

‘Southern’ perspectives about cultural management: some thoughts

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Abstract

In this essay I pursue the idea about what “decolonizing art institutions” can mean and draw on some examples coming from São Paulo, where I am from. Taking the discussions about institutional critique as starting point, this essay points out how we can learn from artistic practices in order to think about power relations and mechanisms of cultural institutional operation. Thinking that the institution itself, as apparatus, already translates Eurocentric epistemologies, it also seeks to present new perspectives on integrating Southern perspectives into its processes. Lastly, the essay brings the concepts of “communing” and “permeability” into the practice and structure of cultural institutions’ *modus operandi* and provokes: how we can incorporate themes and topics from critical artistic perspective to propose new ways of acting and feeling inside institutional practice?

Keywords

Critical management, southern, epistemologies, decolonization, institutional critique

1. “Decolonization, what a beautiful word”¹

The film *Embrace of the Serpent* (GUERRA 2015), follows shaman Karamakate, accompanied by American ethnobotanist Evan, on his journey through the Amazonian rainforest in search of the *yakruna*, the sacred plant. Karamakate is the guardian of the practices and the ancestral knowledge, but he finds himself in *Chullachaqui*, an oblivion state. While scientists rely upon diaries, cameras and maps as forms of record and memory, the shaman shows how through dreams, visions and the journey itself, important revelations allow other ways of knowing, perceiving and understanding existence. By the end of the journey, Karamakate is finally able to heal his oblivion.

I use this plot as a metaphor for the different epistemologies and way to experience the world. If we consider that, as Boaventura Santos states, “this denial of diversity is a constitutive and persistent feature of colonialism. While the political dimension of colonial intervention has

¹ The subtitle is taken from a Grada Kilomba’s performance (KILOMBA 2016).

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been widely criticized, the burden of the colonial epistemic monoculture is still accepted nowadays as a symbol of development and modernity” (NUNES/MENESES 2007: xxxiiia), how can we, in cultural institutions, embrace new forms of thinking, feeling and relating in our daily practice? How can our relationship to the artist and the artistic work be a channel for rethinking the cultural institution and our role in its operation?

At the same time, taking again the encounter between the ethnologist and the shaman in the film, this essay aims as well to go beyond a naïf perspective (since the several encounters between anthropologists and indigenous did not avoid the decimation of the indigenous population in the real world): What responsibilities do we have – being in charge of cultural institutions at this specific moment – with regard to finally opening staff positions and programs to cultures that historically were taken as object and instead of exhibiting, we hire them as curators, in the administrative sector, as head of educational programs, for example? What role do we play as part of the institutional machine? In other words: *how* can we decolonize institutions?

It may seem a rhetorical question, but in fact, it is a very tricky one: although decolonizing has been a word that is used currently in institutional discourse, the impression may be that although much has been discussed, too little has been done: restitution of objects is still a polemic and uncomfortable issue for governments and museums² in Europe, private and state funding for culture is incomparable between the global South and North, and the high positions in institutions are still occupied by white, middle-aged men.³ As Andrea Fraser stated: “Nearly forty years after their first appearance, the practices now associated with ‘institutional critique’ have for many come to seem, well, institutionalized.” (FRASER 2005) Discussing racism, feminism and diversity as a matter of institutional discourse is not enough not to deal with these issues in practical ways. How can concepts that we tackle theoretically be applied to the actual practicing?

2 About an overview of the first reactions to the so-called ‘restitution report’ handed in to French president Emmanuel Macron on Nov 23, 2018 see SARR and SAVOY (2019).

3 A report published in 2016 analysing gender inequalities in the cultural sector in Europe stated not surprisingly that “unequal access to decision-making roles in cultural professions” (18): Despite the strong feminine presence in cultural professions, men’s chances of career progression in that field are better than women’s (glass ceiling) and they also have more choices of career paths.” <<https://cultureactioneurope.org/files/2016/05/Gender-Inequalities-in-the-Cultural-Sector.pdf>> [7.4.2019].

