DECOLONIAL HISTORY OF ART

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CAROLIN OVERHOFF FERREIRA

A METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

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To my son,
Cauã

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Acknowledgements

This book is the result of thirty years of teaching and research. It is addressed to a new generation of students and scholars who I would like to encourage to think and walk decolonial paths. My students and the discussions in the classroom, especially in Brazil, had a deep influence on my studies. This book would not exist without them. My participation in conferences, panels, projects, and round tables has equally given me the opportunity to talk, discuss, and learn immensely from a variety of scholars and disciplinary fields. I am very grateful to all the colleagues I have met in all those years and for everything they have shared with me and taught me.

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Introduction

This book is the result of my lectures for the course "Introduction to History of Art," which I began teaching in 2014, as part of the curriculum of the undergraduate program in History of Art at the Federal University of São Paulo (Unifesp). The revised and expanded edition derives from the optional undergraduate course "Brazilian Decolonial Art" in 2019 and the seminar in the master's programs in History of Art and Philosophy, "Art, Culture, Decoloniality and Philosophy," in 2021.

Coloniality and decoloniality

The indispensability of decolonizing art studies, which this book promotes, lies in the fact that, together with Philosophy and the Human and Social Sciences, especially Anthropology and Ethnology, they have claimed a universality that is responsible for the supposed otherness of peoples with different cosmologies, or, according to the European conceptualization, cultures (Fanon, 1952; Rodney, 1972; Nascimento, 1978; Dussel, 1993; Wiredu, 1996; Jecupé, 1998; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010; Mignolo, 2011; Mignolo et al, 2013; Munduruku, 2009; Kilomba, 2019; Gonzalez, 2020; Esbell, 2020; 2021).

It is absurd, but a fact, that it is necessary to claim the equality of cultures colonized by Europeans. Their practicioners were labelled as inferior in the name of the Western Judeo-Christian worldview, enabling their subalternation, oppression, exploitation, enslavement and destruction. Their subalternation went hand in hand with the often successful attempts to destroy their cosmologies or worldviews through the instrumentalization of the Christian faith. The influence of Greek philosophy on the Christian message, which led to a Hellenization on the part of the church fathers (P'Bitek, 2011), made this possible. This Hellenization resulted from the idea of a teleological metaphysics – the introduction of a higher sphere to the physical world – which did not exist in the original Christian teaching.

Through Hellenization, the basic Christian ideal was lost. This can also be described as the hierarchization of the non-visible world in relation to the visible world resulting from the spread of Greek philosophy throughout the Mediterranean. The ideal consisted of the idea that the external law of Judaism had to be transformed into an internal law. Internal legislation means that every human being always knows how they should behave ethically, without this having to be imposed by external prohibitions and laws. In so-called Native or indigenous cosmologies, whether African, Asian or American, there is the same understanding of a binding and universal ethic that regulates living together in a community (Wiredu, 1996; Jecupé, 1998; Munduruku, 2009; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010; Gonzalez, 2020; Esbell, 2020; 2021). However, Hellenistic metaphysics and its influence on Christianity led Europe to assume the universal power of logos and, thus, its superiority through rationality. The institutionalization of this

idea as faith by the Christian church enabled the development of a political instrument that allowed and justified European imperialism in the name of the "doctrine of salvation," propagated as imperative, and thus as a mechanism of subalternization. Later, especially through the Enlightenment, rationalism perpetuated this idea.

Ancient Greece and Rome were already familiar with the oppression and enslavement of others, which made their imperialist and colonialist practices possible. But the hierarchy and dichotomy introduced by Christianity between the spheres of the visible and the invisible, the physical and the metaphysical world, which do not exist in polytheisms or non-hegemonic cosmologies (Jecupé, 1998; Sodré, 2017; Wiredu, 2011), provided a basis whose declared universalism offered an ideological substrate to the supposed mental and religious superiority of Europeans, leading to the dehumanization of others in a way never seen before modern colonization.

The launch of pejorative identity categories was fundamental to this. The idea of otherness was introduced through ethnicizing and racializing concepts, such as "Indians" and "Blacks," and legitimized by the necessary salvation of these "infidels" and "primitives." The claims of universality through hierarchical metaphysics and of superiority through humiliating identity categories became elementary components to exercise colonial power and justify slavery. The self-declared superiority of the West's allegedly rational, but ultimately irrational (Kilomba, 2019), art and culture is still a leitmotif of art studies and in the publications used to teach them. This also includes the perverse notion of the ability to save the supposed others to bring them up to the same level of what is considered civilization, but which is nothing more than barbarism (Benjamin, 1980).

Even though there have been conflicts between European countries over the conquests of America and, later, Africa, Asia and Oceania, the Christian project is ultimately pan-European, supported by the idea of the hegemony of its religion, science, culture and socio-politics. Interestingly, the metaphysics on which coloniality is based is not humanistic, as it invokes a God as an extra-human instance. This superior self-hood allows Europeans to affirm their customs as morally higher-ranking and impose them as morality on peoples with other cosmologies (Wiredu, 2011). Compared to monotheistic cosmologies, non-European or non-hegemonic cosmologies are, indeed, more humane because their deities – "entities" is the more appropriate term – are ancestors or forebearers and, therefore, not located outside the human sphere. The concept of divinity has been adopted in the West but, for the most part, has no equivalence in non-European languages, although many cosmologies also have entities, now called gods or goddesses of origin (often with no gender distinction because they have both qualities) (Wiredu, 2011). However, human beings do not turn directly to him/her, but to the ancestors. In several Brazilian indigenous cosmologies, for example, there is a genealogical relationship between all beings and no entity is superordinate (Jecupé, 1998; Munduruku, 2009; Wiredu, 2011).

The problem of metaphysics still receives little attention in the debate on decolonization, although it forms the epistemological basis of coloniality through its immanent hierarchization. As a scientific method, decolonization seeks to understand, identify and, if possible, deal with or undo the contemporary impact of the colonial legacy

(Bernardino-Costa et al., 2016; 2019). In doing so, it examines the mechanisms of coloniality, which consist of oppression, destruction, treachery, murder, violence, theft, kidnapping, enslavement and dehumanization through ethnicization and racialization. Subaltern and postcolonial studies (Said, 2012; Spivak, 1988), which preceded decolonial studies, are now seen critically as part of Western epistemology (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010; Grosfoguel, 2019). However, decolonization also often remains induced by the hegemonic scientific system if it is not engaged actively with real-life and political issues (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010).

In order not only to explain coloniality but also to put an end to its continuation, decolonial studies point to epistemological alternatives. The aim is to include the historically subalternated in the cultural, philosophical and scientific dialogues, as well as in socio-political practice. In Brazil, for example, Native peoples and many Afro-descendants have been fighting colonialism for more than 500 years and, based on their historical and current experiences, have little hope that they will be able to effectively change the situation (Nascimento, 1979; Jecupé, 1998; Gonzalez, 2020; Munduruku, 2009; Esbell, 2020; 2021), therefore using the concept of the counter-colonial in the maroon context (Dos Santos, 2023). However, they are not giving up the struggle to make their epistemologies heard and to protect their cosmological practices from oppression and eradication, which are considered cultures in the cosmophobic West. The subalternized are aware that they can only speak if they also learn the grammar of the colonial masters, i.e. their epistemology, and express themselves with their concepts (Spivak, 1988; 2005).

