

Social, Decolonial, and Transnational Museology. Reflections from the Global South, and some Current Brazilian Cases

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Abstract: In this dissertation, we are going to approach Latin American social museology and we will deal with the Brazilian case, focusing on the museum, and art system of São Paulo, since it is a neuralgic pole of global contemporaneity and regarding the revision of its museums from a decolonial, and territorial perspective.

Keywords: Museology, Decolonialism, Social Museology, Brazilian Museums, Ibero-american Museology, Transnational Museology, Integral Museum, Art Institutions.

Over the last three decades, transnational museology has evolved and become influential through research and critical reflection on museum institutions. This new field explores the functions, and connections of museums in a global context. This is because decolonial museology focuses on objects that come from foreign cultures, and backgrounds. Many of these are works of colonial provenance, which in most cases are exhibited and preserved in the museums of the colonising countries.

As far as Europe is concerned, museums of art, history, archaeology, and natural sciences need to be carefully considered. Of course, research work must go hand in hand with museums, and academia, but the conversation must go beyond state terms. Many of the revisions of objects, and collections come from Latin American historians, and researchers, who have been trained and worked in Europe, and the United States, as we will see in the following sections. However, we also highlight the work of research projects, such as TRANSMAT, Digital Benin, and PAESE, among others,¹ which demonstrate colonial origins by documenting and tracing objects in various museum collections. This task, which is central to the history of works of art and to the design of the collection itself, remains a difficult factor in Western dialogue, especially in Europe, because it reflects a violent past in the creation of

¹ Pereira, Elisabete. *Transmat — Transnational Materialities (1850–1930): Reconstituting Collections and Connecting Histories* <https://transmat.uevora.pt/en/participation-of-the-transmat-project-in-the-museology-module-at-the-university-of-evora/> [accessed 25 October 2023]; *Digital Benin* <https://digitalbenin.org/> [accessed 30 November 2023]; *Postcolonial Provenance Research in Lower Saxony* <https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/paese/?lang=en> [accessed 30 November 2023].

museums.

However, the priority of museums and their credibility must be to provide historical evidence through the study of traceable materials, and this is why the most critical museology makes this claim.

In this documentary work, the next step is for the museum to reformulate the discourse of the exhibition on the basis of the documentation uncovered.

When it comes to rethinking museology from a critical, and decolonial perspective, the type of museum is not an obstacle; museological reviews cover all these types, as shown by international congresses (such as the Encontro Internacional TRANSMAT-IN2PAST at the Museu Nacional de Etnologia de Lisboa on 22–23 June 2023).

On this occasion, we will explore contemporary art from a country with a great trajectory in social, and decolonial museology, Brazil.

We will discuss some examples from the Brazilian context, especially São Paulo, as one of the current paradigms that re-reads and critiques the perspectives that institutions reproduce from colonial dynamics.

However, to understand these specific case studies, we must first understand the social ideas on which Latin American, and Ibero-American museology is based. To do this, it is necessary to approach the precursors of Latin American emancipatory thought and, as far as social museology is concerned, the Santiago de Chile Round Table. We will also delve into decolonial museology, which identifies the nature and presence of works, and practices that museum curators, and art critics use as references to address decolonial, and transcultural issues.

Theories of Dependency, Emancipation, and Decolonialism: The Search for Latin American Identity

The thinker Carlos Beorlegui, in the title of his vast compendium on the history of Latin American philosophical thought, reminds us of what has been the constant search for identity. It has been a journey, and a development of ideas in the region, and a self-reflection that has always revolved around the necessary search for one's own identity,² and self-affirmation. We must consider this study of identity as an inevitable step in the formation of nations after independence, supported by the search for new enlightened paradigms, and references, such as those of France, and England, which would allow the tradition of Spain, and Portugal to be challenged, the influence of which would

² Beorlegui, Carlos, *Historia del pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano: una búsqueda incesante de la identidad*, 2nd edn (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 2010), p. 45.

persist over time in formative habits.

Many intellectuals who discussed the need for Latin American thought to solve specific problems, situations, and peculiarities studied in French, British, and then North American universities. It is the preparation carried out in countries where research, reflection, and teaching are based on the dominant paradigm that makes it possible to adopt and maintain a productive critical-reflective stance with an original vision. Some of the names of these intellectuals are: the Argentinean Arturo Andrés Roig, the Brazilian Florestan Fernandes, the Colombian Luis Ramiro Beltrán, the naturalised Argentinean Mexican Enrique Dussel, and Néstor García Canclini, the Italian-Venezuelan Antonio Pasquali, the Paraguayan Juan Díaz Bordenave, and the Bolivian Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, among others.

In the twentieth century, new forms of economic, and cultural colonisation emerged, in which interventions were carried out using paradigms promoted by ‘centres of political knowledge’.³ Faced with the cultural imposition of the role of underdeveloped countries, the absence of solutions, and formulas defined by the context of experts, and organisations from developed countries, as a sine qua non condition for the availability of their development aid plans.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) was created and established in Santiago de Chile in 1948 to promote the economic, and social development of the region. It was from the work of this institution, especially from 1950 when the Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch became its second Executive Secretary, that the categories of centre, and periphery emerged for studying the conditions of underdevelopment.⁴ This global interpretation has been studied by many authors from a historical perspective, such as the concept of world economy proposed by Fernand Braudel⁵ in the late 1970s, and from a sociological interpretation, the American Immanuel Wallerstein⁶ and his world system.

