of other countries that are in some way part of the postcolonial movement have imposed new questions on the notion of Europe and on the legacy of Western philosophy.

³Free Translation: what emerges in moments of fracture within the imaginary of the world-system producing a double criticism (of Eurocentrism, at the same time as of the excluded traditions). [...] is the displacement and starting point as criticism and affirmation of an alternative order of the real

⁴ Braudel, F. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (2 Vols). New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1972, 1973.

⁵ WALLERSTEIN, I. *The Modern World System*. New York: Academic Press, 1974.

to reassert a superiority of the western (Europe-United States) of techniques and strategies is the so-called "European Universalism". He states that we must persist in attempting to analyze the world-system of our transitional time, and thus " esclarecer as alternativas disponíveis e, portanto, as escolhas morais que teremos de fazer e, finalmente, lançar luz sobre os caminhos políticos que desejamos seguir⁶" (WALLERSTEIN, 2007, 124). So the collapse of European Universalism points to the blossoming of another age, which no longer uses rhetorical frameworks to propose unique paths of action and understanding of the world.

So let's highlight the events involving activities that took place at *documenta 14* and the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). Locating the public programs of these institutions as agglutinative elements of issues that stress our present moment, locating contemporaneity within this crisis of hegemony. Before we go into the specificity of these public programs, I think it is necessary to make two clarifications about decolonial thinking, in order to mark the specificity of decolonial thinking in the face of postcolonial theories. To do so I am going to mention two authors who contributed to the development of this thought.

The first is the Argentine researcher Walter Mignolo, who wrote works like *Histórias locais/projetos globais: colonialidade, saberes subalternos e pensamento liminar* (1999) and *Desobediência epistémica. Retórica de la modernidad, lógica de la colonialidad y gramática de la descolonialidad* (2010). In *Desobediência Epistémica*, the author affirms that post colonialism and critical theory are transformational projects which operated almost exclusively from the perspective of the European and American academy. The decolonial option is a project of epistemic detachment for the sphere of the social, although it also turns to the academic scope, this is seen as part of the social world, thus diluting the idea of a center of action and elaboration (MIGNOLO, 2010, 15). Another author with enormous contributions to decolonial thinking is the researcher Catherine Walsh, professor at Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (Ecuador). She is co-editor with Walter Mignolo of the book *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (2018), and series editor *Pedagogías decoloniales: Prácticas insurgentes de resistir, (re)existir y (re)vivir*, published in two volumes (2013-2017). In an interview⁷, Walsh presents what she considers to be the main contribution of a decolonial pedagogy, which is the fact it does not need an author, a manual, recipes or schemes that advocate for a form. It is the posture of continually questioning and asking, recognizing that there is a power structure, and such a structure maintains continuities, due to the intrinsic colonial / modern relationship.

Postulated these two contributions, it is worth mentioning in the field of art history, this sort of questioning and request for revision, maintains important historical precedents. I am specifically interested in the text published in *Arts Magazine* in December 1988, by the poet and art critic John Yau, entitled: *Please Wait By the CoatRoom: Wilfredo Lam in the Museum of Modern Art*. The text turns to the question of the disposition of the painting *The Jungle* (1943) of the Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam which was arranged in the hall that leads to the museum cloakroom. For the critic, the position of

⁶ Free Translation: clarify the available alternatives and therefore the moral choices we will have to make and finally shed light on the political paths we wish to pursue.

⁷ Source: UTV Esmédios UNIMINUTO. Colômbia, Fev. de 2017. mp4, 25m. Fonte: <<https://bit.ly/2CGEV8X>> Access in 10th September, 2018.

the painting, far from the museum's galleries, reveals a logic that runs through various institutions. Placing such a work in a passage space near the entrance door would be a reflection of a hierarchical view of the artistic manifestations. Wilfredo Lam in an interview with Max-Pol Fouchet in 1976 says

Eu queria, do fundo do meu coração, pintar o drama do meu país, mas expressando minunciosamente o espírito negro, a beleza da arte plástica dos negros. desse modo, eu podia agir como um cavalo de Troia que jorraria figuras alucinantes com o poder de surpreender e perturbar os sonhos dos exploradores. Eu sabia que estava correndo o risco de não ser entendido nem pelos homens nas ruas nem pelos outros. Mas um retrato verdadeiro tem o poder de colocar a imaginação para trabalhar, mesmo que isso possa levar algum tempo (YAU, 2018, 83)⁸.