Art and art studies initially used the concepts of global art and post-coloniality to be more inclusive. However, they did not manage to overcome coloniality. The concept of global art first appeared in the context of post-colonial studies at the end of the 1980s, but only engages with the contemporary art of indigenous artists – that is, the colonized inhabitants of Africa, America, Asia and Oceania – and Afro-diasporic artists, for whom there was no previous interest. Ultimately, "global" art only manifests the inclusion of non-European art in the Western art world and its market. Due to lack of knowledge, non-European epistemologies do not have much to say in this integration, even if certain decentralization and de-construction is aimed.

Furthermore, in colonized countries such as those of Latin America, art studies, when trying to understand their artistic production, especially Native and Afro-diasporic art, have great difficulty breaking free from the dominant Eurocentric perspective and incorporating appropriate epistemologies by taking into consideration diverse cosmologies. Instead of recognizing and respecting them, they were initially pathologized and folklorized (Rodrigues, 1988) and studied with the key Western concepts and narratives. My approach in this book is therefore neither global nor post-colonial, but rather seeks to deconstruct the Western epistemology that has underpinned art studies for the last 2,500 years – more specifically, since the invention of the alphabetic writing system and philosophy in ancient Greece. On this basis, it will be possible to meet the challenge of decolonization, in terms of integrating and better understanding non-European epistemologies. I am aware of the limitations of my attempt since Western epistemology must first be deconstructed. Nevertheless, my approach is based on the hope that this deconstruction, together with the valorization of other cosmologies and their

epistemologies, can contribute to the revision of art studies that has been underway since the 1970s and has not yet been completed.

Decoloniality as a concept in the art context

For this, we need, above all, a more differentiated concept of art that includes both its European emergence after the Renaissance and the millennia-old artistic production of other cosmological contexts. The understanding and recognition of the epistemologies responsible for artistic production in non-European or non-hegemonic spheres are indispensable for this. I assume that art – and, as I will show, we cannot avoid the term – is a universal practice even though it has a Western history. Using the concept of art to refer to the aesthetic expression of all peoples recognizes that there are different ways of being in the world, expressing and thinking about it – both with relation to the world and its living beings, organized into communities of different sizes, and beyond it, regarding its forces and entities. In the case of European art, as well as in Western theory and history of art, we can observe a cut between the world and the invisible world, which has been described as "cosmophobia" (Dos Santos, 2023). The predominance of the term culture to circumscribe the context of Western art reveals this idea of the denial to anchor it in a cosmology, which has been replaced by the ideology of colonial-capitalist modernity. The recovery of medieval art by scholars of the image (Belting, 1985; Didi-Huberman, 2000) has sought to remind us that it was not always like this in Europe.

I will start from the assumption that art is a powerful form of communication and action. It was only European hierarchical thinking that tried to take this power away from art, instrumentalizing it or replacing it with its study. In the process, specific functions were assigned to it, hierarchies such as erudite and popular art were coined, and categories of evaluation were introduced, which make no sense in non-European or non-hegemonic cosmologies. To define a generally valid concept of art, it is necessary to re-acknowledge the various existing epistemologies and worldviews. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the commonalities and differences between the different cosmologies and their ways of being in the world and relating to the invisible world. A central commonality is the fact that in all cosmologies, art has the task of making the invisible perceptible. However, this is done under different cosmological auspices, which can be understood as either spiritual, hierarchical-metaphysical or equivalent relationships.

When looking at the differences, ideological and socio-political components must be included. It is worth remembering that court art in Africa cannot be compared to court art in Europe, because the concepts of government and community are completely different. Although artworks are being made all over the world and the concept of artefacts should be abandoned completely, it is important to recognize, understand and include these epistemological differences. Because, due to the power relations caused by colonialism, they also persist in so-called contemporary global art, obstructing an understanding informed by the respective cosmologies and ways of being in the world. This is also true for hybrid forms.

Art in the singular

When I started thinking about the structure of this book, all the basic questions about art came to mind: What is art? How and by whom was it defined? Why is it created? Why do we study its history? What stories exist and by whom have they been and are they being told? What methodologies and paradigms have been developed, by whom and with what intention? What are the criteria for art criticism? Who and when were they determined? How have methodologies and criteria changed, if at all? What is the relationship between the different arts? Why are the different arts studied separately and how did this come about? How do countries that have suffered and still suffer from colonialism practice and study art?

I will answer these questions successively in each of the chapters. Before explaining the structure of the book and offer short reflections on Eurocentric narratives and History of Art as an academic discipline, let me briefly address the question of the plurality of the arts, as it is important for the decolonial conception of the book. In my considerations, the fact that there is no comparable separation in the view of the different media in the art of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the indigenous Americas played an important role. All media – bronze and other minerals, wood and stone sculptures, thrones, masks, weavings, textiles, hairstyles, body paintings, songs, dances, etc. – are part of a knowledge system of a respective society, expressing its cosmology.

The different media are based on a codification that makes declarations about the owners and bearers within the community or determines their actions. The meaning is known by all participants; it relates people to the visible and the invisible and therefore to other times and spaces that can be parallel, past or future. Ancestors and forebearers are always considered, and there is generally no hierarchy between humans, animals and beings (including forces of nature, often associated with the ancestors). As has already been briefly mentioned, the unseen is not supernatural in the Greek-Hellenistic meta-sense. Although the terms religion, spirit world, spirituality, sacredness or divine are often used today, especially in non-hegemonic contexts, these are Judeo-Christian concepts. Understanding the complexity of non-European epistemologies is only possible by using the terms in their respective languages, which should therefore be consulted.

Because of the cosmological systems and the epistemologies that hold them together, no one outside Western thought would think of seeing the different media as separate from each other. On the contrary, they make sense individually, but together they express the different facets of the respective way of being in and understanding the world. If we think about it, the same applies to Europe. Art studies, however, have done everything to create a separation between the different media or arts, so the overall coherence has been lost within the colonial-capitalist system. As we shall see, this is part of the attempt to disempower art or instrumentalize it for ideological, colonialist and/or imperialist purposes.

Even in the Western context, it should be kept in mind that the various media and art genres have not only always influenced each other but were also initially thought of together. It was only in the 18th century that ideas about art were developed in their

singularity, relating, comparing or distinguishing them. This was usually done to make a particular art form recognizable as such or to emphasize its importance concerning other arts. As always in European thinking, it was a question of hierarchization. But even when the specificity of one art form or media was discussed, it was necessary to know the others and to affirm possible differences and limits. In this context, the Western artistic genres, which today are separated by media, are mostly interconnected, have developed historically from each other or are inherently impure and composite, such as theatre, dance, storytelling and audio-visual media.

It is no coincidence that contemporary art has made it its task to combine media or explore the relationship between them. However, the Eurocentric concept of art still refers mainly to the "fine" arts (sculpture, painting, architecture), with a clear exclusion of music, literature, non-European or hegemonic art, but also contemporary forms of expression such as photography, film, video art, performances or installations, which are studied in the disciplines of Anthropology, Social Sciences in general, Media, Theatre and Cinema Studies. Although the fields of knowledge on art and the underlying epistemologies have become more permeable, I believe that in the West it has not yet been sufficiently considered how their theories, histories and critiques are interconnected and, because of this, should be studied together, as I will do in this book. For this reason, I will use examples from all the artistic fields mentioned above.

