

O my body, make of me always a man
who questions!¹
Roberta Garieri

In history everything begins with the gesture of setting aside, of putting together, of transforming certain classified objects into "documents".² The deep dimension of research implies a constant interrogation, a making and unmaking of concepts, opinions and observations that come in succession and surpass each other in a metamorphic process that endlessly relocates itself. This means making a compromise with history – a history that is never manifest or taken for granted. It's true, history is never safe, as revealed by Michel de Certeau, and so is the persistent and residual image of history. This is why the compromise we refer to occurs in specific times and contexts.

NEW FICTIONS FROM LATIN AMERICA

*To discover is to find, but to find is not always to discover.*³

*Besides, to represent is to control the discursive means that subordinate the object of knowledge to a conceptual economy that is declared superior.*⁴

We live in connected spaces. The world seems to have pressurised vertiginously. But we already know this story. Together with institutions and the economy, ideas and socio-cultural models of behaviour have become uniform. Thus, we no longer think about "territories": what once represented something specific and particular has been crushed by an incessant and unchanging rhythm that reproduces fictions. The hope to give people's dreams and wishes a "real form" by reducing distances has proved to be an illusion. Indeed, the collapse of boundaries, the rise of connectivity and the expansion of the range of exchanges is giving shape to new orders of symbolic power, instead of facilitating the demise of cultural hierarchies. The art system, because of its spatialisation, is an example that demands our attention.

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto, 2008).

² Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

³ Edmundo O'Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961).

⁴ Nelly Richard, "La puesta en escena internacional del arte latinoamericano: montaje representación" in *Visiones comparativas: XVII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte*, 1011–16 (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1994).

⁵ Mabel Moraña, "El boom del subalterno" in S Castro-Gómez, E Mendieta, *Teorías sin disciplina: Latinoamericanismo, poscolonialidad y globalización en debate* (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 1998).

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⁶ Walter D Mignolo, *L'Idea di America Latina. Geostoria di una teoria decoloniale* (Milan: Mimesis, 2013).

⁷ Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Beyond 'the Fantastic': Framing Identity in US Exhibitions of Latin American Art" in *Art Journal* vol 51 no 4 (New York: College Art Association, 1992).

⁸ Gerardo Mosquera, "Poder y curaduría intercultural" in *TRANS>arts.cultures.media* no 1 (New York, 1995).

⁹ Piotr Piotrowski, *On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History* (Prague: Umeni, 2008).

¹⁰ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "A Non-Occidental West? Learned Ignorance and Ecology of Knowledge," in *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol 26, 7–8 (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, and Singapore: SAGE, 2010).

¹¹ Fernando Coronil, "Más allá del occidentalismo: Hacia categorías geohistóricas no imperialistas" in S Castro-Gómez, E Mendieta, op cit.

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The global artistic geography – taken as a thematic map – can be considered as a case study that allows us to understand transcultural politics of representation. It shows how colonial modes of different-iation are still present within its boundaries, as politics of inclusion and exclusion are emblematic of the international artistic environment. This means that, despite the end of colonialism and the beginning of the phase that we call "post-colonialism", the heritage left by centuries of oppression of cultures and populations – "a god, a king, a language"⁵ – can still be perceived within the production of imaginaries and forms that dominate knowledge. Specifically, Latin American art is part of those artistic discourses that have recently escaped their geographic limits after the activation of the international circuit of art fairs and biennials. In the past, Latin America was among those territories considered to be peripheral; territories that remained outside the cartography of modernising progress and outside the predetermined model of Euro-American narratives.⁶ Consequently, Latin American critique indicates that it is necessary to rewrite its own artistic local history in order to recover its authority in the wider artistic discourse.

This authority has long corresponded to the self-conferred role of the "centre", which has been disguising itself behind the postmodern consensus, concerning the inclusion of differences and cultural diversity through the perpetration of stereotypes.⁷ However, even some of the post-1989 global exhibitions, such as the infamous *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris, 1989) or *Cocido y Crudo* (Madrid, 1994), have represented an idealising attempt to escape the contradictions proposed by postmodernist rhetoric. But these examples have also contributed to maintaining a lively debate about the staging of alterity (in this context, of Latin American identities) in the world. At the same time, the existence of these exhibitions encouraged discussion of the grand binary oppositions created by globalisation and the associated risks.

So what is the role of the exhibition in politics of transcultural representation? What mechanism lies behind this alleged hospitality of countries holding power to stage, to represent? What counter-paths could be traced to develop a decolonised aesthetic thought?