The concept of development was key to the emergence of an autonomous Latin American thought. The need to examine it from one’s own reality and to try to go beyond the narratives disseminated by the dominant

³ Brulon Soares, Bruno, ‘Transculturación del conocimiento museológico’, in Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, ed. by Javier Arnaldo and Ariadna Ruiz, 814 (2018), p. 69.

⁴ Mora Toscano, Óliver, ‘Las teorías del desarrollo económico: algunos postulados y enseñanzas’, Revista Apuntes del CENES, 26.42 (2006), 53–55.

⁵ Braudel, Fernand, ‘Civilización material, economía y capitalismo, siglos XV-XVIII’, in Tomo I. Las estructuras de lo cotidiano: lo posible y lo imposible (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1984).

⁶ Wallerstein, Immanuel Maurice, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (California: University of California Press, 2016).

paradigm, be it Western North America, European positivism or more or less orthodox Marxism.

The impetus for independent action came from the observation that neither the methods nor the efforts offered by the centres of power in the developed countries considered the specific conditions of the region. In other words, instead of having a positive effect, they had a negative one, aggravating, and perpetuating structural problems.⁷

Thus, the classification of countries, and regions is based on their central or peripheral position in economic, social, and cultural development, in the semi-periphery of the developing world or in the periphery of underdevelopment, where the Brazilian museologist Brulon's expression of political centres of knowledge is framed. As most contemporary postcolonial, and decolonial studies have pointed out, this refers to the parallelism between the centres of global geopolitics, and the centres of dominant knowledge construction.

They reflect the influence of paradigms established in colonial power structures located mainly in Europe, the United States, and Canada.

This indigenous critical thinking began to develop in the early 1960s around the critique of Professor Everett M. Rogers' theory of the diffusion of innovations, to influence the process of communication of modernisations among social network actors to achieve their diffusion, and acceptance in the shortest possible time.

As it happened, Everett M. Rogers developed and published his theory as the subject of his doctoral thesis at the University of Ohio and later joined the staff of the University of Michigan, one of the main intellectual poles of development and modernisation projects in Latin America, and other regions.

While supervising doctoral theses, he took on two students, the Bolivian Luis Ramiro Beltrán, and the Paraguayan Juan Díaz Bordenave, who would later shape the critical discourse in opposition to the dominant paradigm. After the completion of their doctorate, they returned to work in international development organisations. This coincidence is extremely important because their response, knowing first-hand the scope, and details of the theory, was forceful and direct, offering a serious and well-founded critique from their perspective, and understanding of the Latin American reality. Thus, Rogers⁸ considered their criticisms, arguments, and suggestions and incorporated them into a newly revised volume that included and acknowledged Latin American

⁷ Díaz Bordenave, Juan, 'Communication of Agricultural Innovations in Latin America: The Need for New Models', *Communication Research*, 3.2 (1976), 135–54.

⁸ Rogers, Everett M., *Communication and Development: Critical Perspectives* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1976).

contributions.

In this way, the discussion that appeared first as dependency theory and then as emancipation theory emerged from all fields of thought, and knowledge, apart from the obvious ones of sociology,⁹ and economics,¹⁰ from anthropology,¹¹ education,¹² and communication,¹³ which stand out as the most active and productive in the construction of the epistemic bases of Latin American thought. It was a step forward in the construction of a participatory, and horizontal communication paradigm for the development of the subcontinent, taking advantage of the bases that had been created since the early 1960s with reference works such as those of Pasquali or Paulo Freire, who reconceptualised the nature of communication from its participatory, and dialogical axiomatic premises.

The contributions of both researchers not only had an impact on Latin American thought, but also laid the foundations for a new general paradigm that, from the point of view of communication, and pedagogical communication, challenged the dominant ones, which were centred on the idea of controlling the masses of receivers, from a behaviourist epistemological point of view and based on simple, unidirectional, and hierarchical communication schemes. The adoption of such a viewpoint shifted the importance of the effectiveness of the transmission of messages to their co-creation, in solidarity between the participants in the dialogue, as a construction of the common good.

All this has been facilitated by the ineffectiveness, and failure of the development models proposed by the centres of economic power of the North and adopted by local elites. As well as the persistence of great social, and economic inequalities in Latin American countries, despite their submission to the measures imposed by international organisations. All of this fuelled hostility towards external tutelage and encouraged the search for their own solutions at all levels, whether economic, social or cultural. The foundations were thus laid for an intense intellectual activity that lasted for decades and produced some original theoretical approaches that were later exported to other regions of the world.

⁹ Cardoso, Fernando Henrique and E. Faletto, *Dependencia y desarrollo en América Latina* (México D.F.: Siglo XXI, 1969).

¹⁰ Prebisch, Raúl, and Martínez Cabañas, Gustavo, 'El desarrollo económico de América Latina y alguno de sus principales problemas', *El Trimestre Económico*, 16.63 (1949), 347–431.

¹¹ Dussel, Enrique, *América Latina. Dependencia y Liberación* (Buenos Aires: Fernando García Cambeiro, 1973).

¹² Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogía del oprimido* (Montevideo: Tierra Nueva, 1970).

¹³ Pasquali, Antonio, *Comunicación y cultura de masas. La masificación de la cultura por medios audiovisuales en las regiones subdesarrolladas. Estudio sociológico y comunicacional* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1963).