The suggestion that the specificity of different artistic genres or media is also not appropriate for Western culture can be found in the French philosopher Jacques Rancière (2005). He notes that we should understand all the arts as an integral part of the same history in the singular. British artist David Hockney also comments on this point in *The Secret Knowledge* (2001) and, with art historian Martin Gayford, in *A History of Pictures: From the Cave to the Computer Screen* (2016).

Hockney and Gayford deal with a dimension of understanding the world that is specific to the West: the gaze. They distinguish between observation with human eyes and then, since the Renaissance, the technologized gaze with the aid of the one-eyed camera obscura. The authors emphasize the use of lenses and other optical tools and question the separation of the arts according to the technological methodology of their creation (painting, drawing, photography, film, animation, cartoons, comics, collage, video games, etc.). In other words, they also think of art in the singular and tell the story of the images created by human beings as one that follows the technological development of the media but not in an evolutionary way.

Understanding Western art in the singular, without denying the singularities of the media given the different technologies with which they were developed, but seeing them as less important, also makes it possible to understand that the Eurocentric master narratives in art studies in terms of their theory, history and criticism have been passed on to the subsequent disciplines that study literature, theatre, photography and cinema, mostly without reflecting on their relationships and their emergence.

Eurocentric narratives of art

Many art history reference books still have a high cultural value, but they do not take art in the singular into account. In terms of their definition of art – the visual arts – and their focus – Europe – they should be considered outdated. A Brazilian study by Amália dos Santos, Bruno Moreschi and Gabriel Pereira (2016) shows what kind of art history is being taught at Brazilian universities. It explains that the various bachelor's degree programs are mostly based on eleven European books that have nothing to say about the art and epistemologies of the Native, African and Afro-descendant in Brazil, even when they include contemporary art. Undoubtedly, they are important for getting an overview of European art, but the study evidences the exclusionary scenario of hegemonic History of Art, as they not even mention Brazilian canonical art. They also maintain the specificity of the media.

The Brazilian study makes us aware that books perpetuate not only national but, above all, ethnic, racial and gender exclusions. Furthermore, although there are some works on the history of Brazilian art, such as *História Geral da Arte no Brasil* (General History of the Art in Brazil), organized by Walter Zanini (1983), *História da Arte no Brasil* (History of Art in Brazil), organized by Myriam Oliveira (2008), *Pequena História das Artes no Brasil*, by Duílio Battistoni Filho (2008), and *Sobre a Arte Brasileira* (On Brazilian Art), organized by Fabiana Werneck Barcinski (2015), they are rarely found on course book lists, let alone specific texts that discuss Afro-Brazilian and Native art. The need for a decolonial perspective on this type of teaching, which cannot be called anything other than colonialist, since it naturalizes Eurocentrism in Brazil, becomes aparent in the study.

History of Art as an academic discipline

Art studies began to be founded as disciplines in Europe just over two centuries ago. It is instructive to summarize their history. I will focus on the first academic discipline, the History of Art, because it shaped all those that followed. It emerged as an academic discipline at the end of the 18th century, with the creation of a chair at the University of Göttingen. Johann Dominik Fiorillo (1748–1821), a painter and archivist of Italian descent, was the first to occupy this chair as an associate professor in 1799. In 1813, he became a full professor. During the 19th century, professorships multiplied in German-speaking countries with the declared aim of establishing art as a cultural heritage.

The first professorships were held by Aloys Hirt at the Friedrich-Wilhelm University of Berlin in 1810; by Rudolf Eitelberger at the University of Vienna in 1852; by Jacob Burckhardt at the Polytechnic of Basel in 1855; and by Friedrich Salomon Vögelin and Johann Rudolf Rahn at the University of Zurich in 1870. In 1875, Berlin created the first Institute of Art History, which became the largest in Europe in the first decade of the 20th century. In France, the Institute of Art and Archaeology was only established in Paris between 1925 and 1930, deriving from the donation of the library by the fashion designer and patron Jacques Doucet in 1917. In England, although there had been

courses at the Slade School of Fine Art since 1870, and a first chair in 1920 – held by two emigrants from Nazi Germany, Rudolf Wittkower and Ernst Gombrich –, the first graduation in History of Art dates back to no more than 1965 at University College, London.

Following on from G.W.F. Hegel's (1770–1831) lectures on Aesthetics in 1835, the discipline of History of Art opted for a historiographical approach. Aesthetics had initially developed as a sub-discipline oriented towards the sensible in Philosophy, which, following the rational paradigm of colonial-capitalist modernity, had placed the intelligible in the foreground. However, Aesthetics ended up focusing on perception and the function of art, being reduced to concepts such as truth, beauty and taste. While following in Hegel's footsteps, the History of Art saw in the historiographical approach the possibility of emancipating itself from Aesthetics. It was Fritz Thausing, a professor in Vienna, who proposed the separation of Aesthetics and History of Art, choosing historiography as the basic principle of the new scientific study when he took up the second professorship in 1879. In the following decades, different methodological directions were established at the universities of Berlin, Hamburg, Vienna and Munich.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the young discipline was strongly impacted by the political context. Adolf Hitler's National Socialist regime had devastating effects in Germany and Austria, forcing several important figures, such as Ernst Gombrich, Max Friedländer, Oskar Wulff, Otto Pächt, Erwin Panofsky, Nikolaus Pevsner, Ernst Cohn-Wiener and Rudolf Wittkower, into exile from the second half of the 1930s onwards. In addition, the fascist regime had a direct influence on teaching and research and led to changes in the choice of objects and methodology. Art that would later be canonized as modern was dismissed as "degenerate," and interest in national and regional art, for example, German medieval art, was promoted. Academics who sympathized with or supported Hitler's policies replaced those whose multidisciplinary interests and studies of non-European or non-hegemonic art could have changed the course of the discipline.

The impact of forced emigration on the study of art history in the English-speaking world should not be underestimated, as exiled academics participated in the establishment of important institutions in England and the USA, such as the Warburg Institute and the Courtauld Institute in London or the History of Art departments of the American universities of Berkeley, Columbia, Princeton, and Stanford, to name just a few examples.

Art criticism, on the other hand, developed thanks to the growing bourgeois interest in art since the Renaissance and was initially carried out through critical reviews and articles in the first mass media for quick consumption – newspapers or commercial magazines. Although there was never a complete separation between theory, history and criticism, a certain division of functions emerged between Philosophy, History of Art and Criticism. This changed when artists, whose role in society had been frequently discussed since the Renaissance, began to elaborate their ideas programmatically in manifestos during the 20th century. Their growing influence on artistic discourse also had an impact on the discipline's self-questioning.

Although the History of Art tried to transform its historiographical method over time – first with form analysis (Wölfflin, 1915), iconology (Warburg, 2010; Panofsky,

1978), and then a social history approach (Hauser, 1958) – by trying to turn it into cultural history (Warburg, 2010), the discipline later reformulated its identity as a whole. The concept of art was replaced by that of the image to expand the understanding of human aesthetic creations (Boehm, 1994, 2015; Elkings, 1994; Bredekamp, 2015; Belting, 1984, 1995, 2001; Didi-Huberman, 2000; Mitchell, 1994, 2005).