Using words like “unlearn” (HEISER 2017) and decolonize (and hereby I problematize my own vocabulary) is hence a probable proof of a desire for a paradigm shift. But are we truly ready to bear the results of what we are pretending to be asking for? Are we ready to work in a different manner? Are we prepared to give up our privileges? In practical terms, what does the “decolonizing cultural institutions” actually entail?

From my own perspective as a white, European descendant (with a European passport, but still being a South American woman who migrated to Germany), things will only change when people – other than middle-aged-white-European-men – occupy decision-making positions in the institutions. In the meanwhile, this essay offers insights into initiatives undertaken by cultural institutions located in São Paulo – where I come from – which raise questions regarding the relationship between artists and institutions and how they affect their own operations. I will try to emphasize the intricated and complex operations that involve the relationship between artists and the institutions, the asymmetries that compose this relationship and how features such as communing and permeability can open new possibilities with regard to this relation.⁴

2. The institution of institutional critique

Questioning the role of cultural institutions is not exactly a new practice. Between the 1950s and the 1960s a so called “first movement of institutional critique”⁵ – represented by artist such as Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke and Marcel Broodthaers – already based their artistic work on critiques of the institutions, mainly concentrating their investigation on the conditions of the museum and the art field, aiming to break out of the rigid institutional frameworks. However, these artists did not call what they were doing institutional critique. This concept

4 Most of the reflexions that resulted on this essay came from the project *Episodes of the South*, led by the Goethe-Institut São Paulo from 2015 to 2017. The thoughts outlined here come from an experience of cultural management of the project, from the impasses encountered daily. I would like to thank the reviewers of the article – that brought my attention for a necessity for a more critical point of view towards the limits of the institution and for their precise comments. Besides them, I would like to thanks: Katharina von Ruckteschell-Katte and Isabel Hölzl (Goethe-Institut), Nora Sternfeld and Julia Stolba (documenta studies), Mario Lopes and all residents of PlusAfroT Residency, Denilson Baniwa, Benjamin Seroussi, Pablo Lafuente and Amilcar Packer.

5 In regard of a short overview of the concept of “institutional critique” see SHEIK (2006).

emerged just after a second wave, and included artists such as Renee Green, Christian Philipp Müller, Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser. The second generation went beyond the economic and political discourse of the previous artists and added elements of forms and modes of subjectivity to their discourse (RAUNIG 2009).

It is also important to point out that even though “institutional critique” itself became an institution, over the last almost 60 years it has not remained immutable. On the contrary, it has been relating to its time and raising questions not only within the artistic domain, but also in the social and political fields. For example Andrea Fraser, one of the most representative names in the context of institutional critique in the 1990ies, highlighted in an interview the importance of feminism

to open (or reopen) art not only to sexual politics, but also to symbolism, narrative, affect, the body, and the psychological (...) It was feminist performance that provided the model for my early museum tours (...) and while I found models for social and archival research in Conceptual Art, it was in the feminism that I found the model for introspective research: research into one own’s experiences, desires, fantasies. (CHU 2016)

Another example of how the institution of institutional critique has changed is observable in the dynamic relationship between artists, their works and the institution: if the first generation thought that maintaining a distance from the institution was possible, the second considered their involvement in the institution inevitable (RAUNIG 2009: 9).

Thinking that these waves were also related in an organic way with their times and with the questions brought by their specific historical moments, I am interested then in reflecting on how these two waves bring queries to the present days and also to propose a certain update. In a so-called “third wave” of institutional criticism: what points would we have to pay attention to? How it would relate to the matters of our time?

To conceive a model for the construction of future institutions, I propose some thoughts on the positions institutions can occupy in the world in which we are living.

As Pascal Gielen states, in this networked society – based on information, communication and mobility –, art institutions – which are based on hierarchies, traditions, elites and canons – are having a hard time surviving (GIELEN 2013). In other words, the institution, which conceptually represents features such as “stability” and “certainty” is having trouble maintaining its position as a site of exchange and knowledge production among the artistic class.

With regard to this tension between artists and the institution nowadays, Chantal Mouffe describes a common position between some artists, the so-called withdraw which argues that institutions of the art world would have become an ally of the capitalism and they no longer can provide a site for critical artistic practices.