While Lam sought to be a Trojan Horse, in Yau's understanding, MoMA redefined him as an office boy who waits without entering the galleries. The text of John Yau considers the influence of the writing of William Rubin⁹ (1927-2006) in the positioning of *The Jungle*, because, Yau finds only a paragraph of six sentences on the painting of Lam, written by Rubin, and still with several problematics, about which he discourses phrase to phrase. The task of John Yau concerns us in this study specifically by two points, the first is how a historiography of art that seeks to frame artists in a continuing tradition of Western art can result in systemic deletions, and also by the alert made by the author who says "com a proximidade do fim do século e estando num país cuja demografia está mudando rapidamente, talvez tenha chegado a hora de reavaliar essas suposições¹⁰" (YAU, 2018, p. 82).

2. Enunciation policies and memory

The city of Kassel (Germany) has an interesting history for thinking about some exchanges between history, art and politics. This city was home to some very emblematic episodes, which I consider relevant in the history of *documenta*. Created in 1955 by curator Arnold Bode, the headquarters of *documenta* is the museum *Fridericianum* opened in 1779, the first public museum in Europe. The city suffered strategic attacks between February 1942 and March 1945. In a single attack carried out between 22 and 23 October, 150,000 people were bombed, resulting in the destruction of the entire city center, plus a fire that lasted seven days, also destroying the Fridericianum Museum. Another powerful image are photographs found in many historical archives, where trains carrying people to concentration camps hold the inscription *Deutsche Reichsbahn Kassel*¹¹.

Throughout Germany, museums have begun to remove modern works of art under the official *entartete Kunst* (degenerate art). The term "degeneration" (*Entartung*) was borrowed from medicine to art in the late nineteenth century, a word originating in the German Middle Ages, which meant "going

⁸Free translation: I wanted, from the bottom of my heart, to paint the drama of my country, but expressing meticulously the black spirit, the beauty of black art. so I could act like a Trojan horse that would gush forth hallucinatory figures with the power to surprise and disturb the dreams of the explorers. I knew I was in danger of being misunderstood by the men on the streets or by the others. But a true portrait has the power to put the imagination to work, even if it may take some time.

⁹ Director of the painting and sculpture department of MoMA between 1973 and 1988.

¹⁰ Free translation: with the approach of the end of the century and being in a country whose demographics are rapidly changing, it is perhaps time to re-evaluate these assumptions.

¹¹ German national railway system created after the end of World War I from the regional railways of the individual states of the German Empire.

out of style". In this way, works that did not meet the art and beauty conception of *Deutsche Kunst* (German art). On July 19, 1937, the exhibition "Degenerate Art" was inaugurated in Munich, with 650 works confiscated from 32 German museums. The exhibition received more than two million visitors, counting on the exhibition of images in schools and associations affiliated to the regime. This process was already outlined in 1930, when Minister Wilhelm Frick issued the *Wider Die Negerkultur für deutsches Volkstum* (Against Black Culture, in favor of German nationalism) decree.

In 1955, Arnold Bode sought to bring the avant-garde, who had been defamed and banished back to Germany and reintroduce it to a large audience that had long been deprived of these works, while also seeking to promote conversations in the contemporary arts in opposition to the specters of nationalism, neo-Nazism and fascism. With the five-year periodicity, soon the documenta took a prominent place in the agenda of global contemporary art events, together with the Venice Biennale and the São Paulo Biennial. From the 1990s, the *documenta* joined the global decentering movement of the Western historical-artistic canon. Evidenced by two unpublished events, in *documenta X* (1997), for the first time the artistic direction was not exercised by a man from the Germanic Europe, but by the French curator Catherine David. A fact that was added to the spatial decentralization inaugurated with *documenta 11* (2002), curated by the Nigerian Okwui Enwezor (first non-European curator), with platforms in Berlin, Vienna, New Delhi, Saint Lucia and Lagos, this was the *first truly global, postcolonial documenta exhibition*¹².

