

***Karai Arandú* in the Mercosul Biennial: guarani education as a possibility for a decolonial aesthetics**

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ABSTRACT – *Karai Arandú* in the Mercosul Biennial: guarani education as a possibility for a decolonial aesthetics¹ – This article discusses education, aesthetics and possibilities for a decolonial aesthetics, based on an experience we call (inter)cultural mediation in a Guarani school and an art exhibition at the 10th Mercosul Biennial. The concept of school (located in the indigenous territory) as a border space contributed to the understanding of a border thinking, which escapes the modern western canon. The (inter)cultural mediation proved to be useful as a method for *je guata* – a walking –, an investigative walking, performed with a school group of Guarani people.

Keywords: **Guarani Education. Art and School. Cultural Mediation. Decolonial Aesthetics.**

RÉSUMÉ – *Karai Arandú* à la Biennale du Mercosur: l'éducation guarani comme possibilité pour une esthétique décoloniale – Cet article porte sur l'éducation, l'esthétique et les possibilités pour une esthétique décoloniale à partir d'une expérience de médiation (inter)culturelle dans une école guarani et dans une exposition d'art à la 10e Biennale du Mercosur. Dans le contexte indigène, l'école est un espace frontalier et pour nous, elle a contribué à la compréhension d'une pensée sur la frontière qui échappe au canon occidental moderne. La médiation (inter) culturelle s'est avérée utile comme méthodologie de recherche pour réfléchir sur la *je guata* – la marche –, une marche d'investigation, réalisée avec un collectif scolaire guarani.

Mots-clés: **Education Guarani. Art et Ecole. Médiation Culturelle. Esthétique Décoloniale.**

RESUMO – *Karai Arandú* na Bienal do Mercosul: educação guarani como possibilidade para uma estética decolonial – O artigo discute educação, estética e possibilidades para uma estética decolonial, a partir de uma vivência que denominamos mediação (inter)cultural em uma escola guarani e em uma exposição de arte na 10ª Bienal do Mercosul. A noção de escola (inserida no território indígena) como espaço de fronteira contribuiu para a compreensão de um pensamento fronteiro, que escapa ao cânone moderno ocidental. A mediação (inter)cultural mostrou-se útil como método para o *je guata* – caminhada –, uma caminhada investigativa, realizada com um coletivo escolar pertencente ao povo guarani.

Palavras-chave: **Educação Guarani. Arte e Escola. Mediação Cultural. Estética Decolonial.**

Je guata

In the guarani language, one of the most widely spoken indigenous languages in the American continent, the expression *je guata* means walking. With the willingness to carry out an investigative walking, searching for an understanding of the decolonial aesthetics from the perspective of the guarani way of life and education system, we made the reflection introduced in this article. The understanding of this topic is based on the artistic-pedagogical experiences with students, teachers and administrators at the indigenous school *Karai Arandú*, located at *Tekoá Jatai'ty*, Guarani Cantagalo land, Viamão/RS, Brazil, as well as on the visit with this group to the 10th Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, RS. We considered, also, the interaction walking with guarani groups, resulting from research, education and outreach projects, both at the indigenous villages and at the university².

We demarcate the investigative walking with a few questions: how art, in its form, mostly, understood in the *juruá* – nonindigenous – world, is seen from the guarani school? How Guarani students think and consider art, as a discipline, in their schools? How indigenous students and teachers interact with the museum? How the museum and contemporary art exhibitions relate to guarani education?

To report this experience, we organize the text in two acts: the first is the understanding of the guarani education, the mediation, the aesthetics and the decolonial as constructions situating the theoretical region we inhabit, as the ones who produce these reflections. In the second act, we report the interaction, the coexistence with the guarani group at the indigenous village and at the city, aiming at organizing and enjoying collectively the visit to the museum. Finally, we draw conclusions, making the theoretical-methodological experiences dialogue among themselves to understand the possibilities of a decolonial aesthetics.

Act I: (inter)cultural mediation as an understanding

We introduce the guarani education system and its school, because this institution, invited to attend the exhibitions in the Mercosul Biennials in Porto Alegre, provided our need for understanding aesthetic elements

that point to a decolonial aesthetics. To address this issue, which involves understanding a way of life, the state of being a guarani nowadays, we consider important to situate our perspective for interacting and thinking about aesthetics: (inter)cultural mediation, both as the dialogue approaching the guarani group and contemporary art exhibitions at the 10th Mercosul Biennial and as a research method, which allowed mediating various lifestyles and its respective aesthetic perceptions. In the same act, we register the understandings about decolonial aesthetics.

Guarani Education: between the ancestral knowledge and the school

When we seek to understand guarani lifestyle in indigenous schools and experiences with students and teachers who also interact in nonindigenous educational spaces, such as the museum, we intend to connect two symbolic horizons that are similar in some characteristics but come from different cultural logics: the indigenous and nonindigenous. The guarani logic is based on the ancestral knowledge, called by their indigenous leaders and teachers as tradition or *mbya reko*, guarani way of life or state of being *Mbya Guarani*. When understanding the notions of *mbya reko*, we can distinguish some cultural expressions, which we call aesthetic elements, a complex network of actions, contexts, concepts and specific productions.

The education original from this people is aimed at forming the person in and for the completeness of the life referenced in the *mbya reko*, through which aspects of the individuality and collectivity that go beyond the guarani individual are developed, the *mbya*. In this process of formation, a constant search for fullness and joy, also understood as the pursuit of perfection, is present. The guarani education references are in a wide and complex symbolic horizon that is established in the personal efforts for knowledge and for revelations also derived from a belonging to the collective.

Two ways of learning predominate among the guarani. One of them is linked to the personal effort, it is the search, triggered by the curiosity developed in the person since her/his childhood. The other is the revelation and relates to the former, because the person makes an effort to live

according to the *nhande reko* to receive the revelation from the deities (Bergamaschi, 2005, p. 154).