All institutions are perceived as monolithic representatives of the forces to be destroyed and every attempt to transform them is dismissed as reformist illusion. The strategy advocated is one of 'desertion' and of the creation of new social relations outside the existing institutional framework. (MOUFFE 2013: 66)

The philosopher, however, disagrees with this perspective:

To believe that existing institutions cannot become the terrain of contestation is to ignore the tensions that always exist within a given configuration of forces and the possibility for acting to subverting their form of articulation. (MOUFFE 2013: 66)

Mouffe's attitude towards the role of institutions, is in the context of this essay, very inspiring: it complexifies the power relations and hegemonic struggles for beyond the cultural field (what may be natural, but sometimes I feel that we, as cultural practitioners, are trapped in our own self-referenced world).

What is at a given moment accepted as the 'natural order' is always the result of sedimented hegemonic practices. (MOUFFE 2013: 67)

The counter-hegemonic reading of institutions brings us back to Foucault's text *What is critique?*, in which he considers a shift from a fundamental negation of government toward a maneuver to *avoid* this kind of dualism: from not to be governed at all to not to be governed *like that* (FOUCAULT 1997). And *like that* in the context of the theoretical approach this essay presents is: reproducing hegemony to assure a fake stability, based – as we seen thanks to the post-colonial studies⁶ – on a violence constructed on the basis of privilege and otherness. Thinking with Mouffe's proposals and having the thought raised by Foucault in mind, the question shifts: it is not about the existence of the institution and a blind negation of its importance but rather about how institutions can operate differently.

Sønke Gau suggests a more humanist approach:

[Institutions] It's also internalized, embodied, and performed by people. It is internalized in the competencies, conceptual models, and modes of perception that allow us to produce, write about, and understand art, or simply to recognize art as

6 More about the influence of the post-colonial studies and the reflexive turn in museological theory see KAZEEM, MARTINZ-TUREK, STERNFELD (2009).

art, whether as artists, critics, curators, art historians, dealers, collectors, or museum visitors. And above all, it exists in the interests, aspirations, and criteria of value that orient our actions and define our own notion as member of the field of art. (GAU 2016: 267)

In this sense, if we speak about changing structures of institutions, in fact we are dealing with the difficult task of changing our structures: the way we feel and act, to sum it up. The Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong’O (1981) made a call to ‘decolonize the mind’, meaning that as a strong commitment to contesting and subverting the unquestioned sovereignty of Western categories — epistemological, ethical-moral, economic, political, aesthetic, and the rest.

Andrea Fraser famously rejected the very existence of an outside for art practitioners, remarking that the institution is “inside of us” and that every attempt to evade it only expands its frame (FRASER 2005: 104). The artist’s approach highlights the importance of blurring the lines that separates the us and the them considering our being in the world. From this perspective, how can we decolonize the engine room of the institutions in ourselves?

3. Why do we feel the way we feel: understanding the birth of frontiers

In the book *The cultural politics of emotions*, Sara Ahmed pursues the idea about how emotions can attach us to the very conditions of subordination and how directing our attention to emotions allows us to address the question of how subjects become *invested* in particular structures so that their demise is felt as a kind of living death (AHMED 2013: 12f.).

The methodology used by Ahmed is composed of close readings of texts that circulate in the public domain, which work by aligning subjects with collectives attributing others as the source of our feelings. She examines how different figures get stuck together and how sticking is dependent on past histories of association that often work through concealment. Analysing one particular excerpt, the author argues that

The narrative works through othering; the ‘illegal immigrants’ and ‘bogus asylum seekers’ are those who are ‘not us’, and who in not being us, endanger what is ours. Such others threaten to take away from what ‘you’ have, as the legitimate subject of the nation, as the one who is the true recipient of national benefits. The narrative invites the reader to adopt the ‘you’ through working on emotions: becoming this ‘you’ would mean developing a certain rage against these illegitimate others. (AHMED 2005: 2)

Demarcating the boundaries between us and others is also an inherent feature of the emergence of exhibition practices. Taking as example the Great Exhibition, as is commonly known as the World Fair that took place in 1851 in London, the construction of otherness was embodied in the display's layout of the Crystal Palace: the internal area was organized for the event, in the form of national courts or display areas, a proof of the influence of principles of classification based on nations and the supra-national constructs of empires and races (BENNETT 2005: 103).