In 2015 the Greeks decided in a referendum not to accept the conditions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank (ECB) for financial aid, as the required measures included raising taxes and cutting pensions. Thousands of "No" supporters crowded into Syntagma Square in central Athens, displaying Greek flags and posters with the word OXI (No), repeating slogans against austerity. "No, for a free country" and "No, for the future, for our children," said some of the posters. The protesters shouted Oxi, oxi, some sang and others danced. This event has a double symbology because it was an event resulting from the 2008 global financial crisis, and the city of Athens has a great historical weight, since the city is considered as one of the "cradles of Western epistemology", since the city was the birthplace of Plato and Aristotle. Founder of Ethics, Logic, Ethics, Method, Dualism, Theory of Ideas, Demiurge, Concept, Justice, Physics, Rhetoric, Metaphysics, Poetics, Politics, Virtue, among many other creations, which laid the foundations of a universalist science. In the text *Desobediência epistêmica: a opção descolonial e o significado de identidade em política* (2008), Walter Mignolo says

O que os pensadores gregos chamaram de filosofia (amor à sabedoria) e os pensadores aymara, de tlamachilia (pensar bem) são expressões locais e particulares de uma tendência comum e uma energia em seres humanos. O fato de que a "filosofia" se tornou global não significa que também é "uni-versal." Simplesmente significa que o conceito grego de filosofia foi assimilado pela inteligência ligada à expansão imperial/colonial, aos fundamentos do capitalismo e da modernidade ocidental¹³ (MIGNOLO, 2008, 298).

¹²Documenta official website: Source: <<https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta11>>. Access in 10th October, 2018.

¹³Free translation: What Greek thinkers called philosophy (love of wisdom) and Aymara thinkers, tlamachilia (think well) are local and particular expressions of a common tendency and an energy in human beings. The fact that

All this development has resulted in the *documenta 14* (2017), conducted by the artistic director Adam Szymczyk, where the chosen theme was "the South as a State of Mind", fact that evidenced the relevance of this question in the international scope. The proposal of the event had the interest of pointing out the possibility of another sphere of relations with Europe, starting from the South as a "mental state". The central idea was to construct a mentality that could reject, rebel and present new possibilities of non-passive communication, contrary to the verticalization of orders, thus defending a horizontality of decisions. The South, in this case, appears as a possibility of insurrection in the face of the crisis that is taking place in the world. For the first time, the model initiated by Okwui Enwezor (*documenta 11*) was ripped and the exhibition was also based in southern Europe. And there was no charge of tickets at the Athens-based exhibition.

Adam Szymczyk invited philosopher and curator Paul B. Preciado to create public programs, which sought to discuss the need for alliances between artists, activists and critical thinkers, in order to build open, anti-monumental forms within the existing institutional ruins¹⁴. Thus, it was proposed ways of collectively experimenting with a radical transformation of the public sphere and proliferation of new forms of subjectivity, not creating distinctions between speech and performance, theory and action, criticism and art. Documenta's public programs were started seven months before the opening of the exhibition (September 2016). Entitled *The Parliament of Bodies*, which was based on the idea that the Parliament¹⁵ was in ruins, soon the "true" Parliament was in the streets, constituted by undocumented and undocumented entities that resisted to measures of austerity and xenophobic policies¹⁶. Such programs have a dimension that deserves detailed analysis, but in this text our objective is to insert their central ideas so that they are considered within the complexity of a global neoliberal economy, and in a context of growing neocolonial and neofascist discourses. Fundamental references for the organization of public programs are societies of friends that emerged in the late nineteenth century, generating activities which sought to foment the abolitionist struggle. These associations of friends wanted to develop at the same time epistemological, discursive, political and poetic imagination alternatives to the colonial regime, functioning as "a public countercultural program¹⁷", such as

In 1787, eleven friends founded the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in England, with the aim of informing the public about the treatment of enslaved Africans within England, in the colonies, and on plantations, campaigning in favor of a new law to abolish slave trade locally and oversees, and establishing areas in West Africa where Africans could live free of the risk of capture and sale into slavery. The members of the Society pursued these proposals vigorously by writing and publishing antislavery books, abolitionist prints, posters, and pamphlets and by organizing public lecture tours and theatrical displays in English towns and cities. A year later, following the same model of action, La Société des Amis des Noirs was founded in France. Organized as "societies of friends," both groups promoted the creation of

"philosophy" has become global does not mean that it is also "uni-versal." It simply means that the Greek concept of philosophy was assimilated by the intelligentsia tied to imperial / colonial expansion, to the foundations of capitalism and Western modernity.