Due to the geopolitical effects of the emigration of scholars, and despite the methodological complexity acquired in recent decades, the History of Art maintained a historiographical perspective on much of the 20th century. Strictly speaking, it has always been based on its original interest: the study of the development of European fine or visual art, its analysis, classification and dating, to guarantee its understanding as cultural heritage. Until thirty years ago, the discipline was almost exclusively Eurocentric and focused almost entirely on the historiography of Western art as the only advanced civilization whose cradle is considered to be Greek Antiquity.

It was only when the idea of the end of this discourse emerged in the 1980s that the central paradigm of an era and its style lost its importance and gave way to a reflection on the future of the discipline. Hans Belting declared the "end of art history" in 1983, and the American philosopher Arthur Danto declared the "end of art" in 1985. The exhaustion of the art-historical discourse resulted from the realization of the limits of the narratives on canonical artists and their works, the limitations of the paradigm of eras and their styles, the differences in genres and media, and methods such as form analysis and iconography.

Both Belting and Danto, although one from the perspective of the end of the discipline and the other from the perspective of the plurality of artistic styles, tried to broaden the geographically and temporally defined framework of Western art and opened up the discipline to other objects, including reproductive and mass media. However, regarding the History of Art, this only happened theoretically, as the broadening of the scope of art did not put an end to the deeply rooted notions of the centrality and superiority of Western art, or the established methods. No reformulation would have profoundly changed art studies, let alone decolonize them.

Danto's declaration of the end of art has a tradition in German philosophy and strongly participated in creating the History of Art and, later, art studies in general. The idea behind this declaration was to reduce art to its study in order to diminish its sensible potential and understand it only as a dead cultural good. When Hegel (1986) first issued a death certificate for art, he already had this agenda. At the beginning of the 19th century, the influential philosopher stated that the art of Romanticism was no longer capable of revealing the truth of society, as, in his opinion, had only been the case in classical Greek art. Hegel thought it made more sense not to consider art as an essential part of society but to evaluate it intellectually, in other words, to study it as an object and thus strip it of its power. This was related to the Western self-understanding that had emerged during the colonization of America and culminated in the transcendental subject of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). According to Kant, the European transcendental subject had access to universal morality through art and nature, which meant not only a departure from Christian religion but also a further affirmation of the superiority of Western rationality.

Criticism of the discipline in the 1980s interrogated the concept of art, which the supposed first art historian, the Italian artist and writer Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), had not yet used, but whose book had played an important part in creating the distinguished status of artists in society. This importance of the artist was then anchored in both Kant's and Hegel's Aesthetics in the idea of genius. Nonetheless, this extreme valorization of artists was the beginning of their devaluation. From then on, they were the chosen ones, but their activity on the margins of society and reason became dangerous for them. Art and those who produced it lost their power because they came to be seen only as objects for collection and contemplation (Agamben, 2012).

Vasari's (2011) book *Lives of the Most Eminent Italian Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, published in 1550, was the first attack on art. Paradoxically, the book immortalized artists for posterity and thus exorcised the life from art for the first time. Following the declaration of the death of the discipline in the 20th century, which developed from the constant attempt to destroy life in art, American, German and French scholars such as Hans Belting, Horst Bredekamp, Gottfried Boehm, W.J.T. Mitchell and Georges Didi-Huberman, to name but a few, sought to develop a new discipline, visual, picture or image studies, in the early 1990s. The attempts by Belting, Mitchell and Boehm, in particular, consisted of bringing art back to life with the concept of the image. But, understanding the vividness of images (or art in a broader sense) in non-European or non-hegemonic cosmological contexts has not been achieved or even thought of in this endeavour.

Another important factor has led to a reorientation of the History of Art, namely the inter- and multidisciplinarity imposed by other disciplines. The arts have always been of interest to other areas of Western knowledge, but in the 20th century, this interest intensified, leading disciplines such as Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology to focus on them. The new names for the discipline show that art history has not only been incorporated by scholars from the Humanities and Social Sciences but that art historians themselves have been absorbing anthropological, psychological, sociological, feminist and phenomenological methodologies, among others, thus broadening the framework of art studies and art produced with new media and technologies, popular and mass culture, and image and sound production.

Even today, some courses are called History of Art, but less narrowing names, such as Image Studies or Science (Kunstwissenschaft in German), Visual Arts, Visual Studies, Visual Culture, etc., are being implemented, depending on the intended focus. While the name "art studies" contemplates the idea of art, even if it is investigated using methodologies that go beyond the historical, Image Studies already point out that the objects of investigation avoid differentiation and hierarchization between art and popular culture since they are dealing with everything from prehistoric cave paintings to advertising images. Who knows, some day in the future we will have Decolonial Art Studies as a course title. It could be an outcome of this books whose chapter's breakdown I would like to present now.

Content of the chapters

In the first chapter, I ask: What is decoloniality and what is its importance for art studies? To answer, I first present the definition of decoloniality, as well as the history and key authors of decolonial studies and their difference from postcolonial and subaltern studies (Joaze Bernardino-Costa, Enrique Dussel, Franz Fanon, Ramón Grosfoguel, Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, Walter Rodney). I argue that the concept of decoloniality takes a broader political approach than postcoloniality because it is more analytical and programmatic. However, I note that, if truth be told, only non-hegemonic thinkers are really indicating new paths. This is why I present African, Afro-diasporic and Native Brazilian authors (Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Jaider Esbell, Lélia Gonzalez, Kaká Werá Jecupé, Grada Kilomba, Daniel Munduruku, Abdias Nascimento, Okot P'Bitek, Kwasi Wiredu, etc.), who fight against contemporary colonial violence and the Western claim to universality, make colonial irrationality recognizable by appealing to and explaining non-European or non-hegemonic cosmologies and their epistemologies. I suggest that without an understanding of these epistemologies, we cannot decolonize art studies, which have been and continue to be an essential part of coloniality.

In the second chapter, I ask two fundamental questions: Why do we study art's histories and why do we produce them at all? I present my answers in five steps. The first consists of an analysis of the film *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* by the German filmmaker Werner Herzog, who was invited to make a 3D film on rock art found in France in 1994, which are now considered to be the oldest existing paintings in the world. As the West has lost the key to their understanding, they are now being studied. In the second step, I present some Western and non-Western authors who, from today's perspective, deal with the motivations that lead people to produce art. I distinguish between hegemonic and non-hegemonic approaches, discussing perspectivism and anthropocentrism. I show that contemporary theories of the image are committed to the Western idea of individuation and that, consequently, they do not reveal new ways of understanding. In the third step, I defend an expanded concept of art. Next, I return to the explanations of why humans produce art and create a historical kaleidoscope of answers that range from the desire to connect, to know, to communicate, to flatten and to remember. Finally, in the fifth step, I address the issue of media, since the different forms of codifying provide more information about the reasons for making art. I discuss the meaning of images, texts and technological codes with the help of media scholars and Native authors.

The third chapter asks: how does art generally relate to other forms of knowledge and what potential does it have? It consists of two parts. Firstly, I employ Michel Foucault's book *The Order of Things*, which uses a work of art – *Las Meninas* by Diego Velazquez – to show when and how Europe began to organize knowledge of the world, first analytically and then in a historicizing way. I point out the limitations of Foucault's analysis because he ignored the relationship of the formation of hierarchical epistemologies with the emergence of colonialism. To explain how the interpretive thinking mode that preceded the analytical-historical one operated, which is closer to non-European epistemologies, I present Didi-Huberman's study of Fra Angelico's *Annunciation*. In due

course, I explore its Eurocentrism by bringing in an African example, a Congolese Nkisi sculpture. Then, following Foucault, I discuss historicizing thought with the help of a work of art – Pablo Picasso's version of *Las Meninas* from the 1950s. In the second part of the chapter, I analyze René Magritte's versions of *The Key to Dreams* from the 1930s, as they demonstrate art's ability to interrogate the historical-analytical relationship between signifier and signified, and thus Western epistemology. The images highlight the potential of art to articulate knowledge in contrast to other fields of knowledge. To further explore the problem of art's potential, I discuss various Western philosophers' attempts to reduce this potential (Plato, Aristotle) or to emphasize it (Martin Heidegger, Peter Sloterdijk).