It should not be overlooked that the process of independence in Latin America took place a hundred years before the emancipation of many of the colonies under British or French jurisdiction. This in turn means that the former had a longer period of time to rethink their own identity, and the nature of their relations with the rest of the actors in the international concert. As Christa Berger¹⁴ points out, it is this condition of dependency, as a structural component of Latin American society, that generates a culture of silence, and submission, but also of denunciation, and struggle.

Although the foundations of the dependency theory were laid in the aftermath of the 1929 crisis, in terms of the solutions outlined to overcome it in different regions, it was actually born by the hand of the Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch in his work as Executive Secretary of ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America) between 1950, and 1963, when he introduced the debate on the division of the world into centre/ periphery countries. This approach would find its continuity in the 1970s with the challenge to the theory of the diffusion of innovations, as well as with Wallerstein's world system theory, which distinguishes between central (rich), peripheral (poor, underdeveloped), and semi-peripheral (developing) countries, but also raises the North-South conflict.

Regarding the latter, it is important to note that, although they have points in common with the postcolonial theories of the 1980s, and 1990s, which developed around the colonial legacies of the British Empire, they have serious differences, both epistemological, and even geopolitical. Nor can they be compared to the subaltern studies that have emerged from India, and Africa,¹⁵ or to the postcolonial studies that are constructed from the academy in the United States, based on the tradition of struggles for civil rights, immigration, and multiculturalism, although they share formal, and epistemological parallels with them.

Liberation Theory is one of the most representative fruits of the Latin American consciousness of identity, and one that has had the greatest impact both within, and outside the region. An example of this is the current inclination to abandon the confrontation with European-Western thought to adopt a dialogical stance from an intercultural perspective,¹⁶ so characteristic of the discourses of Paulo Freire or Antonio Pasquali. As some authors have pointed

¹⁴ Berger, Christa, 'A Pesquisa em Comunicação na América Latina (Apontamentos de Sala de Aula)', *Teoria da Comunicação. Conceitos, escolas e tendências*, ed. by Antonio Hohlfeldt, Vera Veiga França, and Luiz C. Martinho (2008).

¹⁵ Méndez Baiges, Maite, 'Los discursos poscolonialista y feminista sobre el arte moderno: La crítica de *Les Femmes d'Alger*', *Quintana. Revista de estudios do Departamento de Historia da Arte*, 13 (2014), 217.

¹⁶ Beorlegui, Carlos, *Historia del pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano: una búsqueda incesante de la identidad*, pp. 661–62.

out,¹⁷ it emerges in a context of favourable economic, social, cultural, and political conditions, supported by the previous contributions of dependency theory, pedagogy of the oppressed, and liberation theology, the first truly Latin American Christian theology.¹⁸ In this sense, it is conceived as a line of thought from the periphery that, aware of its dependence, rebels against the imposed categories, methods, and objectives, seeking its own ways towards a process of liberation based on the analysis, and knowledge of the Latin American reality.

The conceptualisation of the theory of the good life is a product of intercultural dialogue, as an indigenous contribution derived from the expressions *suma qamaña* in Bolivian Aymara vocabulary, and *sumak kawsay* in Ecuadorian Quechua. It is framed within the incorporation of new visions of development that pay more attention to the integral sustainability of tangible, and intangible heritage as rights of individuals, and communities,¹⁹ as well as the concept of Pachamama or Mother Earth, which has even been incorporated into the constitutions of Bolivia,²⁰ and Ecuador.²¹

Latin American decolonial theories are based on the interdependence of coloniality, and modernity since the sixteenth century onwards, with the arrival and imposition of the Spanish empire in America and the birth of Wallerstein's world system. And one of the neuralgic points is centred on the racial division of labour from that moment onwards. The other essential axis, inherited from the theories of dependency, and liberation, is that of the geopolitics of knowledge or the coloniality of knowledge, and Eurocentrism, as developed by Mignolo,²² and Dussel. And in terms of their own genealogies, the various decolonial perspectives point to thinkers such as the first critical voices of colonisation, Franz Fanon,²³ or indigenous figures such as Fausto Reinaga,²⁴ without forgetting the structuring function of the work and thought of Anibal

¹⁷ Dussel, Enrique, *América Latina. Dependencia y Liberación* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fernando García Cambeiro, 1973).

¹⁸ Pérez Prieto, Victorino, 'Los orígenes de la teología de la liberación en Colombia. Richard Shaull, Camilo Torres, Rafael Ávila, "Golconda", sacerdotes para América Latina, cristianos por el socialismo y comunidades eclesiales de base', *Cuestiones teológicas*, 43.99 (2016), 73–108.

¹⁹ Descola, Philippe, *La selva culta. Simbolismo y praxis en la ecología de los Achuar* (Lima, Perú: Institut français d'études andines, Abya Yala, 1988), p. 415.

²⁰ Asamblea Legislativa del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, *Constitución Política del Estado* (Febrero de 2009, La Paz, Bolivia).

²¹ Asamblea Nacional República del Ecuador, *Constitución de la República del Ecuador* (Quito, Ecuador, 2008).

²² Mignolo, Walter, *Habitar la frontera. Sentir y pensar la descolonialidad*, (Antología, 1999–2014). 1st edn (Barcelona: CIDOB, 2015).

²³ Fanon, Frantz, *Écrits contre le colonialismo* (Paris: Découverte, 2006).

²⁴ Reinaga, Fausto, *La revolución india*, 4th edn (La Paz: Minka, 1970).