¹⁴ Source: <<https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/1351/d14-sessions-8>> Access in 10th October, 2018.

¹⁵ Understood as a political representation of citizens within the governmental structure of a constitutional regime.

¹⁶ Source: <<https://www.documenta14.de/en/public-programs/>> Access in 10th October, 2018.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

social and friendly bonds between those who were considered legally and politically unequal. Two years later, in 1791, the revolt of slaves on the Caribbean island of Saint-Domingue developed into the first major antislavery revolution¹⁸.

The *Parliament of Bodies* took place in two emblematic buildings of the city, which offer elements to think not only of history and memory, but also illustrate different ways of dealing with public cultural industries within the spectrum of contemporary neoliberalism. So the activities took place in the *Parko Eleftherias* (Liberty Park), created in the area where there was a complex of military districts of the nineteenth century. The building of the *Athens Municipality Arts Center* was a military junta headquarters from 1967 to 1974 (Regime of the Colonels), and just behind this building is the *Museum of Anti-dictatorial and Democratic Resistance*, which in turn was an installation for detention and torture. Thus both spaces were the scene of repressive governmental measures, including censorship, persecution and torture of dissidents. The building of the *Athens Municipality Arts Center* underwent renovations in the 1980s and was transformed into the traditional "white cube" so that it could be used as a contemporary art space and a public gallery. *The Museum of Anti-dictatorial and Democratic Resistance* was partially rebuilt, while retaining its interior spaces as in the 1960s and 1970s. The disconnection of both buildings reveals distinct ways of dealing with historical processes of violence. For the realization of the Parliament of Bodies the concept of open form was developed by Oskar Hansen¹⁹, which started from critical ideas of the traditional conceptions inherited by Le Corbusier, thus contributing for rethinking contemporary architecture and urbanism. Starting from this idea, the Greek architect Andreas Angelidakis was invited to transform the architecture of both buildings, an activity that he called an exercise of research restoration. A direct connection was created in both spaces by reopening the back door of the building, the panel walls were partially cut off, allowing the stone walls to emerge showing the material history of the building, and the windows were covered with black curtains. In this space it is tried to avoid facing the public as aesthetic visitors or neoliberal consumers. Angelidakis designed a soft architecture composed of sixty-eight blocks of fake concrete "ruins" that can be assembled and remounted in various ways that rearrange the inner structure of space. For each one of the activities occurred the reorganization of these Ruins, creating different platforms for enunciation, exhibition or action.

The *documenta 14* was accompanied by publications that explore forms of writing - such as letters, stories, parables, essays, diaries, speech acts, legal documents, propaganda, poetry, among others. Including *South as a State of Mind*, a magazine founded by Marina Fokidis in Athens in 2012, and since the beginning of 2015, has temporarily become *the documenta 14 journal*, presenting and accompanying the research processes that train the exhibition. Its four editions focused on: [2015 # 1] Examining forms and figures of displacement, expropriation and modes of resistance - aesthetic, political, literary, biological; [2016 # 2] Explores questions of identity and silencing, orality and recognition, indigenism and exile, ancestry and repatriation, colonialism and gender violence; [2016 # 3] Concerns the constant correlation between nature, capital, power, and language; [2017 # 4] Seeks to understand violence as one of the structuring devices of our world. *The documenta 14: Daybook*

¹⁸Ibidem.

¹⁹For more details see: Oskar Hansen, Zofia Hansen, "The Open Form in Architecture—the Art of the Great Number". in CIAM '59 in Otterlo, edited by Oscar Newman, Stuttgart: Karl Krämer Verlag, 1961, p. 190–191.

has its emphasis on the 163 days of the exhibition, each artist has a day in the book, which includes a newly commissioned text as well as images selected by the artist specifically for publication, followed by two map leaflets, which are available in the exhibition and can be inserted into the cover sheet, thus completing the book. *The Documenta 14 Reader*, is the main publication of *documenta* and explores the discursive and practical concerns of the project, such as debt, donation, coloniality of power, art economies, languages and coins. An anthology that merges newly commissioned texts into the project as other fundamental ones, involving artists and historical actors included in the *documenta* project. Each of these publications articulates greater historical and political concerns of art, concentrating also on daily activities and practices of resistance.