One of the aesthetic and educational elements related to the guarani ancestral knowledge is expressed in wood carvings: the pets, usually exposed to sale at craft fairs. The creation of these sculptures in the indigenous villages involves men who organize themselves to pick the raw material in the woods, carve the wood and burn the sculptures to give life to them, with very characteristic colors and smells. Another reference of the guarani tradition is the use of clay, especially in the construction of houses both for living and for constructing the *Opy* – ceremonial house. This ancestral knowledge is also preserved in some education institutions, in workshops for creation of ceramic pieces and even in the construction of small traditional houses near the school.

Guarani education does not separate the artistic and the utility practices, as well as it does not separate the *porã* – pretty – of the material things or people. Something or someone is *porã* when there is life, that is, the aesthetic sense of beauty is linked to the existential aspect and not directly related to the visual. Although the precepts of the guarani way of life are not explicitly revealed to nonindigenous people, part of them are shown as language, body expressions, linguistic expressions, expressions of doing, building or being. Therefore, understanding the complexity of aesthetic expressions and nuances of the educational field in the guarani world is also plausible in the everyday school life: for example, the spatial organization of the classroom in the indigenous village, which sometimes follows subtly what is determined in the traditional guarani way of life, or what material conditions impose on the school practices, such as rows and circles.

The school in the guarani villages has demands and various goals, established in the relation of a border between the ancient education and nonindigenous education, idea presented by Tassinari (2001, p. 47): “Due to such characteristics, putting the indigenous education in interstitial situations, I suggest that considering it, theoretically, a border is plausible, which may be useful for a better understanding of its functioning, difficulties and deadlocks”. The view of the indigenous school as a border space is relevant for our reflection, because the school, “[...] as an open door

for other knowledge traditions, in which novelties arise and are used and understood in diverse ways” (Tassinari, 2001, p. 50), is understood as a space in which, in a complex and conflicted way, guarani and nonindigenous aesthetics are present.

Currently, school education has its own characteristics, especially when referring to the model proposed normatively: educational practices based on hierarchies and disciplines; educational processes focused on, partially, the market; school architectures based on military fortifications; homogenizations and uniformizations of pedagogical methods. They are different aesthetics of secular ways of organization and education of the guarani groups, in which the knowledge is understood as a cosmological totality, whose production and transmission does not correspond to the sectioned spaces and times of life.

The guarani and the *jurua* – not guarani – aesthetics can coexist at school, combining oppositions. Even though the origin of school is unrelated to guaranis, even when the administrative and pedagogical organization is composed of nonindigenous teachers, marks, symbolic interferences, patrimonial interventions, changes in school times and school days, activity schedules based on guarani calendars, differentiated political-pedagogical projects and school feeding, among many other elements transform the aesthetics of school life and its meanings for the community. These appropriations are made by guarani groups from a singular mode of doing things and giving meaning to school in its territories (Bergamaschi, 2005).

However, the borders are also marked by precise boundaries in various school situations: on one hand, misapprehensions of Portuguese by the guarani children; on the other, fluent guarani language in the classroom, which is not understood by nonindigenous teachers; distinct conceptions and practices of leisure and play; rituals that prevent students and teachers from going to school for a few days, which is a situation not always understood by the managers of the school education policies; spatial-temporal conceptions and experiences resulting in a different school organization; parental and family relationships interwoven in the guarani hierarchy among indigenous teachers and students; and desegregation of

ages, culminating with intergenerational interactions also in the school environment.

Guarani perception of time is aesthetically expressed in many ways, being one of them the children's attentive listening. The silences also assign, sensibly, different notions to the school times; as they are not only pausing, they may be a cosmopolitical strategy³. As Vherá Poty reported⁴: "the word for the guarani is spirit, so it cannot be indiscriminately uttered" (Field notes, September 2015). The focus for listening is an intense and sensitive practice in the guarani daily life, established as an educational posture for the person in school: a silent focus is understood as an ethical-esthetic positioning of ethnic affirmation when related to nonindigenous education.

When Guarani education expresses specific symbols and manners, it shows a state of being Amerindian⁵. This state can also be understood as a border, because it organically and seminally integrates traditional knowledge derived from indigenous knowledge with the modern western science, related to the state of being someone (Kusch, 2009a). Therefore, the notion of being a guarani is fruitful in the educational relations, because it mixes up traditional knowledge situated in the geoculture and in the history of this people with knowledge from other societies, producing a border that delimits the differences, but, simultaneously, combines them, which result in being a guarani⁶.

Thus, the meeting of the guarani education with the school, generating a frontier space, is fruitful for perceptions about the guarani lifestyle, because the game of aesthetic relations flourish more intensely in it. Or, as Tassinari said (2001, p. 50), the school as "[...] a space of transit, articulation and knowledge exchange, as well as spaces of misapprehensions and redefinitions of identity of the groups involved in this process, Indians and non-Indians".

(Inter)cultural mediation as a method

According to Cunha (2012, p. 38), the mediator's role, the one who uses the cultural mediation as an educational practice, is

[...] to awaken the perception and curiosity of the group, creating an atmosphere proper for debating and building shared knowledge through discoveries and knowledge manifested by the group during the visit to the

exhibition. The work of cultural mediators in the exhibition is carried out through the connection between exhibition and visitor, leading the exhibition to the reflection, experience and knowledge production context.

This understanding of cultural mediation in art exhibitions corroborate what Nunes says (2014, p. 319): “[...] this interaction involves a mediator and one or more mediated subjects in a process aiming at the understanding through an object of sense”.

Cultural mediation is established through observations and sensations, and the mediation actions promote and enhance meetings with art and culture. Although the understanding of cultural mediation linked to education in museums is predominant, we propose to expand its use and chose to use it as our research method. To perform an activity with a group of guarani students and teachers at the 10th Mercosul Biennial, an (inter)cultural⁷ mediation in an indigenous school before and after the visit was necessary. We also needed to put ourselves in this border between two worlds, between different aesthetics, in which the mediation became intercultural.