These, and many others, are questions that still await a definitive answer. Meanwhile, they feed the belief that we are far from the constitution of a compact, homogenous community. Perhaps the world is no longer divided between "cultures that curate" and "curated cultures",⁸ if we consider Latin American countries' establishment of an energetic artistic and theoretical production. Furthermore, if there is an ambition to shape a world in which gender, class and race divisions are no more, and in which power relations regulating the circulation of cross-cultural knowledge become horizontal, then we start by reconsidering the politics behind our own positioning and the role of language, that is, the structure that exposes our ways of thinking and conceiving the world we live in. These are fundamental questions that involve art workers from both academic and non-academic contexts. Doing research and producing exhibitions – thus being a researcher or a curator – means being morally responsible to generate and disseminate a kind of knowledge that contests what has been affirmed until now. It means prioritising transnationalism and creating a history of art that is no longer vertically ordered, but instead is horizontal, plural and multi-dimensional, liberated from geographical hierarchies.⁹

WHERE FROM? HOW? WHEN?
FOR WHOM?

*We live in a time of strong questions
and weak answers.*¹⁰

*If we were to freeze history and replicate geography on a map, wouldn't this representation coincide with something ephemeral?*¹¹

¹² Rosi Braidotti, *La philosophie...là où on ne l'attend pas* (Paris: Larousse, 2009).

¹³ Adrienne Rich, "Notes toward a politics of location," in *Women, Feminist Identity and Society in the 1980s*, conference at the First Summer School of Critical Semiotics, Utrecht, 1984.

¹⁴ Walter D Mignolo, op cit.

¹⁵ Santiago Castro Gómez, "Decolonizar la universidad. La hybris del punto cero y el diálogo de saberes" in S Castro-Gómez, R Grosfoguel, *El giro decolonial. Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global* (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores; Universidad Central, Instituto de Estudios Sociales Contemporáneos y Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Instituto Pensar, 2007).

¹⁶ A heterogeneous and multidisciplinary research group that includes Argentinian philosopher Enrique Dussel, Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, American-Argentinian

theorist Walter D Mignolo, Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez, Argentinian semiotic theorist Zulma Palermo, Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar, Venezuelan sociologist Edgardo Lander, Venezuelan anthropologist Fernando Coronil, philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Puerto-Rican sociologist Ramon Grosfoguel, American linguist Catherine Walsh and German linguist Freya Schiwy.

¹⁷ Fernando Coronil, op cit.

The person speaking here – me – is a Southern Italian woman that moved elsewhere (like many among her compatriots), which can signify many things, but I won't dwell on discourses on my own origins here. The mere fact of recognising and retracing myself allows me to pinpoint a location, to situate myself in relation to what has been stated so far in this paper. This entails being aware of the need to dislocate and dispute that very knowledge that has always been transmitted, that the "universal self" generated by humanism and the Enlightenment whose objectified body (white, male and Western) understands difference as other, improper and external. For example, becoming conscious of eurocentrism provides the benefit of a more fair and precise cartography to map the real conditions of our existence. De-identification is not a betrayal of primordial affects, but rather a kind of epistemic disobedience that encourages the systematic research of a radical, or relative, non-belonging as the subject's main location.¹²

Then, a politics of location,¹³ of situating oneself, implies a constant movement of the self based on the perception of difference. Ultimately, once the self de-familiarises with those categories that, throughout centuries, have blurred our vision of the world, beginning to perceive oneself as "other" may become intentional. In this manner, alterity would be part of the process of constituting the self: a self that employs difference not as a tool for additional cultural appropriations, but through a decolonial perspective. It is certainly not easy for European intellectuals to admit that thinking also happens beyond Europe. Decoloniality is not a moment in time; instead, it marks the coexistence of several options in the global progression in which "post-" does not exist, except Eurocentric thought, which recognises Euro-American time as universal time.¹⁴ What decolonial thought posits is an opening, an emancipation from the past to imagine the future and create a rupture of the status quo. Therefore, this is not equivalent to declaring a crusade against the West in

the name of Latin American indigeneity, ethnocentrism or populist nationalisms. This is not about contradicting model science or promoting a new form of epistemic obscurantism.¹⁵

Rather, the Latin American Modernity/ Coloniality Research Programme¹⁶ proposes that we adhere to a certain nomadic thought, a thought that advances by a process of unlearning and relearning, moving between past, present and future. This de-territorialisation of knowledge and minds can only become concrete if we rethink the politics of language, of the very language that has been used to write this story. We may agree with Fernando Coronil as he posits that in daily conversations, as well as in academic labour, words like "West", "centre", "First World", "East", "periphery" and "Third World" are used to classify and identify several geographical zones. Even though what these terms refer to is not always clear, they are used as if they correspond to an external, well-defined reality.¹⁷ Or, at least, their use has resulted in the perpetration of this delusion. Supporting these theories does not call for a work to illustrate them; instead, it entails a subjective immersion within them and a process of visualisation that enables the production of research on geohistorical and geocultural contexts that differ from the ones in which we belong. This involves assuming an aware, anti-imperialist stance that intends to suspend the coloniality of power, knowledge and being that is rooted in the Western modern project.