Quijano.²⁵

However, in the body of critical research that has begun to encompass the foundations of autonomous Latin American thought since the middle of the last century, the museological reflections of numerous authors have also had a specific place: Waldisa Rússio, Mário Vázquez, Georgina DeCarli, Nelly Decarolis, Teresa Scheiner, Felipe Lacouture, Maria Cristina Oliveira Bruno, Maria de Lourdes Horta, Norma Rusconi, and Isabel Laumonier, among others. They have rebelled against the hegemony of global museological thought, taught in the languages of the former colonial powers, especially English, and French,²⁶ to justify, as in many other disciplines, the importance of owning, empowering, and giving greater visibility to its own discourse, transforming the concept of the museum from its concern to incorporate its social role, and critical perspective to its philosophical, and epistemological bases,²⁷ but nevertheless not sufficiently taken into account at the global level.²⁸

The originality of this Latin American line of thought, with the social at its core, lies in its early understanding, from the interdisciplinary analysis of its realities, that the problem of development cannot be approached from the exclusive angle of the standard economy, without linking it to the physical world (the territory) or to the social world (the community), with all that this implies in terms of addressing the need for integral, economic, but also ecological, social, and cultural sustainable development.²⁹ Thus, all the manifestations of this trend of thought, its search for and construction of its own paradigm to face the difficulties of effective, egalitarian, and sustainable development, have in common the epistemic foundation of the use of dialogue, and participation between individuals and multicultural communities, based on equality, and respect.

The Latin American Influence on the Social Role of Museums in the Contemporary World: The Santiago de Chile Round Table of 1972, and the Organisations that Followed

²⁵ Quijano, Aníbal, 'Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina', in *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas*, ed. by Edgardo Lander (2000).

²⁶ Brulon Soares, Bruno, and Leshchenko, Anna, 'Museology in Colonial Contexts: A Call for Decolonisation of Museum Theory', *ICOFOM Study Series*, 46 (2018), 61–79.

²⁷ Brulon Soares, Bruno, 'Prólogo', in *Teoría museológica latinoamericana: Protohistoria*, ed. by Sara Escudero (2019), pp. 25–28.

²⁸ Guiragossian, Olivia, and Berti, Marion, 'Encuesta del ICOFOM sobre la Nueva Definición de Museo', *ICOFOM Study Series*, 48.2 (2020), 161.

²⁹ Naredo, José Manuel, *Raíces económicas del deterioro ecológico y social: más allá de los dogmas* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España Editores, 2010), pp. 199–200.

This need for self-affirmation, and the generation of epistemic tools to confront the Latin American problem was not limited to a specific field of knowledge. In this case, museology, and research, took it up and clearly came to fruition from the early 1970s onwards. With the confluence of an ideology of liberation that would manifest itself in a highly productive, and influential way in pedagogy, and also in museology,³⁰ especially around the thought of Paulo Freire. Hugues de Varine himself explicitly points this out when he says that both the concept of the community museum, and his role in its development correspond to the ideas of the Brazilian pedagogue, and this motivated him to reflect on a museum inspired by his ideas of liberation pedagogy,³¹ and conscientization,³² which would lead him to consider the application of some of his critiques to a traditional museology that promoted a landless heritage disconnected from society, and a living culture.³³

At the meeting of the International Council of Museums in Grenoble in 1971, there were strong voices that were certainly very clear, such as that of the representative of the Republic of Benin, the professor, and anthropologist Stanislas Adotévi, and that of the already very famous museologist, and director of the National Anthropological Museum of Mexico, Mario Vázquez. Both shared the idea that the revolution of the museum had to be radical, otherwise the museum would disappear.³⁴ After their interventions, as the German museologist Andrea Hauenschild notes, the participations took a surprisingly critical turn and the debate focused on the validity of the museum in the society of the time.³⁵ Among the milestones of museological theory, the Santiago de Chile Round Table of 1972, also known as the Santiago Round Table or the Round Table, was the most transcendental meeting at the Latin American level, due to the projection it had in the region, and its transatlantic influence, which continues to this day.

A few years before the Round Table meeting in Santiago de Chile, dictatorships were already in place in Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia. The 1970s saw instability in Uruguay, Chile and Ecuador, with coups d'état and a dictatorship in the latter.

³⁰ Miranda Priosti, Odalice, *Memória, comunidade e hibridação: Museologia da Libertação e estratégias de resistencia* (PhD thesis, Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 2010).

³¹ Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogía liberadora: antología* (Madrid: Libros de la Catarata, 2015).

³² Freire, Paulo, *Conscientização* (São Paulo – SP: Cortez Editora, 2016).

³³ dos Santos, Jr., Fernandes, Roberto, and Carvalho Britto, Clovis, 'Hugues de Varine e os museus comunitários no Brasil', *Museologia & Interdisciplinaridade* 8.15 (2019), 325.

³⁴ Varine, Hugues de, *El ecomuseo singular y plural. Un testimonio de cincuenta años de museología comunitaria en el mundo* (Santiago de Chile: ICOM Chile, 2020), pp. 63–64.

³⁵ Hauenschild, Andrea, *Claims and Reality of New Museology: Case Studies in Canada, the United States and Mexico* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Centre for Education and Museum Studies, 1988).

One consequence of all this economic, political, and social instability was the impoverishment of cultural budgets, which had a direct impact on museum policy. This led to great difficulties in funding museums, as well as a crisis that resulted in the closure of many centres.³⁶

In this context, museums welcomed the social, and community-based proposals that were developed in Chile in 1972. Mario Vázquez's critical words to the International Council of Museums in Grenoble in 1971 brought greater attention to the Latin American region from the international organisation.