The cultural mediation, as an intercultural practice and research method, proved to be effective in the experiences and learnings in the guarani school. We gave the expression a new meaning, by using the (inter)cultural mediation to express the translations, understandings and misapprehensions in the approximation between the indigenous and nonindigenous universes, preparing, conducting and evaluating the visit to the exhibition. In this sense, the (inter)cultural mediation was useful for understanding the participation of the guarani people in the 10th Mercosul Biennial (or the 10th Mercosul Biennial from the guarani perspective), which included the indigenous-themed works in its curatorial project, as the *Antropofagia Neobarroca* (Neo-Baroque Anthropophagy) exhibition⁸. Thus, we observed an aesthetics coming from other senses, which reveal individual symbolic horizons and find forms included to tell about themselves and their stories strange, as we will see next.

The (inter)cultural mediation can be considered a pragmatic practice when enabling the approximation of being an Amerindian, reflecting its own mediator position in the alterities. Therefore, interculturality, also understood as an experience with the other (Kusch, 2009b), causes

destabilization, doubt and, sometimes, incomprehension, due to the differences.

Guarani Aesthetics

From the (inter)cultural mediations in the indigenous school, three elements of the guarani aesthetics were registered as the foundation of the Amerindian thought and revealed meanings derived from the education of this people: *Japyxaka* – listen/focus, *Ta'Anga* – represent an image and *Ambovaipa*⁹ – destroy/undo.

1. *Japyxaka* – listen/focus

A practice that exposes behavioral limits between the guarani and the others: calmness, tranquility, temporality, corporality, performance, ritualization of everyday life and communication require focus for an attentive listening (Pissolato, 2007). Certainly, the guarani practice of focus, listening and attention transcends the deep ethical/esthetic/affective game of the relationship with nonindigenous people. The *japyxaka* is a complex movement, which shows a lasting and vital ancestor education for strengthening of the *mbya reko*.

Japyxaka, when understood as “to feel” (Benites, 2015, p. 36), in an aesthetic perspective of feeling, attaches meaning to the education, because *arandu* – wisdom – is acquired through listening and attention. Thus, the guarani practice of low-voice and soft speaking is an aesthetic movement from their groups.

2. *Ta'angá* – represent an image

Maybe *Ta'angá* is a seminal understanding of guarani aesthetics, embracing the notions of aesthetics in the school, collective, philosophical, sensitive and fruitful daily life of the intercultural relations. This term, which is polysemous in its contexts of use and in the dimensions that it reveals, appears as a notion of the aesthetics of feeling the lived world. *Ta'angá* has a meaning of physical things or visual aesthetics when compared with the term *i'pará*, which has mythological, sacred and symbolic meanings.

The guarani imagery representation has two designations: *ta'angá*, related to the profane world, and *i'pará*, related to the spiritual world. For

example, graphisms or sacred drawings, which should not be commercialized, are called *i'pará*.

Studies by Pissolato (2007) show that, in the guarani mythical texts, *ta'angá* means having a not fully true quality of something that has earthly existence, because only divine beings and the inhabitants of their dwelling place have the true quality. It also denotes the characteristic of imitating the current existence in relation to the mythical time. Thus, *ta'angá* can be understood as something imperfect (not divine); the term *ta'anga ryrú* – falsehood box –, television in the Guarani language, comes from this explanation.

However, the symbolic imagery representations, according to the indigenous logic, are extensive, holistic and seminal (Kusch, 2009a) for being product of philosophies of traditions and lengths different from the modern western knowledge. Consequently, *ta'angá*, as a visual aesthetic perception, can be used in the guarani education in the most diverse ways, such as in the understanding of mathematics, orthography, art and sciences, and in guarani/indigenous, school, extracurricular and intercultural educational processes.

3. *Ambovaipa* – destroy/undo

In the Amerindian philosophical thought, objects of artistic value or those connected with the beauty also have practical value. That is, an object without practical use probably does not have artistic-esthetic value, because artistic practices are not distinguished from pragmatic practices, as stated by Lagrou (2007). Therefore, there is no distinction between practical objects and artistic objects in the guarani culture. Everyday artifacts and creations representing myths and stories acquire varied and specific meanings according to the agency relations¹⁰ of their objects. However, a specific meaning of the guarani culture regarding their objects is the destruction.

In the guarani logic, something built should have its natural path of destruction, death or transformation, always through the choices and guidelines of *Nhanderú*, the supreme deity. It shows an understanding different from that of the western society, which considers that art and aesthetics art connected with museological art as a patrimonial reference aimed at the protection, non-destruction, revitalization of the things. According to Kusch (2009a), it would be the courtyard of the objects. For

this author, the denial of sacred spaces, soil and objects was forced due to the establishment of the western thought, which denies the sacred and its fates, commercializing the objects. The work that actualizes this denial is the construction of the city for comfort, aggregation and salvation of the objects created by humans. In this sense, the city-courtyard that ignores the divine nature, product of something that cannot be calculated, ruled and unveiled, overlaps the Amerindian way of feeling and its logics.

Contributions of the decolonial thought to understand other aesthetics

Decolonial aesthetics, as germinated fruits of a decolonial thought, seek to decolonize the concepts of art and aesthetics to set the subjectivity free. While one of the objectives of the arts is to attach meaning to emotions, the decolonial aesthetics, in their productions and reflections, expose the colonial wounds of modern western art and aesthetics, specifically, by proposing a return to the world's body, the cosmos, the vegetable and the organic sense of life (Goméz; Mignolo, 2012).

Walter Mignolo (2010) proposes a conceptual difference between aesthetics and *aisthesis*, the latter seen as elemental consciousness, non-elaborated, coming from stimulation, tactile sensation, sensory experience, sensory impression. Such proposal of separation is focused on another experience, which seeks to find a way of describing each practice in different values from other lifestyles. In this sense, *aisthesis* can be understood as a decolonial option of aesthetics: both founded in a conceptual history, based on the experiences of the otherness. "En suma, la estética colonizó la aesthesis. Se trata ahora de descolonizar la estética para liberar la aesthesis" (Goméz; Mignolo, 2012, p. 16).