The fourth chapter tackles the problem of art as an epistemology and discusses its possible threat to other epistemologies in three stages. The central question is: What is the relationship between Western philosophy and monotheistic theologies and art? First, I address how these two oldest representatives of knowledge using written culture are presented in terms of their many fears and few hopes regarding the power of art. In doing so, I show how Jewish, Christian and Islamic philosophy and theology influenced the formation of theories and concepts of art, mainly to limit its figurative representation. I describe the Christian way of circumventing the limitations of the representability of the sacred by inventing "divine" images not made by the human hand, the *acheiropoieta*. I then discuss iconoclasm, which can be based on religious, political or aesthetic resentment. In the following, I contrast this practice with non-European or non-hegemonic views of art, which see it as a path to the invisible world. In the second stage, following the chronological timeline from Greek Antiquity to Romanticism, I show how Western philosophy tried to master the sensible through the intelligible. Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Hegel are discussed.

In chapter five, I describe in detail, in three sub-chapters, the relationship between art, history and art studies. I ask: What is the relationship between the different models of history, art and its studies? First, I present historiography and its most important models and methods. Following the historian E.H. Carr and the philosopher Walter Benjamin, I explain the concepts of "positivism" and "historicism," as well as the evolutionary-teleological and circular models of time and their origins. While the evolutionary model is a Western invention and is based on the idea of progress and decline, disconnected from the circularity of nature, the circular model refers both to the cycle of nature and to the critique of the Western political model of power. In the second sub-chapter, I show how the models of history and time come into play in contemporary drama, cinema, theatre, performance and art. In the last sub-chapter, I analyze how the History of Art, Film, Media and Theatre studies have adopted and then problematized the evolutionary model in their historiographies.

The sixth chapter is dedicated to criticism. It has two parts: What is art criticism, and what are the methodologies of criticism? To start, I give an overview of the development of criticism from ancient Greece to the Enlightenment. I highlight how the evaluative criteria created determined the canonization of works, periods and styles of art. I sketch an overview of Aristotle's *Poetics* and its influence on the Latin rhetorical tradition from Plautus to the Renaissance writings of Jean Chapelain. In the

second part, I discuss three different critical methodologies: the encyclopaedic and biographical approaches – especially those of Pliny the Elder, Giorgio Vasari and Pierre Daniel Huet; the practice-oriented art manuals of Polykleitos, Vitruvius, Leon Battista Alberti and Albrecht Dürer and their growing elaboration of anthropocentrism and cosmophobic virtualization; and finally, I describe how, from the 18th century onwards, artists such as John Richardson, Denis Diderot and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing began to establish the differences between the arts in order to determine their specificities, thus advancing the division of art studies into different media and genres. I note that the evaluation criteria make no sense for non-European or non-hegemonic art and express the ideological project of hierarchization in the West.

In the seventh chapter, I ask: How is art studied as a scientific discipline? In three parts, I comment on the wide-ranging but not-so-diverse methodologies of art studies. As a basis for my critical discussion, I first introduce two concepts from the Western philosophy of science: paradigm, as defined by Thomas Kuhn, and indisciplinarity, as defined by Jacques Rancière. I argue that neither of the methodologies applied has any meaning for non-European or non-hegemonic art. In the second part, I present the central paradigm of the History of Art, the period style, which was of great importance for European identity and its supremacist colonialism. I study some famous examples: Johann Joachim Winckelmann on Greek Antiquity and its questioning by Cheikh Anta Diop and John Jackson, who described Egypt as the cradle of humanity; Jacob Burckhardt on the Renaissance; Émile Mâle on Gothic art and architecture; Clement Greenberg on Modernism; Rosalind Krauss on Postmodernism; and Heinrich Wölfflin's formal analysis that contrasts the Renaissance and the Baroque. I then discuss the questioning of the paradigm through the ideas of stylistic pluralism and trans-history. I look at the variant of period style, the authorial style, in cinematographic and literary studies, highlighting its deconstruction by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. The third part deals with inter- and multidisciplinary methods. I explain in detail the iconology of Erwin Panovsky, the central concepts of the cultural studies developed by Aby Warburg and the iconic or pictorial turn to Image Studies by Gottfried Böhm and W.T.J. Mitchell. Although they are also applied to non-European or non-hegemonic images, I point out their epistemological limitations.

The last chapter is dedicated to art studies in Brazil, with some brief references to the situation in other Latin American countries. I ask: What is Brazilian art and how is it studied? The answers are presented in five sub-chapters. I begin by discussing the coloniality of Brazil in Film and Literary Studies. I show that the discussions are incapable of thinking outside a dialectic with Europe and therefore ignore Native and Afro-diasporic or Afro-Brazilian cosmologies and art. To evoke a new perspective, I present Afro-Brazilian and Native authors. Next, I analyze academic Eurocentrism in the history of Brazilian art, which adopted the main European narrative of periodization – pre-colonial, colonial and Brazilian art – and invented two myths of origin: the emergence of the first and imperial art academy in Rio de Janeiro in 1816 and the Modern Art Week of 1922. In the third sub-chapter, I suggest that Eurocentrism and nationalism are also omnipresent in hegemonic Brazilian art, having been used to express an ideological agenda of the white bourgeoisie and to cover up or deny colonialism. I then point out that art has

never had a prominent place in Brazil, even though art scholars claim otherwise. Finally, I present publications such as manuals, art criticism and the most important publications in the History of Art, as well as some national and international exhibitions that have shaped the vision of art in Brazil. I argue that although there has always been an awareness in art studies of the need to discuss the relationship between Brazil and the rest of the world, this has never led to decolonization. In this way, African art produced in Brazil by enslaved, Afro-Brazilian and Native art were never understood as part of the History of Art but seen only as separate chapters, without taking their cosmologies and epistemologies into consideration.

Decolonising art and art studies

In writing this book, I was honestly astonished to see how certain notions of art have never really changed over the last two and a half millennia in the West. The attempt to control art and subordinate it to the intelligible, as well as the impact of diminishing non-European or non-hegemonic art, runs like a red thread through Western art epistemology. Although Image Studies have looked for a redefinition, they do not represent a break. It is not surprising that the Western control of art through its study, especially through the choice of objects, methodologies and values, has been adopted directly by colonized countries such as Brazil. This dynamic of the colonization of art can be observed particularly well with regard to both Eurocentric art, and Native and Afro-diasporic or Afro-Brazilian art.

However, in Brazil Native and Afro-descendant authors have spoken out in recent years, opening up non-hegemonic perspectives on art, even though there are different words for it in Native languages and their respective cosmologies. Furthermore, the history of colonial Brazilian art still poses difficulties in terms of terminology, such as the idea of Afro-Brazilian or popular art and folklore. These historically coined concepts make it possible to understand the need to decolonize studies of both hegemonic Western art and non-hegemonic art. Ultimately, the former has been instrumentalized in politics, philosophy, theology and the sciences, not only in Brazil but everywhere, and the latter has often been subalternized.