3. Stories, when the canon is questioned

Across the Atlantic, we can find another interesting point of debate at MASP, a museum founded in 1947, at the initiative of the Brazilian Assis Chateaubriand, founder and owner of *Diários Associados* - at the time the largest conglomerate of communication vehicles in Brazil. Currently the MASP collection is listed by the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN), and has the most important and comprehensive collection of Western art from Latin America and the entire southern hemisphere. Throughout its history it has contributed with important initiatives in the field of museology and a marked didactic activities. The MASP (like *documenta*) was a pioneer institution in the promotion and diffusion of the artistic tendencies that emerged after the II World War.

Since November 1968, the headquarters of MASP is the building designed by the architect Lina Bo Bardi - one of the most important modernist works of the country. Its inauguration even counted on the presence of the queen Isabel II. The first temporary exhibition presented in 1969 was *A mão do povo brasileiro*, exhibition designed by Lina Bo Bardi with the director of the museum, Pietro Maria Bardi, the filmmaker Glauber Rocha and the theater director Martim Gonçalves. The exhibition presented a vast panorama of the material culture of Brazil (about a thousand objects). In 2016 the exhibition was rebuilt with the title *A mão do povo brasileiro - 1969/2016*. This attitude was taken by the institution as “um objeto de estudo e um precedente exemplar da prática museológica descolonizadora”²⁰. The central question of this show was: “de que maneira podem ser reconstruídas, lembradas e reconfiguradas as histórias sobre a arte e a cultura no Brasil, para além dos modos, gostos e ofícios das classes dominantes?”²¹. The MASP has a long-lasting project, around the idea of other stories, as the prefix stories, in the plural - open, unfinished and never totalizing - provokes . Also offering a program focused on public school network teachers, seeking to pulverize the discussions presented. These discussions include artists, cultural workers, teachers and activists who help to elaborate a critique of *European Universalism*, from lectures, workshops, publications and film shows.

²⁰ Source: < <https://masp.org.br/exposicoes/a-mao-do-povo-brasileiro-19692016>> Access in 10th October, 2018.

²¹Free Translation: how can stories about art and culture be reconstructed, recalled and reconfigured in Brazil, beyond the modes, tastes and offices of the ruling classes?. Ibidem.

The artistic director of MASP, Adriano Pedrosa, states that “A disciplina da história da arte, com suas raízes, estruturas e modelo profundamente europeus, é o aparato mais poderoso e duradouro do imperialismo e da colonização²²” (PEDROSA, 2018, p.8). So, the guiding question is what other stories can art deal beyond the history of art? What are the other characters, themes, narratives and periods of the discipline itself? In this sense, artistic production could reveal important aspects of several other stories. The MASP has organized, through extensive research, a program that revolves around these questions, generating thematic axes that agglutinate issues and knowledge that also result in exhibitions. However, it is not a closed program, since the themes intertwine in the measure that there is possibility to expand visions and methods beyond the position diffused by the centrality of the western museum. In this sense, in recent years the exhibitions have taken place: *Histórias Mestiças* (2014), *Histórias da Infância* (2016), *Histórias da Sexualidade* (2017), *Histórias Afro-Atlânticas* (2018). These exhibitions are the end result of the program that takes place in previous years, including thematic seminars with the participation of national and international voices that can contribute to these elaborations. In the next years, according to the program presented by the museum, there will be *Histórias do Feminismo e das Mulheres* (2019), *Histórias da Dança* (2020) and *História dos Indígenas* (2021).

Part of the result of these seminars, is followed by publications released together with the catalog in two volumes. Vol. 1 containing the images of the works of the exhibition and texts on the thematic axes, and vol. 2 which presents an anthology of texts. In the Anthology of texts of the exhibition *Afro-Atlânticas*, for example, 44 texts have been published, from *I am not a woman?*, by Sojourner Truth from 1851, the previously quoted text of John Yau, *Please Wait By the CoatRoom: Wilfredo Lam in the Museum of Modern Art* (1988), to rare texts of the historiography of Brazilian art, for example, *The Brazilian black in the plastic arts*, of Clarival do Prado Valladares, originally published in *Cadernos Brasileiros* in 1968. A final session called *Some Questions* is added to this publication, thus presenting texts commissioned for publication with the positioning of artists, who have worked through these questions.