Approaching aesthetics as an option is to avoid assumptions that a single way of perceiving the world is possible, as well as not to ignore the polysemy in the notions of aesthetics historically constructed. The decolonial option seeks to attach the proper value to the creation and imagination from other aesthetics, in the case of this study, the indigenous aesthetic. For Mignolo (2015), such option should not close its limit situations, but prefer a border thought, in which other ways of thinking and doing/acting germinate and bloom, beyond what is put in the prevailing modes. Focusing on a way of thinking based on a philosophy of limit is also

necessary, because the limitation of the experiences is a value, an aesthetic feat as construction. It justifies our choice in understanding the *Karai Arandú* school and the Neo-Baroque Anthropophagy of the 10th Mercosul Biennial exhibition as ethical-esthetic borders, in which identifications and differences allow us to find other meanings.

For Gómez (2014), the decolonization has a different way to be imagined, opening possibilities for the existence of other unknown ways, which were deleted by the colonization of the being and knowing. According to him, such proposal may be a deconstructive tool, which gives new meanings and can be employed in different social and cultural contexts derived from colonial processes other than Eurocentric ones. Thus, we consider that the contemporary Amerindian-themed works exhibited in one of the largest and most important art exhibitions in the Southern Brazil still reproduce colonial logics in their educational practices, standardization models, target audience and democratization space for art, even when addressing the Amerindian alterity. One of our learnings was that, when visiting the Neo-Baroque Anthropophagy exhibition at the 10th Mercosul Biennial, the guarani group did not feel the indigenous echo in the forms and contents exposed, affirming that they were hybrids in the anthropophagic conceptions/productions. The true anthropophagy existed through their perspective, which suspected, felt identified or denied. As Kusch (2009c) said, only the perspective of the spectator assigns meaning to the piece of art.

Act II: (inter)cultural mediation as an experience

Sharing moments with the guarani people in their land by exercising (inter)cultural mediation before and after the visit to the art exhibition at the 10th Mercosul Biennial was one of our choices. In the second part of this text, we will show our perceptions regarding the guarani school and the activities carried out in the museum, as well as our further reflection at the school. What does this experience produce for the understanding of guarani aesthetic elements related to school education?

The Karai Arandú School

The Indigenous Elementary and High School *Karai Arandú*, – a name that means the wisest of the wise men – was founded in the early 21st century, after request of *Tekoá Jatai'ty* leaders – *Aldeia Guarani do Cantagalo*. It is located in a horizontal building with three classrooms, one of them being subdivided; another is divided into school office, library, and computer room; kitchen and school canteen; restrooms for students and teachers. Other spaces were created, as a classroom outside, at the back of the school, and another in the shadow of a tree alongside the building. We understand this creation of spaces as an alternative to an insufficient assistance of the community actual needs by the State government bodies, but also as a guarani production that appropriates the school, a modern western institution entering the village. The space limited by concrete walls, which keeps students and teachers away from the forest that surrounds the school, is actually questioned when presenting other options of spaces for classes that could also happen, as they partially do, indoors.

The total of students was 104 in 2015, divided into classes from the first to the ninth grade of elementary school; 27 of whom were high school students, and 12 students from EJA – *Educação de Jovens e Adultos* (Adult and Youth Education). The school staff consisted of 4 indigenous teachers responsible for teaching curricular components connected with the history, culture and guarani language and 12 non-native teachers responsible for specific disciplines representing the knowledge of the western world¹¹. A principal and an administrative secretary, both nonindigenous, as well as 4 lunch ladies and assistants of general services from the community also were part of the staff.

Our first visit to the *Karai Arandú* school for conducting the mediation activities occurred on October 23, 2015. The principal and the secretary received us. We described that edition of the Mercosul Biennial exhibition to some teachers and discussed together the objectives of a visit of the guarani students to a contemporary art exhibition. Next, we went to a classroom, where we talked about art, museum and education with students of the final years of elementary and high school students. According to the teachers and leaders present, this activity would be more

suitable for the students from the most *advanced grades* of school, with greater Portuguese understanding and knowledge of the nonindigenous world, which allows them to better exploit the experience. According to the school principal, the reflections by that group of students on the works could be deeper. However, in practice, many children attended the activity in the museum, because students of high school and of the final years of elementary school took their children, as children usually accompany their families in activities outside the village.

Karai Arandú goes to the Biennial: aesthetic perceptions

After this meeting with the group willing to participate in the visit to the exhibition, mediated by guarani interlocutors, who translated what we said to the others' language, we scheduled a visit to the 10th Mercosul Biennial and made arrangements regarding transport and foods. On the bus, whose point of departure was the Cantagalo village, there were 52 people: 4 indigenous teachers, 2 nonindigenous teachers, 46 students and 2 babies. We waited for them in the city and we arranged to meet close to *Praça da Alfândega* – central Porto Alegre. After receiving them, we all went to the Santander Cultural building to visit the Neo-Baroque Anthropophagy exhibition.

A reception to the visitors, conducted by three tour guides assigned to our visit with the guarani group, was part of the mediation pedagogical strategy. In the first contact with the group, the guides briefly showed the museum and the exhibition's curatorial proposal. According to the route, the first work shown for reflection was the oil paint on canvas *A rébis mestiça coroa a escadaria dos mártires indigentes* (*The Mixed-Race Rebis Crowns the Staircase of the Indigents Martyrs*), 2013, by Thiago Martins de Melo, a painter from Maranhão, Brazil (Image 1).



Image 1 – *A rébis mestiça coroa a escadaria dos mártires indígenas*.
Source: Work by Thiago Martins de Melo (2013)¹².

The cultural mediation in museums and exhibitions of contemporary art is marked by several meanings, which can be understood through the theories that lie between art and education as aesthetic experiences. In this sense, Meira (2009, p. 32) tells us that

[...] the aesthetic experience places cognition in permanent deconstruction and reconstruction, by the vulnerability of the events, states of mind, relations with the culture, knowledge coming from body and abstractions, and what our mind creates through landscapes of the body, environment, memory and fiction.

Imbued with these meanings, we observed, listened and got lost on the *vulnerability* of the feelings that came across during the visit, both for being with a guarani group admiring works of art that showed the western perspective, or at least the *juruá* perspective, about their history, colonization, lifestyles, and for the involvement with the works exhibited.