The importance of art as a visualization of the invisible, that is, people's connection to their ancestral or spiritual world and collective knowledge, was shattered in Europe and almost destroyed in the non-European context. The fact that art displays a strong connection to the invisible world has been and is still being percieved as threatening in the Western context of colonial-capitalist modernity. Since art is an elementary human epistemology that gives meaning to life and keeps balance in both our physical and with the non-physical worlds, the impact of the repression of art through its colonization has been devastating, both for the hegemonic as for the non-hegemonic context, especially when we think of the destruction of nature. The powerful entry of Native and Afro-descendant artists into the contemporary art world in the last decade or so has significantly broadened and enriched this understanding in Brazil and elsewhere and can help draw attention to the connection between economy and ecology. The artists

and their works now enable a better comprehension of the colonial impact on their and the Western world. With regard to the History of Art, they highlight the urgency of finally decolonizing art studies and the development of a universal concept of art.

A universal concept of art should reclaim its importance for creating meaning in human life and invite people to act against the limiting of its power. It is no secret that this will meet with resistance. Nor do we yet have the methodology to understand non-European or hegemonic art, as the cosmologies and their epistemologies are still too little known. It is time to grasp the colonial content of the Western epistemology of art, and to state that it was created primarily to establish first Europe and then the US as universal powers. To achieve a decolonization of art and its study, two approaches are needed: one is to deconstruct the coloniality of art studies in general in all the fields and disciplines that concern it. This should include examining Western art and its colonialist content. The second approach consists in offering knowledge on non-hegemonic art and its cosmologies and corresponding epistemologies, including art with a decolonial impetus. The recognition of its meaning and role in maintaining an equilibrium in human and other relationships, especially with nature and the ancestral world, is still being denied in the West, given the colonial-capitalist ideology. Recent debates about the restitution of looted and stolen art should also be intensified, as they can shed light on both debates.

Art is, in a universal sense, for all peoples and cosmologies the creation of meaning and knowledge about our human existence. Once we apprechiate the full potential of art and eliminate its subalternization, it can develop again its full potential as a guiding principle for humanity. Accordingly, we need to be alert to the Western tradition of disempowering art through Philosophy, the Humanities, the Social Sciences and art studies in general, but especially through the suppression of non-hegemonic art. This book aims to take a step in this direction.

CHAPTER ONE:

What is decolonization and what is its importance for the study of art?

Decolonizing is an act of resistance. It refers to the need to expose colonial thought patterns, concepts, and discourses that still exist today, as well as the power structures and practices that result from them, be they cultural, psychological, socio-political, economic, or ecological. Decolonization consists of trying to understand, become aware of, and put an end to the hierarchical and subalternizing mechanisms that underpin coloniality, affirming as equals cosmologies and their non-hegemonic epistemologies that until now have been suppressed, combated, and branded as "other" by Western discourses. The Portuguese artist and psychologist of Saint-Thomian descent, Grada Kilomba (2019: 238), sums up decolonization as the moment when "we become subjects". It is an attempt to confront centuries of otherness. Accordingly, decolonization is a process of deconstruction and becoming.

To better understand the act of decolonizing and its meaning for art, I will first explain the historical and geographical genesis of the term, and then present its most recent definitions and methodologies, and its authors. By doing this, the struggle against colonialism, contemporary colonial violence, and the claim to the supposed universality of Western epistemology that are at the root of coloniality need to be taken into account. European epistemology, that is, its way of perceiving and being in the world and consequent way of producing and organizing knowledge, has instrumentalized concepts such as rationality, morality, people, history, culture, and art to make the supposedly "other" controllable through philosophical, scientific, and cultural ethnization and racialization. We need to be aware of this and make it conscious by bringing in non-hegemonic perspectives from colonized contexts that, based on their ways of being in the world and thinking about it, expose European coloniality's deceptiveness and take a stand against it.

In terms of art's involvement in the colonial discourse, the dichotomy between European" and "non-European" (or "Western" and "non-Western") art is unfortunately in the world and therefore needs to be used to be decolonized. Additionally, I will also use the concepts "hegemonic" and "non-hegemonic art" to differentiate between colonial European (or Brazilian) art and art that does not participate in the colonial project, like Native and Afro-diasporic art. This posses many problems. It is worth remembering that European art has sometimes been as suppressed, instrumentalized, and misunderstood as non-hegemonic art, especially when it did not take part in the colonial project. For this reason, I will use the term European or hegemonic art to indicate art that participates in the colonial project.

On the genesis of the concept of decoloniality

Decolonialism as a concept in the context of art first appeared in Africa in the 1980s after the establishment of the new nation-states that followed the wars and declarations of independence. Depending on the country, region, and colonial rule, these began in the 1950s. The initial euphoria about the processes of political decolonization had faded and their failure became obvious (Wiredu, 1996: 5), needing to be named, represented, and discussed by intellectuals, politicians, scientists, and artists.

After the geopolitical paradigm shift that followed the Second World War and made European imperialism unsustainable, many efforts had already been made in Africa and the Caribbean to demand political (Fanon, 1961; Nyerere, 1966; Cabral, 1967; Nkrumah, 1965), ethnic-racial (Césaire, 1950; 1987; Fanon, 1952; Senghor, 1963), and cultural equality (Jackson, 1939; 1974; Diop, 1974). Mahatma Gandhi was probably the most influential figure in Asia in terms of self-determination and emancipation from colonial power. However, the term decolonial was not used.

Regarding Africa and Latin America, the concept is part of a centuries-long struggle against colonial rule and slavery, first waged both by conquered African kings and leaders and by the Native population and their leaders through diplomatic resistance, wars, insurrections, mutinies, escapes, maroonage, etc. But the history of resistance to colonialism and slavery has either been silenced, as Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2016) observes, or told incomplete, as Bissau-Guinean historian José Lingna Nafafé (2022) points out. The documents that prove these resistances are unknown or only mentioned in contexts that serve the European narrative to obfuscate colonial history. This is why the abolition of slavery is mainly attributed to White abolitionists from the former colonies and colonial powers. Nevertheless, it has been actively demanded by leaders, kings, and aristocrats in Africa and the Americas since the 16th century. It led to a lawsuit against the Portuguese and Spanish royal houses before the Roman Curia in the 17th century but was lost in the second instance (Lingna Nafafé, 2022).

The need to decolonize the mind due to the imposition of the Eurocentric and colonialist worldview, and the construction of new imperialist relations of dependency (Rodney, 1972) quickly became recognizable as a central challenge after political decolonization. It was intensely discussed by African scholars concerning the arts, such as literature and cinema (Wa Thiong'o, 1986), and scientific disciplines, such as Anthropology, Philosophy, Religious Studies, etc. (Mudimbe, 1988; P'Bitek, 2011; Wiredu, 1996; 2011). From this debate emerged post-colonial and subaltern studies on both the African (Said, 1990; 2011) and the Asian continent (Spivak, 1988; 2005).