In 2018, the *Seminar on Art and Decolonization* took place at MASP, due to a partnership established between MASP and *Afterall*²³. The research project includes publications of academic articles on the subject between 2018 and 2019, which will be gathered in an anthology to be published in 2020, including other texts that are already reference on art and decolonization. The objective is to raise questions and proposals for the reinterpretation of exhibitions and museum collections, from readings that challenge the traditional narratives of art. Adriano Pedrosa, wondered what would be the path to decolonize the museum, and the answer he finds is very interesting in the scope of this research, because it is necessary to recognize the impasses and incongruities of this idea. He states that “decerto não há uma receita para descolonizar o museu, e há diversos entendimentos em torno

²²Free translation: The discipline of art history, with its deeply European roots, structures and model, is the most powerful and enduring apparatus of imperialism and colonization.

²³Afterall, is a Research Center of the University of the Arts London, located in Central Saint Martins. Founded in 1998 by Charles Esche and Mark Lewis, Afterall focuses on contemporary art and its relationship to a broader artistic, theoretical and social context.

do que isso possa ser”²⁴ (PEDROSA, 2018, p.10). And he emphasizes that the interpretation of those engaged in these attempts is that this project can not be carried out, but in return, it is necessary to continue on this path, since it can always be even more decolonized.

4. Tensioning the structure: problems and positions

After this brief presentation of these two institutions and their public programs, I consider important to problematize these projects, inasmuch as these platforms, even if viewed as a device for criticizing hegemonic structures, can not escape complex challenges that demonstrate their own logic spaces. The first case involves *documenta 14* and exchanges of accusations through public letters, the second aims to point control of institutions mechanisms, which delimit the imaginative geography of certain subalternized groups.

On September 12, 2017, art critic Catherine Hickley published in *The Art Newspaper*²⁵ the article *Documenta faces yawning €7m deficit, seeks financial help*, where it says that the company that runs the *documenta* faces a deficit of 7 million euros and is seeking help from the state of Hesse and the city of Kassel. Soon after being communicated, the mayor immediately called a meeting, the matter informs us that, according to information from a local newspaper²⁶ (HNA), the excess costs of the current edition of *documenta* was partly due to miscalculations by the financial management team, and electric bills were extortionately high because of the cost of air conditioning due to the external temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius, added to the transport of the works between Kassel and Athens.

On September 14, the artistic director of *documenta 14* Adam Szymczyk and the team of curators published an open letter²⁷ in response to this matter of HNA, stressing the importance of maintaining the independence of *documenta* as a public, cultural and artistic institution in the face of political interests. In the letter the team claims that politicians have provoked a turnaround in the media spreading an image of imminent bankruptcy, while presenting themselves as "saviors." They also state that *documenta* is made public in a collective, transnational manner and that it must be kept away from the mechanisms of local, regional, national and associated financial systems. Adam reports that by the end of 2013, when he presented his concept of two sites, clearly all responsible parties were informed. The *Supervisory Board of Documentation gGmbH* and the *International Selection Committee* (both parties concerned) welcomed and authorized the appointment of Adam Szymczyk committing himself to the fulfillment of his project. So it's time to question the mega-exposition's value-production regime, denouncing *the exploitative model under which the stakeholders of documenta wish the "most important exhibition of the world" to be produced*. This statement is sent to the German and international media, hoping to generate a careful discussion of what would be at stake.

²⁴Free translation: there is certainly no recipe for decolonizing the museum, and there are several understandings around what this might be.

²⁵ Source: < <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/documenta-faces-yawning-euro7m-deficit-seeks-financial-help>> Acesso em 10th October, 2018.

²⁶ German newspaper Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine - HNA (12/09/2017).

²⁷ Source: < <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/documenta-faces-yawning-euro7m-deficit-seeks-financial-help>> Acesso em 10th October, 2018.