Next, the guarani visitors, who began to choose where to go in the visit and anticipating curiosities, became interested in the work *Pack (Matilha)*, 2012, by the carioca visual artist Barrão: a sculpture made of porcelain and epoxy resin (Image 2). The guarani were interested in the

sculpture showing dogs entwined with jars, pots and other porcelain containers. In front of the work, some students asked: “what do these dogs mean? What does it mean? What material this is made from? A student commented: “I liked this one, because a dog is coming out of the other”.



Image 2 – Matilha. Source: Work by Barrão (2012).

During the visit, interest in the materials used in the artistic productions, in the history of the works and in the museum building was sparked. Before the visit to the exhibition, we never thought that the building could also awaken their curiosity and, surprised, we and the tour guides accompanied the group, listened, observed and overcame curiosities. They asked why the building was put up, watched stained glasses and paintings on the walls, making several comments in their language, the official language of the activity, mediated by interpreters from the community, more specifically, the guarani teachers. A work in particular really drew the students' attention: *Família (Family)*, 2004, by the Colombian Carlos Castro Arias (Image 3), referring to the wallpaper that decorated the author's childhood home. The wallpaper was faithfully reproduced with blood taken from each of the members of the artist's family: his father, mother and four siblings.

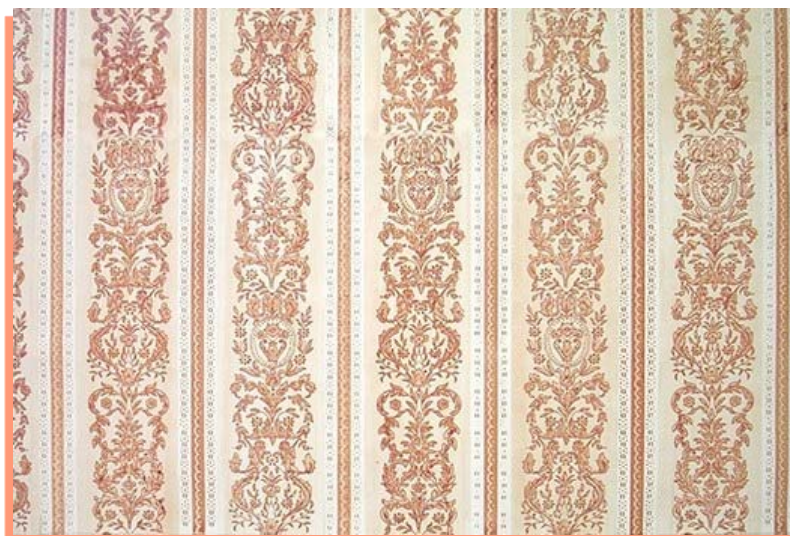


Image 3 – *Familia*. Source: Work by Carlos Castro Arias (2004).

The work drew attention because of its wealth of details and beautiful prints. After reading the description and commenting in guarani language that that was a painting made of blood, all of them paid attention and checked visually. When a group of girls admired the work *Familia*, a mediator asked: “Could this painting have used menstrual blood? If that were so, what would you think about that?”. The girls were restless, laughed and said something in their language. An Indian teacher who was observing the situation spoke in Portuguese: “you had better not keep talking about this subject, because the guarani people do not talk about that”. This situation shows a conflict of conceptions concerning cultural borders. In the border context of artistic aesthetics and indigenous and nonindigenous education, the misapprehensions show that such perceptions are potent in the mediated educational process. Silence reigned among the *jurua*, while the guarani people who attended the exhibition were talking in a low voice without translating what they observed.

The work *Kuna Metal*, 2011, by José Castellón (Image 4) was greatly admired by the guarani students, who only listened and visually examined and talked to one another, obviously in their native language. The work was composed of four photographs, a video played on the TV and two headphones playing an audio. The film showed a small Caribbean island surrounded by azure waters, giving the island the impression of tranquility and pristine landscape. Four photos of the components of the punk rock band called Kuna Metal, whose members are indigenous Kuna people

living in Panama and Colombia, were alongside the film. The hard punk music played through headphones contrasted aesthetically with the images of the calm paradise island. The eyes and ears of the guarani people dwell on this work and almost all of them listened to the audio. In parallel conversations, we tried to understand the curiosity caused by the identification with the body aesthetics of the young Kuna men, represented in the work of art, probably expressing some guarani body aesthetics.



Image 4 – *Kuna Metal*. Source: Work by José Castrellón (2011).

The work *Cosecha*, 2001, by Carlos Castro Arias (Image 5), also drew the group's attention: a small sculpture of an ear of corn. However, this ear was formed by human teeth instead of grains of corn. We talked about the meanings of that work and a guarani teacher commented: "this work is interesting and at the same time strange to us, because corn is a sacred thing for us¹³". Strangeness, admiration, curiosity: their sharp eyes recorded details; laughs and side conversations also showed distrust. Was that what they expected to find? Their answers were only silences and laughs.



Image 5 – *Cosecha*. Source: Work by Carlos Arias (2001).

We realized that, during the visit, some nonindigenous visitors looked at our group, making us think about the relationship between the different audiences that visit the museum, or maybe about the usual homogeneity in these spaces. It seemed to us that we were experiencing a different performance, a game of identities in a space to which indigenous people did not belong. Also, we noticed that the tour guides were feeling uncomfortable, perhaps they were anxious to respect the diversity, for they devoted special attention and respect to the guarani visitors.

This game of aesthetics in educational spaces is a border, as well as a fruitful situation triggering reflections on the indigenous and nonindigenous aesthetics. The presence of mothers, babies, girls, boys and teachers who formed the group from the *Karai Arandú* school at the Biennial caused impressions on all of us, as a possibility of educational encounter with alterity. As a performance action, the museum received aesthetic interference by the guarani language, by the indigenous teachers' way of educating, by the presence of those different modes of attentive listening, of reading images and reflecting from an opposite place: the state of being a Guarani was shown at the museum.