The framers of the meeting in Chile were mainly Latin American museologists. Once again, Mario Vázquez played an important role, as he continued to act as a bridge between Latin America and the Council's management, and in particular with Hugues de Varine, who was the director of ICOM at the time. The other great figure, the Brazilian Paulo Freire, who also had considerable influence, was unable to attend due to the veto of his country's military regime.

The French museologist found what he learned from Freire of great interest and applied it in his work as director of ICOM. Also asked him to systematically adapt the principles of his pedagogical theories, and methods to museological and museographic practice, to be considered in his direction of the Santiago meeting.³⁷

For the 1972 meeting, Latin American museologists set out to address technological development, and progress, as well as the main territorial problems: social inequality, rural illiteracy, urban growth, and uncontrolled urbanism, with the consequent enlargement of the periphery, were to be the subject of museum work.

Having identified these burning issues, they set up a multidisciplinary panel of experts to draw up a regional strategy, to define areas of work and to outline action plans for museums and their staff.

The first, and most important aspect was the creation of the Integrated Museum model. This was conceived as an institution of action, a tool at the service of society, which had to be involved and active in solving real problems.

[...] The Round Table considers that one of its most important achievements was to define and initiate a new approach to the action of museums: the integral museum, which aims to give the community an integral vision of its natural and cultural environment and calls on UNESCO to use the means of dissemination

³⁶ Ruiz Balart, Macarena, *Una aproximación a la museología chilena: la realidad de los museos de artes de periferia* (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, 2015), pp. 354–61.

³⁷ Varine, Hugues de and Chagas, Mário, 'Apresentação. Respostas de Hugues de Varine às perguntas de Mário Chagas', *Cuadernos de Sociomuseologia*, 5.5 (1996), 8–9.

at its disposal to stimulate this new trend.³⁸

The second point, which is closely related to the value of the Integral Museum, refers to the concept of heritage as a global asset that should be managed in the interest of man, and all mankind.

Thirdly, it was pointed out that contemporary problems require a global vision, and a transversal strategy, in which knowledge comes from different fields of study and techniques that have been involved in the progress of societies in the contemporary world, requiring an integral and interdisciplinary perspective. The way in which contemporaneity was incorporated into the exhibition space of museums focused largely on scientific, and technological development.

It also became clear that the museum was one of the indispensable spaces of society, as it contained the narratives of society. For this reason, it was presented as an institution that should contribute to the active involvement of communities, both in large cities, its suburban areas, and rural spaces.

Finally, the creation of a Latin American Association for the development of museology was proposed. The association was founded at the same meeting and was called ALAM, Asociación Latinoamericana de Museología.³⁹

These ideas went beyond the Latin American region and became a beacon for the study of social museology, serving as an impulse for the lines of work of the International Committee for Museology, ICOFOM. Likewise, the organisation Ibermuseos, founded in 2009, also has its roots in the Mesa de Santiago.

The Ibermuseos programme has focused its philosophy on recovering, updating, and strengthening the principles of the Santiago Round Table, after almost two decades of the hegemony of the museum as a spectacle. In the same vein, we can understand the statements made by Christian Manhart, UNESCO's representative, who declared in 2012 that the organisation must take care and position itself by clarifying its conceptual bases. In fact, is what happened in 2015 with the UNESCO Recommendation, which, in the section Social role, in points 16, 17, and 18, includes a good part of the thesis of Ibermuseos and its antecedents, with special mention of the Santiago Round Table.

16. Member States are encouraged to support the social role of museums that was highlighted by the 1972 Declaration of Santiago de Chile. Museums are

³⁸ ICOM-UNESCO, 'Mesa Redonda de Santiago de Chile', in Resoluciones de La Mesa Redonda: la importancia y el desarrollo de los museos en el mundo contemporáneo, celebrada en Santiago de Chile (1972).

³⁹ Grete Mostny, G, 'Mesa redonda sobre la importancia y el desarrollo de los museos en el mundo contemporáneo', Noticario Mensual, XVI, 190.91 (1972), 8.

increasingly viewed in all countries as playing a key role in society and as a factor in social integration and cohesion. In this sense, they can help communities to face profound changes in society, including those leading to a rise in inequality and the breakdown of social ties.⁴⁰

17. Museums are vital public spaces that should address all of society and can therefore play an important role in the development of social ties and cohesion, building citizenship, and reflecting on collective identities. Museums should be places that are open to all and committed to physical and cultural access to all, including disadvantaged groups. They can constitute spaces for reflection and debate on historical, social, cultural, and scientific issues. Museums should also foster respect for human rights and gender equality. Member States should encourage museums to fulfil all of these roles.⁴¹

18. In instances where the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples is represented in museum collections, Member States should take appropriate measures to encourage and facilitate dialogue and the building of constructive relationships between those museums and indigenous peoples concerning the management of those collections, and, where appropriate, return or restitution in accordance with applicable laws and policies.⁴²

Background and Context of Brazilian Museology

The Portuguese colonists began by using native slaves in the fields. Nevertheless, the Catholic clergy defended the Indians and condemned their slavery. This led to the replacement of the indigenous labour force with African slaves. The enslavement of Indians was banned in the eighteenth century by the Marquis of Pombal, but African slavery continued until the late nineteenth century.

The slave origins of Brazil's conspicuous wealth led to harsh criticism from English, and French abolitionists. This was especially true during the Great Exhibition in London in 1862.