Oh 18th September, 2018 another open letter signed by 212 artists who had participated in *documenta* in various editions was published in ARTFORUM²⁸, with the title “On the emancipatory possibility of decentered exhibitions”. It highlights the criticisms that accompanied *documenta 14* since the presentation of the project, such as the challenge of working with local communities in an environment of equality and partnership, inserted in a large exhibition infrastructure, considering also if a mega-exhibition would be the best to break discursive hegemonies. Without ignoring this debate, the letter turns to broad criticism for financial issues, as the shortfall in the operating budget is suggested as a result of Athens. Emphasizing the need to escape from a neoliberal logic that does not allow alternative methods, histories and experiences. The curatorial innovation of *documenta 14* sought to create this meeting space between Athens and Kassel. Although the exhibition has presented a juxtaposition of stories, often misleading, this was its intention, to show the impossibility of total apprehension of the phenomena that cover the culture and the current production, but allowing the creation of platforms where infinite possibilities can occupy the same space beyond traditional hierarchies. Thus, with the accumulation and impossibility of seizure in its totality, the exhibition would be fulfilling one of its objectives. They further state that:

We feel that casting a false shadow of criticism and scandal over *documenta 14* does a disservice to the work that the artistic director and his team have put into this exhibition. Shaming through debt is an ancient financial warfare technique these terms of assessment have nothing to do with what the curators have made possible, and what the artists have actually done within this exhibition²⁹.

4. Conclusions

Both the curatorial team and the artists involved in this project recognize the challenges. However, in locating decolonial thinking in this context, some positions may be dubious, so I repeat Catherine Walsh's speech to the extent that so many cultural workers, artists and the institutions must follow the decolonial pedagogy proposing a constant exercises that is to continue questioning, not proposing objective forms, but rather exercising a critical eye and tensing these forces more and more. For all the financial interests involved in this debate, the defense should be directed not to institutions, but it is everyone's task to find ways to maintain the possibility of discussion, because only then can we find a way out to these issues, which have long ceased to be of specific groups, since the path that has been pursued, both in the arts and in other areas, locate this debate as a central problem of the whole society.

To think about the positioning of certain agents and proposals in this contemporary cultural system it also must be taken into account the risk of spectacularization and emptying, which can sometimes measure the freedom of certain agents with the interest of satisfying an audience that does not have a real commitment to some kind of change, which in the case of decolonial thinking is one of

²⁸ Source: < <https://www.artforum.com/news/documenta-14-artists-defend-exhibition-in-open-letter-71159>> Access em 10th October, de 2018.

²⁹Source: < <https://www.artforum.com/news/documenta-14-artists-defend-exhibition-in-open-letter-71159>> Access em 10th October, de 2018.

the central objectives. For, as the Brazilian artist Jota Mombaça points out, power operates by fiction, and these fictions produce our world with distinct effects for certain groups through multiple mechanisms that distribute violence disproportionately, this idea is debated in greater depth in its text *Rumo a uma redistribuição desobediente de gênero e anticolonial da violência!*, published with the support of the 32nd São Paulo Biennial, where she states that:

Liberar o poder das ficções do domínio totalizante das ficções de poder é parte de um processo denso de rearticulação perante as violências sistêmicas, que requer um trabalho continuado de reimaginação do mundo e das formas de conhecê-lo, e implica também tornar-se capaz de conceber resistências e linhas de fuga que sigam deformando as formas do poder através do tempo³⁰ (MOMBAÇA, 2016, p.5).

This risk of emptying of some proposals is not new when one thinks the location of certain agents in power structures. For more than half a century Clarival do Prado Valladares, in discussing the position occupied by the black in the Brazilian plastic arts, anticipates questions that many artists and cultural workers who are members of historically subalternized groups face today, he affirms that

A sociedade “branca” sabe armar o circo de suas exposições e promoções, porém, necessita injetar, de tempos em tempos, cotas de validade do “contexto histórico e cultural”. Estas são as oportunidades em que artistas negros, [...] são descobertos, assimilados, promovidos e amplamente consumidos pela sociedade “branca”³¹ (VALLADARES, 2018, p.23).