The return to the Karáí Arandú school

As a way to complement the (inter)cultural mediation process at the *Karáí Arandú* school, we returned to the village Cantagalo, aiming at establishing a critical-reflexive conversation with the students and teachers on the exhibition visited. The school principal told us that the group really enjoyed the visit and that some teachers had already conducted an evaluative activity. The activity mentioned by her was part of the Integrated Seminars, a curricular component of high school, in which the students had been asked before the visit to photograph some works from the Neo-Baroque Anthropophagy exhibition. At the school, the students described in small groups, both in Portuguese and in Guarani, one or more selected works. The title of the scholar paper was Review of the Works from the Mercosul Biennial Exhibition in Guarani and Portuguese. Posters with the picture of the work chosen by the group and a brief description were exhibited in the hallway of the school, first in Portuguese, then in Guarani. It is assumed that they are at least similar descriptions, but as we do not know their language and a considerable part of the utterances could not be translated, it allows us to think that maybe their records in their native language show what they really thought about the works in the exhibition.

Descriptions of the work *Matilha*

‘In this work of art, we can observe a group of kitties in awkward positions’.

Apy jaexa jagua kuery ivaikue ikue va’e.

‘Lots of beautiful dogs, white and black. I’ve never seen this before. The art is so cool, awesome’.

Iporá jagua kuery hûû ka’egui xîî aexa va’e’ y teri, ta’anga aexama igutorema.

Description of the work *Cosecha*

‘In this image I see an ear of corn, but its seeds look like human teeth’.

Kova’e ta’ága py ma aexa peteĩ y avaxi, va’eri ha’yĩngue ma taĩgue merâmi (Field notes, 2015).

In these first descriptions, we can observe little opinion: only the report of the simplest records made by them. In the following evaluations, we noticed that the selected works also showed an anticolonial positioning regarding the invasion. When asked about what they really thought on the work photographed, they smiled, keeping an enigmatic silence. Maybe they

were elaborating critical ideas or giving meaning to misapprehensions that did not want to verbalize.

Descriptions of the work *A rébis mestiça coroa a escadaria dos mártires indigentes*.

‘This photo has a lot of different people, but this picture just tells us a story, it is the arrival of the whites and the Indians trying to defend our land ‘.

Koova’e ta’anga o’i heta joegua he’y he’y va’eri koova’e ta’anga omonbeu petei kaxo, jurua kuery ava’e remo mbyá kuery ojoko nha’ã nhande yvy.

‘In this picture we see nonindigenous and the war against the Indians’.

Kova’e py ma ojekua jurua kuery joguero’a mbyá kuery revẽ.

‘In my opinion, these picture shows several Indians, some of them are battered by whites and one is holding a flag and showing it to people. A great Chief of the indigenous people also can be seen.

Koova’e ta’anga o’i heta joegua he’y he’y va’eri koova’e ta’anga omonbeu petei kaxo, jurua kuery ava’e remo mbyá kuery ojoko nha’ã nhande yvy.

Descriptions of some works from the 10th Mercosul Biennial produced by students of the *Karái Arandú* school show the result of aesthetic and educational experiences in the spaces of the museum and in a reflective contact with some Indian-themed pieces of art. The school pedagogical assignment was aimed at pointing the strongest characteristic of that painting or sculpture, or how each person or group felt before a work of art related to their own history.

Their assignment showed that the forms of aesthetic or artistic manifestation of the *Karái Arandú* school students are focused on personal and collective characterizations, in which the aesthetic experience is expressed through the materiality of the objects. These manifestations are shown in many ways in the everyday life, but it was through the school that the guarani aesthetics was exposed with a greater intensity, at least in the fields of visual aspect and of artistic materiality: painting, handwriting, drawing, carving, sculpture, installation, among other recreational activities.

We understand an indigenous aesthetics also characterized by an investment in the visual concepts of cosmological nature present in the decoration of the classrooms, in the representation of animals, historical narratives in school activities and expressions of guarani graphisms, such as the following painting (Image 6).



Image 6 – Painting done in a classroom of the *Karai Arandú* school.
Source: Picture by Dannilo Melo (2015).

The works seen at the museum in little resembles what they produce at the school in the curricular discipline called arts. The guarani drawings, paintings and graphisms on the walls and columns of the school or in the classrooms are an evidence of creation processes of ethnic and political affirmation, and appropriation of school spaces. Likewise, we highlight that guarani aesthetic expressions, such as their paintings, can be understood as political practices of decolonial aesthetic in education. We also realized a probable difference in the understandings of the art concept. For the *juruá*, the artistic practice has multiple creation and expression understandings, while for the guarani, its understanding is utilitarian and sacred. With which concepts do the guarani people visit the museum? What are their inner questions about the art presented?

Aesthetics in a decolonial perspective

Discussions on aesthetics in a decolonial perspective are still new in the Brazilian context, but consistent studies and reflections on the topic were already produced by South American authors. Segundo Mignolo (2009, p. 11), “[...] estética deriva de *Aierthetikos*, palavra que refere a sensaciones físicas, al mundo de los sentidos”. In this perspective, Dussel (1994, p. 290) claims that “[...] la filosofía del arte se la ha llamado ‘estética’ es porque, en el tiempo de los que plasmaron esta ciencia, dicha filosofía era una filosofía de la sensibilidad”. According to these comments, we reflected:

does an object have its meaning given only by its form? Or does this object also consist of other meanings integrating its perception from a particular culture?

When reflecting about the decolonial aesthetics notions, we assumed the existence of an aesthetic dimension of life or, as Kusch describes (2009c, p. 782) in his notes on an American tenebrous aesthetics, we need an aesthetics that does not have productions as basis, but creations “de un ámbito rigurosamente vital”. Consequently, we can understand aesthetics as a body or a house where culture resides. In the words of Kusch, aesthetics, through its predominant notion in the modern western rationality, is an invention of the European bourgeoisie after its power possession in the 18th century, which is an ancient Greek world notion in which aesthetics had another meaning (sensitive, perceptible). According to the author, aesthetics became a term used only to identify the Renaissance art (beautiful, sublime), because the bourgeoisie did not feel able to create a new art.