Faced with this unexpected opposition, the Brazilian government designed a campaign to reconstruct its image to mitigate its negative aspects, and present it as a civilised and progressive country, to be used in subsequent

⁴⁰ Barcelós, Mónica, and Torres Vergara, Andrea, Programa Ibermuseos. 10 años de cooperación entre museos 2007–2017 (Brasilia: AECID, Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, Secretaría General Iberoamericana, 2017), p. 36.

⁴¹ UNESCO, Recomendación relativa a la protección y promoción de los museos y colecciones, su diversidad y su función en la sociedad. Aprobada por la Conferencia General en su 38ª reunión. Paris, 17 de noviembre de 2015, 18 (Paris: UNESCO, 2015).

⁴² UNESCO, Recomendación relativa a la protección y promoción de los museos y colecciones, su diversidad y su función en la sociedad. Aprobada por la Conferencia General en su 38ª reunión, p. 18.

exhibitions. In this approach, references to the issue of slavery was to be avoided altogether, and instead the gradual process of the whitening of slavery was to be promoted and efforts would be redoubled.

Thus, the monarchy was concerned with preserving and protecting the important heritage it had inherited from Portugal, but it also felt the need to promote research, which it tried to do by opening natural science museums, in particular.

At this point, however, it is worth asking about the identity of both the people who studied and researched in these museums, and the nature of the public that visited them. All this in the context of the great diversity that Brazil presents, not only in terms of natural resources, but also and above all in terms of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural realities, due to the different lifestyles, and customs of its urban, and rural populations, some of which live in the jungle, known or unknown. And the answer to the questions posed is simple: the museums created in Brazil in the nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries were intended for the educated population living in the large cities.

The cities developed along with society. With the country's independence in 1822, museums also changed, adapting themselves to a new population and its cultural manifestations, consolidating and recognising the cultural, and artistic heritage they possessed. Undoubtedly, all this contributed to Brazil's search, analysis, and reflection on the museological situation and the functions to be fulfilled by the museum. With the creation of Brasilia, a new city, modern and independent from the Portuguese past, the concept of the new museum appeared, focusing on the educational, and documentary.

During the growth of museums in the second half of the twentieth century, Brazil concentrated its efforts on creating the country's museum park. It is noteworthy that within the Ibero-American group, Brazil is the country with the largest number of museum institutions, as well as the highest growth rate since 2013. It now has more than 3,100 museums.⁴³

On the other hand, it is surprising that the Brazilian government platform does not have a specific category in the register to catalogue the number of municipal museums. However, a manual search in the database of the National Museum Registry reveals 13 museums associated with the term community, while the Ibero-American Museum Registry lists only 10 with the same name.

Similarly, ecomuseums or museums of the territory, a nomenclature used in the typology of the Brazilian Museum Registry, are much more widely

⁴³ Ruiz Gómez, Ariadna, *Contextos museológicos iberoamericanos entre dos cambios de siglo* (Madrid: PhD thesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2021), p. 339.

represented, with a total of 93.⁴⁴

Community Museology in Brazil

Projects with strong roots in the practice of community museology have been carried out in Brazil, with a notable increase in experience in recent decades.

While the community activism in the favelas came from the inhabitants themselves, part of the work with their heritage, and the development of a comprehensive methodology went hand in hand with the research and teaching activity of the museology courses launched at the end of the last century by the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, as well as the Federal University of Fluminense. The credit for this work goes to the professors, museologists, and anthropologists who studied the practices of the 1970s and Paulo Freire's

Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Lygia Segala, together with Professor María Inés Couto de Oliveira, worked on the implementation of social, and integral methodologies in the field of exhibition.

In Brazil, ecomuseums and community museums began to emerge in the 1980s. Although there were precedents in previous decades that pointed towards a more social museology,⁴⁵ the truth is that, as Fernanda de Carmago-Moro, and Lourdes Novaes⁴⁶ point out, the military governments that succeeded each other in Brazil from 1968 to 1984 hindered the arrival of the new international trends. Nevertheless, the first experiences under the term ecomuseum can be found in 1971, with the Ecomuseu in Ribeirão da Ilha in Florianópolis. This was followed by the Museu Comunitário Jeová Batista de Azevedo in Santa Luzia, also in 1971, and the Museu Comunitário Almiro Theobaldo Müller, created in 1979 in Itapiranga. The historiography of the new museology points out that the ecomuseum typology emerged in the early 1980s, with the proposal of the Ecomuseu Integral de São Cristóvão, created in 1982 in Rio de Janeiro, standing out.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Instituto Brasileiro de Museus. Ibram. 2017, Políticas públicas em museologia social e educação museal foram institucionalizadas. <<https://www.museus.gov.br/politicas-publicas-em-museologia-social-educacao-museal-foram-institucionalizadas/> (26 de octubre de 2019)> [accessed 26 October 2019].

⁴⁵ Botelho, André Amud, Vivian, Diego, and Bruxel, Laerson, *Museu das Missões* (Brasília: IBRAM. Instituto Brasileiro de Museus, 2015), pp. 34–42.

⁴⁶ De Camargo-Moro, Fernanda and Novaes, Lourdes, 'ICOM e Brasil: um diálogo – lembranças e reflexões (1946–1993)', in *O ICOM-Brasil e o Pensamento Museológico Brasileiro: documentos selecionados*. Volume 1, ed. by Oliveira Bruno, Maria Cristina (2010), p. 25.

⁴⁷ da Silva Santos, Suzy, *Ecomuseus e museus comunitários no Brasil: estudo exploratório de possibilidades museológicas* (Universidade de São Paulo, 2017), pp. 199–200.