In the late 1980s and 1990s, there was a revival of the concept of decoloniality by Latin American scholars (Rivera Cusiquanqui, 2010; Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2006). It is no coincidence that it appeared mainly, but not exclusively, in North American universities, given the greater political potential because of the Black civil rights movement, repressed in Central and South American countries by military dictatorships. These decolonial studies tried to learn from the mistakes of post-colonial and subaltern studies. Above all, they wanted to discover the difference of coloniality in the Latin American context, encountered in the earlier colonization – since the end of the 16th century –,

in the almost complete genocides of the original population and the associated culturcides, as well as in the political independence and the formation of states in line with the Western model in the 19th century, just before the beginning of the European scramble of Africa.

Contemporary definitions of decoloniality and its authors

Latin American decolonization is based on a re-evaluation of modernity, which is understood in its aggressive colonial-capitalist subalternizing dimension. The critique of the Eurocentric Western epistemology that enabled and justified it plays a decisive role in the process of decolonization. Brazilian political scientist Luciana Ballestrin (2013) summarizes its central principles as follows:

1. The beginning of modernity can be traced back to the conquest of the Americas and Europe's control of the Atlantic between the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century, so it did not start with the Enlightenment or the Industrial Revolution;
2. The structuring of power through colonialism and the constitutive dynamics of the modern-capitalist world system and its specific forms of accumulation and exploitation on a global scale need to be emphasized;
3. Modernity is a planetary phenomenon made up of asymmetrical power relations produced in Europe and later extended to the rest of the world;
4. The asymmetry of power relations between Europe and the colonised countries is a constitutive dimension of modernity and therefore necessarily implies the subordination of the practices and subjectivities of the dominated peoples;
5. The subordination of the majority of the world's population is based on two structural axes: the control of labour and the control of intersubjectivity;
6. Eurocentrism is a specific form of knowledge production and subjectivity in modernity.

The Peruvian social scientist Anibal Quijano (2006) is for many the father of Latin American decolonial thinking, due to his concept of the "coloniality of power," which focused on the persistence of colonial power structures after independence and the founding of nation-states. Like the Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel, he understood colonialism as a capitalist global European project. For Dussel (1993: 9), the decisive factor of modernity is its dialectical character, through which Europeans have affirmed themselves as the "centre of world history," presenting themselves to the rest of the world as representatives of rational emancipation.

The birth of modernity in 1492, through the "discovery," that is, the conquest of the Americas – the continent was already inhabited and known to Africans, Chinese, Japanese, Vikings, etc. – was, as per Dussel (1993), characterized by excessive violence and arrogance. The new religion of capitalism was made possible by the degradation of non-Europeans as "immature" and "lesser" beings, as specified by G.W.F. Hegel's

formulation, which banished them from world history (Dussel, 1993: 18). Since this is an "irrational myth," Dussel (1993: 9) proposes overcoming modernity through trans-modernity.

Labelled as primitive and pagan by the supposedly civilized Christians, the conquered peoples were forced into modernity, and their spiritual, socio-political, economic, and ecological structures, in harmony with their cosmoperceptions and lifestyles, were destroyed. These systems are based on respect for nature and its resources, which began to be over-exploited by Europeans. Interpersonal relationships were regulated by the idea of seniority and community, and often horizontally due to the decisive participation of councils of elders.

The price of colonialism was the underdevelopment of most of the planet, its marginalization and the creation of dependencies on the colonizing countries (Rodney, 1972; Quijano, 2006), the destruction of traditional and functional communal structures as peoples were forced onto the path of Western progress (Jecupé, 1998, Fu-Kiau, 2001; Wiredu, 1996; Munduruku, 2009). In this process, Christian Europe used its religion as legitimation. By universalizing its morality (Wiredu, 1996), it assumed that it could learn nothing from other cosmologies and peoples, as Hegel brutally stated (Dussel, 1993: 22). The knowledge of the Natives of colonized countries, on the other hand, consists of the addition of knowledge, the knowledge itself being transmitted mainly but not exclusively orally and as a result of the contact with the ancestry.

Although post-modernism and post-structuralism have raised questions about this way of thinking, it is hard to find Western thinkers who have formulated their doubts about European prestige and its intellectual centrality in such a way as to restore other epistemologies and worldviews that have been inferiorized for centuries. The Afro-Brazilian philosopher Muniz Sodré (2017: 51) mentions the Germans Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Sigmund Freud, and the French Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze, but with reservations. Significantly, none of them considered colonialism in their reflections. Dussel (1993: 25) reminds us that the respected German philosopher Jürgen Habermas completely ignored in his famous texts the fact that the "discovery" of America was constitutive of modernity. This is why the Congolese philosopher Valentin-Yves Mudimbe (1988: 23) cites only the French scholars Claude Levi-Strauss and Michel Foucault as critical European voices but also with reservations.

Only non-European thinkers point out new ways out of colonial thinking because they are well aware of the mechanisms of persistent colonialism. It is worth remembering that all non-hegemonic philosophies have been excluded from universal philosophy, being considered only in separate chapters, such as "African philosophy". Sodré (2017: 12) argues that philosophy should be understood as a passion for thinking inherent to all peoples, a passion that seeks to give dignity to life and meaning to existence. Consequently, it makes no sense to separate philosophies by region or continent. Nor is philosophy done only with the head; it can be a bodily process, as in Afro-Brazilian candomblé (Sodré, 2017: 107). Like in many other non-hegemonic epistemologies, knowledge is incorporated rather than acquired as in the purely rational Western case. This is because knowledge is understood as something collective, present a priori, and which manifests itself intuitively in the body.

Interestingly, the idea of the a priori permeates Western philosophy from Plato to Foucault. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) saw in art and nature a path through the sublime to higher morality, existing a priori. However, knowledge is always formulated in an abstract and thus rational way as morality. It is worth pointing out that Western philosophy is cosmophobic and therefore not part of a worldview that recognizes forces other than the rational.

Non-Western cosmologies, on the other hand, have many paths to knowledge, based on respect for tradition, which is passed on in different ways. For example, from the elders to the young at specific moments. The ways can be oral (tales, proverbs, songs) or written, above all through graphics on a wide variety of surfaces (skin, metal, wood, fabrics, hair, ceramics, etc.). The punctuation of the achievement or passing on of knowledge occurs in rites of passage (birth, childhood, puberty, adulthood, death), festivals (marriage, sowing, and reaping) and ceremonies (contact with the invisible world). Other ways of acquiring teachings are through ancestors and forebearers in trances or through the ingestion of medicinal plants, such as Ayahuasca, Echinopsis Pachanoi, Hyoscyamus Niger, Leshoma, etc. which offer visions of past, present and future, or in dreams that equally give access to myths and other forms of knowing. However, knowledge comes from the observation of nature and from the spiritual or invisible world. The Congolese scholar Kimbwandende Fu-Kiau (2001: 37) summarizes the idea of knowledge, captured in the term kundu, in the context of Bantu-Congo philosophy:

> In the spiritual world, the *kundu*, *kindoki*, is the central and most important element of an unfathomable world. This element consists of the experiences, the *bibulu*, i.e. the people, the *simbi*, i.e. the ancestors, and the *mpève*, i.e. the spirit-soul.

Western thinkers have only scratched the surface when questioning the idea of European rationality, but they have never assumed a radical link between rationality and coloniality, which is why their critique of reason has not contributed to explaining or accepting the history of modern oppression. In her speech at the inauguration of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, the Nigerian writer and feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2021) aptly stated: "Europe tells colonial history in a way that erases it." Knowledge is power, and for the Western world, the monopoly on power has been acquired by its claim to rationality.