As we can see, concepts as exoticism and notions such as progress and civilization served as pillars for the foundations of the discourse of colonial endeavors. Those discourses were based on an assumption of a universal development of human societies, in a linear understanding of time, that ranked cultural differences in a hierarchy, divided societies into the progressive ones and the regressive, making colonial interventions almost inevitable for the purpose of elevation and civilization (CONRAD 2011). In this context, the practice of bringing objects (and people) from the colonies to the exhibition was an essential tool for the construction of the colonial discourse, or, as Bennett argues, "the ambition to render the whole world, as represented in assemblages of commodities" (BENNETT 2005: 106). In this context, the consolidation of the expository practice being embodied in museums, art galleries and other institutional apparatuses was essential for the consolidation of colonial discourse and, consequently, for a clear establishment of the lines that delimit the we (nation, progress) and the other (colonies, barbarism).

The development of post-colonial studies, therefore, presented a new challenge to cultural institutions, pushing them towards a new phase of dealing with other cultures: if it was possible to disregard this history in the past, today is the time to recognize it in the institutions' speeches and curatorial practices. National historiography of the 19th century was called into question against the background of increasingly transnational knowledge production, but also through social struggles in societies that had long been heterogeneous.

Taking the idea from the anthropologist Benoît de L'Estoile, the curatorial theorist Nora Sternfeld claims (referring specifically to museums but easily applied to a general context regarding the cultural field) that the "new museum" will arise from the radical rupture between the "time of contempt", connected to the colonial history, and the "time of recognition", represented by the time we are living (STERNFELD 2009: 68).

However, what can still be noticed is that the gap between the discourses and the praxis in cultural institutions are still very far away from each other. As Sternfeld argues, at the same time that the term curating has been broadened to include the curatorial that seeks a more critical engagement with a critical perspective on knowledge production, it seems that these critiques have remained almost completely separate from the actual praxis of institutional production (STERNFELD 2014: 15). And that's the reality, according to the artist Jota Mombaça:

Self-proclaimed postcolonial spaces, or even decolonial and anticolonial ones, are not exempt from reproducing coloniality as systematic. The way in which these spaces articulate themselves, who coordinates them, who decides for them, which power relationships, what they write, how, with what support, for what circuit: all these modes of trafficking in the midst of the ruins of colonial relationships (and producing from them) mobilize – almost as a rule – a contradictory, nonnegotiable dimension, the fruit of a racial historical wound tenaciously inscribed onto the social body, though much more poorly elaborated from the point of view of collective feelings and emotions. (MOMBAÇA 2017)

The knowledge produced by queer, black, migrant and other social movements within post colonial studies is co-opted into the institution's programs and is treated in very a serious way, but always remains an external discourse. As pointed out by Nana Adusei-Poku,

if you re-read Black, Feminist and Queer Activists over the past century, they all claim the same form of inclusion and acknowledgement, which seems to be a humanism, which is always in the making but never hits the production line. (ADUSEI-POKU 2015)

The institution, dealing with the postcolonial discourse as an aesthetic treatment of its façade, but always very cautious protecting their territories (conquered with our gold) and establishing the lines between us and you. The institution, this secular apparatus, tries to remain blind to the time that goes by and the changes in the world. The institution, scared of being penetrated, by the other could be a virus that will destroy their foundations. And at this point I return to Sara Ahmed and the relationship between our actions and our emotions: what is the fear of being permeated by the other? How to keep on not disregarding and ignoring the asymmetric power positions but, at the same time, searching for new ways of being and living in order not to reproduce it?