The idea of aesthetics as an exercise of contemplation of the beautiful occurred through the conjunction between reason and rationality in the Kantian thought, as seen in further studies by Zulma Palermo. The author says, “Estoy imaginando claro, pero el cierto es que lo estético y el concepto secular de razón van de la mano y cumplen funciones complementares” (Palermo, 2009, p. 11). Thus, the modern and contemporary artistic perspective of aesthetics is, broadly, still based on the modern rationality.

Consequently, such rationality defines the American. According to Kusch, the primary Americans are the Indians, who subsequently mixed with descendants of immigrants. However, this definition is based on the relationship between death and life. Critically, the author shows that the Indian is regarded as dead in the objective scientific rationality, because the western objectivity is, actually, a “philosophy of usable objects”, which became a “philosophy of the usable individuals” after the advent of the modern rationality (Kusch, 2009c, p. 786). In this sense, the author claims that

[...] lo índio, en el ámbito de la visión del mundo occidental, no tiene ninguna validez política, social o artística, es decir que no entra vitalmente a formar parte de dicho ámbito. En este sentido lo índio es estrictamente lo

muerto y por lo tanto se relega al museo como algo monstruoso y aberrado (Kusch, 2009c, p. 786).

However, as Kusch says, aesthetics subverts the history when redefining the position of the Indian as a thing/subject of the past and regarding indigenous people as fundamental to the American life. In addition, it shows that history as an aesthetics of the past, especially the positivist, functioned as a drainage of the fullness experienced in the past of native myths and epics. It became a state of being an Amerindian through studies on indigenous aesthetic, which contemplate that these are lives being lived right here, right now. The obliteration, invisibility, ignorance or distorted understanding caused by colonial educational practices creates an aesthetics on what being an Indian is, in which the exotic perspective still predominates, especially in school spaces.

The notion of aesthetics as a practice produces effects that allow us to think about the colonization, as Mignolo (2009, p. 11) says: “[...] fuera de Europa, la estética emerge como un nuevo concepto y critério para (de)evaluar y jerarquizar la creatividad sensorial de otras civilizaciones. Así aparece el critério de que una ‘tela’ es arte y un objeto de arcilla ‘artesanía’”. The relationship between art and craft is not only extensively discussed in recent times regarding ethics and authorship in productions, but also as a matter of colonial consequence, in which the indigenous artistic production is recognized, mostly, as handicrafts. When the guarani carve in wood the *animals* sold in craft fairs, they know that they are not creating art. “Art, for us, is to go to the jungle, to arm a trap,” said a guarani teacher from the *Karai Arandú* school (*apud* Bergamaschi, 2005, p. 243). “Each animal has a secret, has a history. It is human, it feels”, said a wise man when asked about the meaning of the sculptures that are sold. This perspective shows a profound understanding of the human, revealing a typical ethics and aesthetics of the guarani world.

For Kusch (2009c), the most serious problem is to realize how the aesthetics of art dominated the other aesthetics. According to the author, this process occurs through the explanatory and persuasive aspect of the modern western art of suiting forms (styles, artistic schools, genres, movements, techniques). Thus, the form is as a right of persuasion that may or not be achieved. As a consequence, the indigenous life and the

Amerindian symbolic horizon are, generally, pejoratively considered as crafts, folklore, legend. In other words, they cannot be signed for not achieving formal types more or less understandable to dominant forms.

Therefore, we consider that aesthetics in the decolonial Latin American thought is not only a theory of classical forms of the modern western canon or of the concept of beauty, but also a means that considers two things: aesthetics as an instance that surpasses science and history; and an intercultural means for integrating America through the geoculture category, understood as a cultural ethos in the indigenous and popular American thought (Casalla, 2010).

Notes on the aesthetics of guarani life

We observed that both the school and the museum are considered important to the guarani education. However, the indigenous people rarely visit museological spaces, as Santander Cultural, in central Porto Alegre, for several reasons, and one of them may be the approach used to consecrate a museum, such as its architectonic reference justified by the greatness, and the asset, historical and material value.

Consequently, the visual greatness of that “museum-bank” in downtown was also perceived by the guarani group as a big difference. The references, since the first expectations, on whether the museum had “expensive artworks” demonstrated views about the differences between the indigenous school and great exhibitions. The imaginary idea about the museum made them think that that place was very valuable for them, and they asked: “why can’t our art be here?” Partially, they show that this imaginary has an actual consequence, because they feel distant from that place.

The experience of going to the Mercosul Biennial, as an opportunity for visiting a great exhibition or going to a great museum, clearly is not the motivation of the indigenous group. Their motivation was to have an experience with something new. The new, the strange and the lack of belonging are present in the guarani school education. For this reason, experiencing this extracurricular activity gained the meaning of complementing the function of the indigenous school in the village. A way to see the nonindigenous world and, thus, to promote the practices of

reciprocity. Maybe for this reason they denied descriptions and deeper and more prolonged reflections as we tried to induce. It was just another way to see the *juruá* world instead of experiencing art as a main objective in this activity.

In this game of aesthetics, the guarani concept of museum is different. If we imagine a meaning in the perspective of this group, a museum could not be defined as a place to store, to preserve objects. Such idea is similar to a criticism against the way that the museum exhibits its works for mere observation at times. Although we know the diversity of creative possibilities that a contemporary artistic exhibition can provide, the *mbyá* guarani world still keeps this idea as the bases of their conceptions and visions. Perhaps it is different from what the guarani people thinks: alive when lived; potent in its broader meanings; long-lasting through ancestry; keeping the myths and consecrated forms, which preserves the shapes that cannot be revealed; protector of communication ways and cosmological dimensions; formed according to the conventions of the community.

Another worthy point is the notions of aesthetics as a pattern of forms, artistic meanings, embodiments, visual aspects related to a cultural context. Thus, art cannot be transferred to another culture: not everything in the guarani life and daily life is aesthetic. Certainly, all peoples, cultures and groups have different aesthetic notions. However, the indigenous aesthetics has different meanings and expressions, arising from cosmological, philosophical and ontological understandings situated in specific ways of life (Kusch, 2009c).