To counter this tendency to silence colonialism, Quijano founded a research group "Modernity-Coloniality/Decoloniality" in the 1990s, with the participation of other Latin American intellectuals such as Arturo Escobar, Ramón Grosfoguel, Catherine Walsh, and Edgardo Lander, among others. The Argentinian scholar Walter Mignolo emerged as the best-known figure because he launched the project "Decolonial Aesthetics" with Colombian art theorist Pedro Pablo Gómez. These academic stars of decolonization are strongly criticized by the Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010: 58), who sees them as part of a conceptual "empire within the empire." In her opinion, this new academic empire advances internal colonialism. Defending the need to decolonize not only in academic terms but also in practice, Cusicanqui is now seen as the mother of a militant decolonial theory. The principles and the works of the authors mentioned above

lack knowledge and experience with other epistemologies. Nor do they demonstrate an urgency to integrate and actively implement them beyond critical discourse.

Rivera Cuscianqui (2010:56–60), who understands herself as a Bolivian-Mapuche mestizo and builds her theory on both Western and indigenous epistemologies, underlines the depoliticization inherent in Quijano and Mignolo's texts. She sees them as representing a Marxist theoretical vision that does not serve Latin America. And she believes that the authors, as White middle-class men, have no points of contact with the lower or subaltern social classes. This is why she denounces their insistence on multiculturalism and their lack of commitment with socially excluded groups, especially peasants and Native workers.

Following Rivera Cusicanqui's reasoning, decoloniality today tries not only to distance itself from post-colonial and post-modern theories but also to make a more radical correction that aims to include other epistemological perspectives so that they can be applied in practice. Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosefoguel sums this up like this:

1. a decolonial epistemic perspective requires a broader canon of thought than the Western canon (including the left-wing Western canon);
2. a truly universal decolonial perspective cannot be based on an abstract universal (a particular that ascends to a global universal design), but needs to be the result of a dialogue between various critical political/ethical/epistemic projects, aimed at a pluriversal world and not a universal world;
3. the decolonization of knowledge requires taking the perspective/cosmologies/visions of critical thinkers from the Global South seriously, who think with and from subalternised ethno-racial/sexual bodies and places. (Grosfoguel, 2019: 117)

The inclusion of non-hegemonic cosmologies and their respective epistemologies has so far been the most difficult issue to achieve in the decolonial project since even the bourgeois intellectuals working on it are mostly not aware of them or do not have existential experiences with them.

The possibility of countering Western epistemology and broadening it with the perspectives of Native (in the wider sense of all continents), Afro-diasporic or mestizo artists, activists, and scientists is generally limited since they are underrepresented in art, culture, science, and politics. They are still being denied entry due to structural and institutional, but especially because of the social form of racism, or are actively prevented from articulating their views, as their interests would undermine established privileges. As a result, the intentions of academic decolonization are often only well-intentioned and in fact problematic because they are mostly inconsistent, sometimes even hypocritical. More often than not, they only have individual academic achievements in mind, as Rivera Cusicanqui notes. If the concept of decoloniality, which is in vogue in art, culture, politics, and academia, is not to degenerate into a fashionable buzzword, it must not only be carefully defined by focusing on the plurality of experiences of being in the world but above all applied in practice. Otherwise, it will be degraded to the half-hearted façade of an "empire within the empire" that only exists to hide coloniality behind a thinly veiled mask.

On the struggle against colonial violence and its symbols in contemporary nation-states

Jaider Esbell, Brazilian Native activist, artist, and curator, passed away in November 2021. His short life story says a lot about the dark sides of the decolonization attempts just mentioned. It shows how difficult it is to break with the West's claim to universality, firmly anchored in the idea of the nation-state and its exclusionary legal system Eurocentrism, and White supremacy. His decision to leave this world evidences how difficult, if not impossible, it is for people from non-hegemonic backgrounds to assert or maintain their place within the Brazilian state.

Esbell (2020, 2021) coined two important concepts within what is now officially discussed as global art (whose limits I already pointed out): artivism (activist art) and contemporary indigenous art (instead of indigenous contemporary art). In this way, he expressed that Native art is always militant because it is decolonial and that indigenous art should not be integrated into contemporary art as a novelty, since it has always been art and never artefact. His colleague and friend Denilson Baniwa (2021) sees his integration with the label of celebrated decolonial artist and curator in the White art world as the reason why he took his own life.

A text on Jaider's blog from the year before his death expresses the political significance of decolonial performances as a transgression of the idea of the national and points out the dangers they pose for activists and artists, as they are always perceived as taking a stand against the state. In the spirit of the remaining colonial power, the modern nation-state fulfills its task of permanently suppressing or completely eradicating other subjectivities and ways of life:

> Thinking about my journey can highlight the importance of understanding different trajectories. It can also serve as an encouragment for people in the process of affirming their identity. Tracing one's roots is an exercise that is done when one decides that it is time to confront the layers deposited on our collective bodies under which, in the attempt to erase them, we have been buried. Making a decolonial performance in the world that surrounds us requires an awareness that our way of establishing social and political relations is based on values that predate the creation of the state. Therefore, there will be constant legal struggles, since we are frequently seen as rebellious and anti-nationalist if not criminalized and punished (Esbell, 2020).

The more than eight-minute video recording on a smartphone of the murder of George Floyd, racialized as Black, by US police officers in May 2020, brought the attention of the world to this kind of exclusion and persecution by the nation-state that threatens the lives of those who are not seen as belonging. Although a citizen as any other, Floyd's skin colour and facial features stigmatized him as an enemy of the state and thus being lynched in public by its authorities and in front of a camera.

While this is a common practice of modern "post-colonial" states against their non-White populations, the recording sparked protests around the world for the first time. The revolt against the brutality of the representatives of the US state erupted

into iconoclastic actions, especially against statues of famous figures from colonial history. In the US and several Latin American states, among others, it was mostly the "discoverer" of America, Christopher Columbus (1451–1506), who was taken down from his pedestal.

In São Paulo, Brazil, it was the wooden statue of the Bandeirante Manuel Borba Gato (1649–1718), made by the artist Júlio Guerra and erected in 1960 in honour of the 400th anniversary of the city of Santo Amaro, that was set on fire. Borba Gato enslaved Native people and made the interior of Brazil accessible for exploration, especially gold mining. In Bristol, England, the bronze statue of the British slave trader Edward Colston (1636–1721), made by the equally British artist John Cassidy (1860–1939) and erected in 1895, was first spray-painted, and then taken down and thrown into Bristol harbour during a Black Lives Matter demonstration that took place in response to Floyd's murder in June 2020 (fig. 1).

It is worth remembering that Bristol was the most important British slave port from 1730 onwards. Irish and English slaves had already been sold there in the 11th century (Dresser, n.d.). The fact that more than half a million enslaved Africans were shipped inhumanely from the port of Bristol, at whose entrance the statue of Colston is placed, is not remembered anywhere nearby. In fact, there is no reminder of the abuse and origin of the city's wealth anywhere in the city. Streets, buildings, pubs, and schools, on the other hand, proudly bear the name of the slave trader Colston. Four young White middle-class men, including students, of whom the police had the clearest evidence of

Fig. 1: *Edward Colston*, John Cassidy, 1895. Statue with graffiti, 2021. MShed, Bristol. (Photo by the author)