4. The South as a state beyond the south

Aiming to complicate the idea between a supposed division between the us and the others, this essay's proposition in taking the South as a place of practices to be considered as a new approach to decolonizing the cultural management is not a polarized one. The South here is considered not in opposition to the North in a geopolitical sense. Although the abyssal difference regarding funding and structure in the cultural field comparing the two hemispheres cannot be dismissed, the idea is to conceive of the South as a concept, where institutions are more permeable to what they can learn from their audience and – at the same time – more flexible to incorporate the necessary changes. The South, here, is much more than a geopolitical category, a poetic one or, as Nikos Papastergiadis claims:

The south is not a place in the world; it is a space where people meet to imagine the possibility of other ways of being in the world [...]. It is where strangers encounter each other and through dialogue produce some form of exchange and mutual understanding. (PAPASTERGIADIS 2012)

It must be said, however, that every time the concept of the south emerges, it necessarily brings with it a semantic field marked by its colonial history of servility and subalternity: creativity and flexibility are often associated with a precarious scenario, lack of structures and resources. An image that reproduces itself incessantly and that strengthens a European/American hegemony in the field of culture, relegating the South as the margin that confirms the existence of a center. As states Papastergiadis,

South is an ambivalent concept. It oscillates between a clarion call for antipodean rebelliousness and the stigmatic expression of the cultural cringe. (PAPASTERGIADIS 2012: 27)

Those two aspects – imagination but, at the same time, an intrinsic asymmetrical position concerning the role played by institutions and artists, will be taken in consideration in the two following examples.

4.1 *Casa do Povo*: embodying the 'becoming-'

Casa do Povo (free translation: The People's House) is a cultural center in São Paulo founded by a non-profit cultural association just after the end of World War II, in 1946. Casa do Povo was erected through the collective efforts of a politically engaged portion of the Jewish community then thought of as progressive, hailing from Eastern Europe, to

pay homage to those who died in the Nazi concentration camps and to create a space that would unite the wide variety of associations in the international struggle against fascism (*Casa do Povo* 2019). Benjamin Seroussi, the curator of Casa do Povo, understands that the notion of culture should be extended from that which we nowadays commonly know, since in its epistemological origin the word culture was linked to the word cultivation. As time went on, it separated spaces and times into other spheres of life. For Seroussi, the decolonization of institutions involves decolonizing the very notion of culture and inventing other institutions to reinstitute other futures.⁷ The expansion of the notion of culture passes through the opening of space in the program and in the governance model by complexifying the idea of responsibilities and hierarchies.

For example, Casa do Povo has no fixed event schedule and opening hours, adapting the institution schedule to the needs of each project in order to attend to neighborhood associations as well as to unconventional artistic proposals. “We see our work as unfolding the world that is in the work of art. In the work of art there is a world in potential and from there we adapt the structure. Instead of thinking of a program, a fixed grid, we think of how to unfold the world that is in the work”, says Seroussi.

The curator argues that the Deleuzian concept of becoming- is present in the cultural management of the institution: it is never considered ready and closed, but unstable, ready to erode at any moment, its ephemeral structures can be permanently dismantled and remounted, an eternal ever-changing ongoing process.

Besides its own program, Casa do Povo hosts as well a permanent a residence program that brings together projects that make use of the space and participate in its daily operations. This self-managed community, colloquially referred to as the Povo da Casa [free translation: The People of the House], composed a series of agreements guaranteeing its involvement in the life of the institution. It is an attempt to bring together small and mid-scale spaces, initiatives and collectives, whose fragile situation and often silent work indicate other forms of organizing – or of disorganizing, for that matter. It includes the search for alternative funding options, collective-oriented work, blurring borders between artist and public, creating communities and expanding our idea of what culture is or turns out to be. The curator compares this groups in residency with

7 Personal conversation held in January 2018 and March 2019.

the model of associated-artists in the theaters and cultural centers in Europe –the only difference being that, unfortunately, the group members are not paid by Casa do Povo.

Another idea present in the management of Casa do Povo is the notion of the common, of commoning as co-management, acknowledging conflicts as part of the process. In practice there are constant conflicts, differences of interests between the institution and the groups. When asked about how these agreements are set and how asymmetrical the relations between the groups and the institution are, Seroussi explains:

We have only have a minimum control over what the residents decide to present in their program, but sometime we do disagree, because it does not match properly to the Casa do Povo's axes of work. We tried to develop a mixed model, in which we do not lose control the control totally, but, at the same time, we decentralize decisions. Instead of generating conflict of interest, we seek to create a common interest.