Also, the guarani aesthetics are not all the actions, emotions, relationships, mythologies, stories, artistic productions or any other form captured by a fragmented eye of nonindigenous people. They have a distinct character, another rationality; thus, they have different eyes, ears, mouths, skins and hearts.

Final Remarks

The guarani students' perceptions concerning the artworks from the 10th Mercosul Biennial, their readings and reflections regarding the nonindigenous art, had the influential participation of nonindigenous teachers. In this regard, the educational processes are also based on the

relationships with teachers sensitized with the indigenous life, principals who militate in the everyday struggles to improve schools, in addition to mediate the bureaucratic administration of education on the border between two worlds. Thus, we realized that, in the appropriation of the school by the guarani, the nonindigenous teachers are also the protagonists of daily life, of conflicts, of learnings and, consequently, of the aesthetics in the guarani education.

Through these experiences with the guarani people and the cultural mediations conducted in 2015 in the village and at the museum, specific meanings have revealed the composition of a set of aesthetics of the school and everyday life, which are constantly interconnected in the education of children and adults. Observing that network was important to understand some guarani ways to teach and learn.

Regarding aesthetics, we realize that even with the use of the guarani art to express their stories, myths and cultural references, the educational strategies constitute a complex network of communication, which is difficult for us, researchers, to understand. This network, created and sustained by and for the balance of the guarani life, has an aesthetic dimension that, despite being in border spaces, is established by well-defined cultural borders. The guarani way of life, as a theoretical formulation, can be noticeable through art, language, pedagogy, politics, education and spirituality, composing a totality.

Aiming to announce a sensible reason able to perceive a less fragmented world, Maffesoli (1996, p. 58) comments that

[...] the aesthetics is no longer a secondary soul for amusing; it becomes a global reality, intellectual and existential at the same time, which, trespassing (and integrating) the classic separations modernity, moral, politics, physics, logic, becomes an accomplishment, a vital imperative ‘.

We understand that the guarani way of life, *mbya reko*, its aesthetics as a “vital imperative” is a complex composition, in which the education evokes a cultural totality, essential for cultural affirmation.

Notes

- ¹ Some of the arguments and data from this article were developed from the MSc thesis of Dannilo Cesar Silva Melo, “Kovae Ta’angá Mbyá Guarani Schools at the Mercosul Biennial: reflections on decolonial education and aesthetics” (2016), from the Graduate Program in Education of Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, advised by Professor PhD Maria Aparecida Bergamaschi.
- ² A proximity in the interaction with Guarani groups already exists, resulting from research and outreach projects on education, developed since 2000 and supervised by Professor PhD Maria Aparecida Bergamaschi.
- ³ The notion of Amerindian cosmopolitics (Lagrou, 2007) and the approach by Alfred Gell (1998) place the aesthetics in a network of social relations. Both of them allow us to understand contradictions created by the interpretive exercise of the form and of the meanings of art within the scope of social interactions.
- ⁴ Vherá Poty is a guarani teacher, an intellectual recognized for his knowledge and political actions. He is a photographer and a lecturer in the outreach course of Guarani Language and Culture, at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.
- ⁵ “El estar expresa esa ‘rara sabiduría’ de vivir en América, que se corresponde con una forma cultural estática, vegetal y femenina como la indígena. En tanto, el ser es dinámico, se rige por una lógica causalística que privilegia un saber de objetos. Ambas representan dos formas de instalarse en el espacio y vivir la cultura. Sin embargo, vale la pena aclarar que estar y ser se relacionan (como la copa de un árbol con sus raíces) en lo que Kusch llama estar-siendo” (Casalla, 2010, p. 107).
- ⁶ Rodolfo Kusch (2009a) uses the term *fagocitação* (phagocytizing) to describe how the native peoples appropriates of knowledge and practices diverse to their logical, adjusting a way of being in the world, without, however, losing their cultural and ethnic identities.
- ⁷ The notion of (inter)cultural mediation is understood from the intercultural philosophical thought, as proposed by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (2007), in which not only the relationship between cultures is shown but also their ethical effects, contextual references for meaning construction, and the thought and criticism coming from these alterity relations.

- ⁸ According to the exhibition curator, “The objective will be to show how strategies alluding to indigenous-related forms encountered and modified European systems of cultural colonization in a sort of cultural anthropophagy (Manifesto Antropofágico by Oswald de Andrade, 1928) that remains until nowadays. Despite the disruptions of the conquests and colonization, the Baroque allowed the operational continuity of the cultural emancipation in Latin America countries. The exhibition will use two approach strategies (Baroque and anthropophagy) to strategically rethink a segment of production of these countries that connects the historic Baroque forms with contemporaneity. Just as Anthropophagy, Neo-Baroque rejects the modern western principles as the concept of originality (in favor of hybridism and miscegenation), and of the historical homogenization and the European Canon premises constructed by linearity”. Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/bienalmercosul/photos/a.139198522908405.28897.136684429826481/426648914163363/?type=3&theater>>. Accessed: Dec. 8, 2017.
- ⁹ Vherá Poty was the translator of these expressions to the Guarani language, in the Guarani Language and Culture classes, at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (Field notes, August 2015).
- ¹⁰ The meaning of agency in art is similar to that of the objects (Alves, 2008).
- ¹¹ When asked about the function of the school, the guarani students answered that its function is to show them the nonindigenous world. For this reason, the indigenous village school is organized just like the other institutions of the state public education. However, the daily experience, the work of guarani professionals at the school and the interaction with the community produce significant changes in the institution, showing the guarani appropriation of the school (Bergamaschi, 2005).
- ¹² Image bank of the Mercosul Visual Arts Biennial Foundation: <<http://www.fundacaobienal.art.br/site/pt/imprensa/banco-de-imagens>>. Accessed: June 27, 2016.
- ¹³ *Avaxi Ete* – true corn in the guarani tradition, considered sacred, for which they have a special care to conserve the seeds. The old Indians keep and carry the seed with them in their trajectory and, as soon as they settle in a land, they plant the sacred seed, even if in tiny spaces (Bergamaschi, 2005).

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