The proliferation of these typologies in Brazil experienced a remarkable growth at the beginning of the twenty-first century, quadrupling their number in the first two decades. This is due to the legislative, and normative support that occurred at the turn of the century.

Brazil, and the Current Debate in São Paulo

As we have seen throughout this dissertation, Brazil is a good example of the emergence (1970s), and growth (last decades of the twentieth century, and first decades of the twenty-first century) of community museology. Nowadays, the inclusion, and participation of the community in museums has become a concern for the most heterodox institutions. This is primarily due to the growth of social museological approaches and studies, so much in demand from the Brazilian museology degrees, and masters, which have focused on contemporary neo-colonial actions by the art system.

Although this section is concerned with the museum, and exhibition scene in São Paulo, it is appropriate to mention the academic, and teaching work of museologists, and historians such as Lygia Segala or Bruno Brulon of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, among others, who have promoted and defended the work of the community, and the critical and social task of museology in the Brazilian territory.

To this academic context of museology must be added the cultural situation that Brazil has experienced between 2016 and 2022, first with Michel Temer, acting president of the country after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, and then with the mandate of Jair Bolsonaro. Under both, museum institutions were directly affected by severe budget cuts. This was largely due to the closure of the Ministry of Culture in 2016 by order of the incumbent president, Temer.

Since then, the task of museologists, technicians, and cultural researchers has been very complicated ever since. At the beginning of Bolsonaro's term, with the previous suppression of the Ministry of Culture, the president created the Special Secretariat of Culture of the Ministry of Citizenship, but at the end of the year he dissolved it and transferred its competencies to the Ministry of Tourism. The disappearance of the institutions that regulated the museum organizations has led to a resurgence of pro-community discourses in urban contexts.

In this political evolution, it is worth noting how minorities, such as indigenous communities, have seen the social progress achieved in recent decades greatly diminished. However, during these years and since 2016, social demands have acted as a counterweight and many institutions have implemented policies aimed at decentralising narratives and incorporating greater plurality in their exhibitions, and museums.

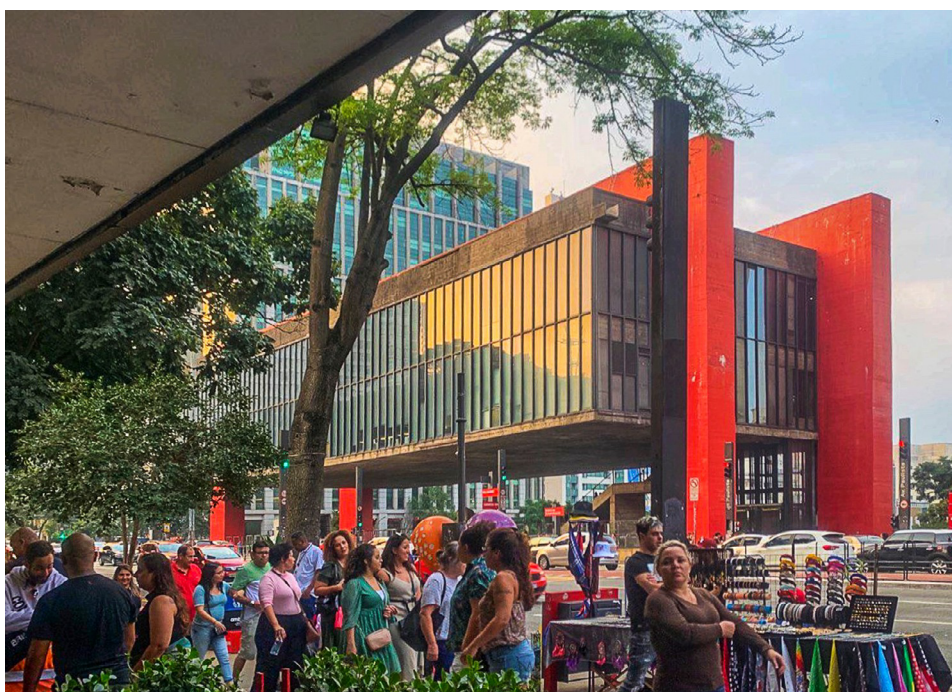


Fig. 12.1. The São Paulo Art Museum (MASP). Ariadna Ruiz, 2023.

In this sense, we should talk about the case of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, MASP, designed and built in 1958 by the architect Lina Bo Bardi and which can be seen in the following photograph (Fig. 12.1).

In recent years, this famous museum has focused on incorporating exhibitions from different indigenous communities in its temporary exhibitions, which have become the most awaited and acclaimed.

During 2023 (24 March to 4 June), the exhibition MAHKU: Mirações could be visited in the MASP, as can be seen in the photograph of the interior of the exhibition (Fig. 12.2).

MAHKU stands for Movement of Huni Kuin Artists. It is an artists' collective established between the municipality of Jordão, and the village of Chico Curumim, in the Kaxinawá Indigenous Land (Huni Kuin), in the state of Acre. In the current Brazilian scene, MAHKU is one of the most important artistic agents. The exhibition included 108 works, 58 of which are already part of the museum's collection.

The collective of indigenous artists is characterised by the Huni Meka songs, the traditional knowledge that they perform in the Nixi Pae rituals with the ayahuasca drink. The visual experiences of the drink are called mirações, which is the title of the exhibition. The themes of these paintings are mainly mythical narratives, and ancestral stories that tell of the origin of the world and the configuration, and stratification of species, as well as the relationship of

mankind with animals, plants, and their spirits.⁴⁸



Fig. 12.2. Exhibition MAHKU: Mirações. At the São Paulo Museum of Art. Ariadna Ruiz, 2023.