To talk about cultural management in the context of Casa do Povo, Seroussi borrows the concept of “umbral mínimo de ficción” (minimal fiction unit) of Argentine theater director and curator Vivi Tellas and adapts to “minimum unity of institutionalization”: how to be flexible without being precarious, how to be open without being diluted, how to be democratic without being populist, how to strengthen the institution without stiffening it.

4.2 Indigenous Art: Discussion on creation, production and dissemination of culture

Indigenous cultural production is a huge question in South America and cultural institutions are searching for formats and processes to open up space for art produced by indigenous groups. The increasing interest of museums and art institutions⁸ in Brazil in acquiring or exhibiting indigenous art and bringing indigenous causes to be discussed as part of public programs poses problems that have aesthetic, ethical, and political implications. The emphasis on the Western view of art, in which the act of creation is confined to a specific activity, separate from other spheres

8 Just as an example, one of the works selected for the 57th Venice Biennale was the work *Sacred Place*. In it, the Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto recreates, alongside indigenous people from the tribe Huni Kuin (Brazil), structure of a Cupixawa, a place of sociality, political meetings and spiritual ceremonies of the Huni Kuin. More information available at: <<http://u-in-u.com/venice-biennale/2017/viva-arte-viva/photos-arsenale-2/ernesto-neto-huni-kuin/>> [25.8.2018].

of everyday life, contrasts with the practices of different indigenous peoples. The mechanisms of production and dissemination of the art system, as well as its insistence on the predominance of the object, are little concerned with issues of agency and collectivity, with language and urgency, or with rhythms and conditions of production different from those that the establishment is accustomed to.

As part of the project Episodes of the South, Goethe-Institut São Paulo hosted the 2-Day meeting “Indigenous Art: Discussion on creation, production and dissemination of indigenous culture”.⁹ The idea was to bring together ten indigenous representatives of the art field to meet and discuss the creation, production and dissemination of indigenous culture, and to invite ten professionals from cultural institutions to follow the discussion. In this regard, since the initial invitation to representatives of cultural institutions, emphasis was placed on Indian representatives taking on the role of protagonists : if they accepted the invitation, their role was one of listening to the artist’s perspectives. The artists invited were: Ibã Huni Kuin, Miguel Vera Mirim, Edgar Kanaykō, Bu’ú Kennedy, Sandra Benites, Daiara Tukano, Arissana Pataxó, Jaider Esbell and Denilson Baniwa.

The initial aim of the project was to offer an opportunity to interface between the institution and indigenous artists, in order to draw attention to common mistakes made by institutions in projects that involved indigenous representatives dealing with indigenous art and thus reproducing the otherness principle: exoticizing the artists and the art, not respecting the specific epistemology of each indigenous culture in the process of exhibiting, the exploitation of indigenous work paying less than to non-indigenous artists and so on. In other words, the reproduction of the colonial *modus operandi*.

The institutional text presenting the encounter claimed that the purposes were: 1. To bring several representatives from different Brazilian indigenous group together in order to think about possible alliances and articulations to assure a protagonism in the art field, in an attempt to not be coopted in a very brutal way by the institutions; 2. To bring these artists’ perspectives to the institution’s representatives, seeking to open gaps of permeability for another way to relate to each specific epistemology and the work conditions of those artists.

9 More infos about the project available at: <www.goethe.de/ins/br/lp/prj/eps/epd/en16506451.htm> [9.4.2019].

From my perspective as the cultural manager responsible for the project's execution, I must admit that it was pretty challenging from my mindset and limited point of view. Catering had to be increased at the last minute, as individual invitations among indigenous communities often do not exist, and many of them attended with children and other more distant family members; the many hours of uninterrupted conversation, and long periods of time sitting down, which were also tiring for some of the indigenous representatives; a format had been foreseen with a part of the meeting open to the public, which was then changed at the last moment.¹⁰ The payment had to be made in cash and immediately, considering that many of the indigenous representatives had no bank account.