In the 14th edition of the *Festival Internacional de Teatro* (FIT), held in the city of Belo Horizonte, on 17th September, 2018, Jota Mombaça presented in a reading session the text *Mundo = Ferida*³², she points out that by occupying a position within the privileges diagram that constitutes racialized societies it is inserted unequally in these structures, because when it is associated with the framework of the historical struggles that made possible the occupation of these spaces with its body, it is evident the process of updating the structures which aims to delimit their creative and imaginative capacities. Being this point of extreme importance, because the imagination emerges as a basis for thinking new codes, because before something exists it is necessary to be imagined, only creativity and freedom of thought break the limits of what exists and germinate new ways of being, act and be in the world. Then she states that

Num certo sentido, o acesso a circuitos artísticos e intelectuais preocupados com as assim chamadas “políticas da diversidade” está predicado na nossa habilidade em reproduzir - até mesmo como posição crítica - a lógica mesma através da qual somos marcadas. [...] nossa presença está condicionada por uma demanda de auto-objetificação positiva, de acordo com a qual nós devemos sempre endereçar nossa

³⁰Free translation: Releasing the fictions power from the totalizing domain of the fictions of power is part of a dense process of rearticulation in the face of systemic violence, which requires a continuous work of reimagining the world and ways of knowing it, and implies also becoming capable of designing resistances and escape lines which continue to deform the forms of power over time.

³¹Free translation: The “white” society knows how to set up the circus of its exhibitions and promotions, however, it needs to inject, from time to time, quotas of validity of the “historical and cultural context”. These are the opportunities in which black artists [...] are discovered, assimilated, promoted and widely consumed by the “white” society.

³²Text not yet published.

desobediência sexual e de gênero e nossa negritude como tema central de nossa especialidade³³.

Another important voice to think about these issues is the Brazilian artist Musa Michelle Mattiuzzi, who has interesting points of intersection with the research of Jota Mombaça, in addition to the joint work, both were residents in document 14 from the Capacete Athens Program. Mattiuzzi wrote a text for vol. 2 of the catalog (anthology of texts) of the Afro-Atlantic exhibition, she raises the same problem of inserting her body in these circuits, questioning the interests involved, she says

quiseram nos fazer crer que tornaram-se nossos "aliados"... Assim, questiono, em minha prática artística, como constranger a política extrativista dessas pessoas brancas, cisgêneras, hegemônicas e supremacistas? essas pessoas que nos roubam e assim também delimitam a nossa geografia imaginativa. Narram nossas histórias como temática social. Esse mecanismo de controle se apresenta como uma oportunidade quando, de fato, é um exercício de poder disfarçado de inclusão. Tal mecanismo, ao se apropriar da reivindicação de grupos subalternizados, gera demanda de representatividade em troca de uma boa imagem institucional, do que seria correto em termos políticos³⁴ (MATTIUZZI, 2018, p. 608).

I have tried to present these questions, pointing out that the initiatives of these institutions can be considered important cases in the understanding of the curatorial logic of public programs, which, in my view, show important changes in the symbolic production of meanings. These institutions are stages of initiatives that present a critique of colonial structures, and question the remnants of coloniality that permeate our present. Documenta and MASP are institutions that present projects of interest to think about how the relationship between contemporary art, humanities and political participation are articulated with the interest of identifying and questioning the interconnection which permeates the continuity of the processes of exclusion occurring at different temporal and spatial scales, making use of diverse disciplines linked to the arts and helping in their understanding and development. Different geographies point to the growing interest the theme has acquired in contemporary debates. Proposing a reflection about the importance of the existence and resistance of different identity consciousnesses, as well as other communication and cognition processes.

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³³Free translation: In a sense, access to artistic and intellectual circuits concerned with the so-called "politics of diversity" is predicated on our ability to reproduce - even as a critical position - the very logic through which we are marked. [...] our presence is conditioned by a demand for positive self-objectification, according to which we must always address our sexual and gender disobedience and our negritude as the central theme of our specialty.

³⁴Free translation: they wanted us to believe that they became our "allies" ... So, I question, in my artistic practice, how to constrain the extractive politics of these white people, cisgenic, hegemonic and supremacist? these people who rob us and so also delimit our imaginative geography. They narrate our stories as social themes. This control mechanism presents itself as an opportunity when, in fact, it is an exercise of power disguised as inclusion. Such a mechanism, by appropriating the claim of subalternized groups, generates demand for representativeness in exchange for a good institutional image, of what would be politically correct.

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