Besides all my efforts in the operational aspects, I was challenged by the reviewers of this article to take a more critical approach regarding the institutional tensions of my position at that time. Therefore, after more than a year after the end of the project, I talked to Denilson Baniwa, who gave me a chance to review my performance as a cultural manager towards the event and to see that – even when you think you are doing a great job, being who I am and being part of the institutional frame represent some structural features that inevitably lead to mistakes and blind spots. I reproduce here our talk:

1. For which reasons do you believe that cultural institutions have been showing a growing interest towards indigenous art?
DB: In fact I do not see it as an increasing interest. This interest has always been there. But this interest was always reduced to the exotic and exploratory interest, always having white people in front of the initiatives. It is not often to see, for example, indigenous people being invited to participate in a movie script.
2. How did you feel, as an artist, in relation to the organization of the event? Which were the mistakes and the hits under your perspective?
DB: This is a funny question because the event was totally wrong. The execution. The idea, the concept and the invitation were made in the right way, but when it came to the event itself, the indigenous were put seated in a dark room and the conversation

10 Here is important to highlight: the change was made for an obvious reason that was brought up by the indigenous participants: it was forecasted that the same number of white participants as indigenous would talk in the event. During the encounter it turned clear that it was a contradiction and it was decided that just indigenous participants would talk on the stage.

was dictated by white people, a colonizing perspective and a guardianship position. It was time for white people to hear the indigenous representatives speak, but that was not the case.

3. In your opinion, which are the limits of these kinds of events, that seek to bring the perspective of another culture, but always inside the institutional frame?
DB: There is not much choice to be different. Institutions work within what they represent as institutions. They call us as an accessory, as someone present in a place to give status to the event. And the voice is taken by specialists, PhDs in the subject and the indigenous people are always in an accessory role. We are in 2019, this has to end, there is no more space for this type of exoticizing event. You can see that the institution does not change because soon after the end of the event, the Goethe-Institut held other events with white people talking about indigenous and white issues that invite indigenous people as props for their production. It seems that the event and that whole discussion was of no use.
4. Did the indigenous artists profit in any way from the event?
DB: The event was good because I met my native relatives and served to expand our way of working. But at the same time it seems that white people did not learn anything, they continued repeating the same *modus operandi* that we denounced at that event. And maybe I'm thinking now that white people will never learn, they have a practice that pretend to give space, but when it comes to the concrete thing, it always end up with white people.¹¹

The short but representative talk with Denilson Baniwa reminded me of the film *The Embrace of the Serpent*, the difficulty to remember (or how easy is it to forget?). The famous line by Andrea Fraser also came to my mind "We are trapped in our field" (FRASER 2005).

5. Conclusions

This essay sought to bring possible meanings about what decolonization of the cultural institution could mean and how the South, as a poetic sign, can bring a more imaginative approach to this political act. For this, we return to institutional criticism as a discourse that can give us tools

¹¹ Denilson Baniwa in personal conversation held with Lorena Vicini in april 2019. I thank a lot the artist for the talk.

to understand the construction and possible deconstructions of the relations between institutions and artists and how the institution - in fact, it is only people. That is, when we speak of decolonizing institutions, we are talking about ourselves.

Reflecting on the consolidated cultural institution, the essay brought some references on the construction between us and other as one of the pillars of colonialism. Finally, through the example of the Casa do Povo and the "Indigenous Art: Discussion on creation, production and dissemination of indigenous culture", we see how the relationships between institutions and artists may be less asymmetrical or assymetrical in a more reciprocal way – but still full of contradictions, attempts and failures.

Of all the thoughts outlined here, one gets the feeling that the cultural institution in the molds in which it operates today clings to a fiction of stability as the American traveler in *The Embrace of the Serpent* clings to his suitcases in books amidst the Amazon jungle: in the film, the ethnobotanist only advances in his journey when Evans throws away his luggage 'of knowledge gathered' and destroy the modes of production that generate ethnographic knowledge.¹² Lighter, Evan lets himself be led by the waters of the flowing river.

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