This exhibition is part of the year (2023) dedicated to the cycle of indigenous stories, which includes exhibitions by Carmézia Emiliano, Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), Bepunu Mebengokré Collective, Sheroanawe Hakihiwe, MASP’s Landmann Comodato of pre-Columbian ceramics, and metals, and Melissa Cody, as well as the large group exhibition *Histórias indígenas*.

Inaugurated on 20 October, 2023, and open until 25 February, 2024, *Histórias indígenas* showcases the indigenous histories of South America, North America, Oceania, and Scandinavia. The project has been curated by indigenous or indigenous descent artists and researchers from these regions. The exhibition aims to show works of different plastic typologies and in different supports. Chronologically, they range from the period before colonisation to the present day. In the spirit of the exhibition, the word ‘*histórias*’ in Portuguese has a fundamental meaning, which differs from that in English. In Portuguese the concept refers to both fictional and non-fictional narratives. In this way the exhibition seeks to bring together historical and personal stories, both public and private in nature. The Afro-Brazilian Museum in Ibirapuera Park, pictured in the following photograph (Fig. 12.3), a few meters from the Biennial

⁴⁸ Museu de Arte de São Paulo, MAHKU: Mirações. MAHKU, <<https://www.masp.org.br/exposicoes/mahku-miracoes>> [accessed 15 September 2023].

Pavilion, is also worth mentioning. It was founded in 2004 by the artist, and museologist Emanuel Araújo, who was the museum's director until his death in 2022. The museum aims to improve its museographic tours to disseminate the history of the African people who were forced by the violence of Portuguese colonisation to work in the new colony of Brazil.



Fig. 12.3. Afro-Brazilian Museum in Ibirapuera Park. Ariadna Ruiz, 2023.

The museum is seeking to strengthen its role in the São Paulo's museum circuit by restructuring, focusing on community work and reaffirming its commitment against racism. Its education department has led actions, including courses, lectures, and research that have changed visitors' perspectives. Despite possible contradictions, the museum continues to actively promote participation, and change.

The proposal for the 2023 Bienal de São Paulo, entitled *Choreographies of the Impossible*, also emphasised that the curatorial, and exhibition projects should be as diverse as possible, criticising previous editions that had witnessed great ethnic, and gender asymmetry. The aim and challenge of this 35th edition was to bring together and understand the antagonistic cultures of the currents that have historically been hegemonic in the art world. To this end, the curators of the 2023 edition focused on themes that are rarely addressed by the Biennial, such as *negritude*, and colonialism, as well as queer art. The jury was made up of Diane Lima, a Brazilian curator specialising in collective learning; Grada Kilomba, a Portuguese writer, and artist working on memory, trauma, gender, and racism; Hélio Menezes, a Brazilian social anthropologist specialised in black cultural practices in urban environments, and Manuel Borja-Villel, former



Fig. 12.4. Biennial Pavilion. Ariadna Ruiz, 2023.

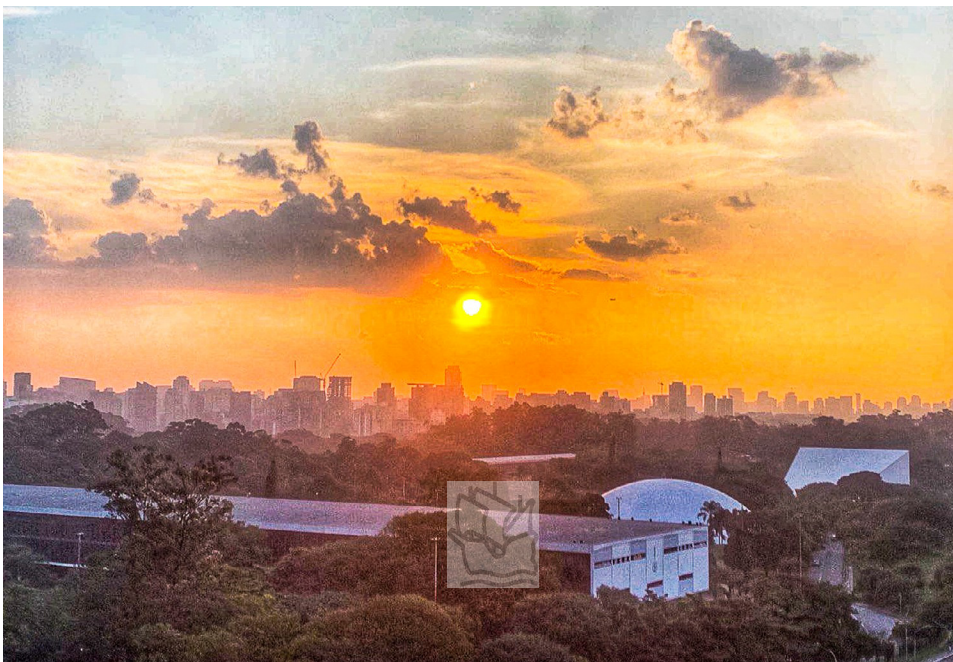


Fig. 12.5. In the foreground, the São Paulo Biennial building with the rest of Óscar Niemeyer's architectural ensemble in Ibirapuera Park. Ariadna Ruiz, 2023.

director of the Museo Reina Sofía.

Below are photographs of Óscar Niemeyer's architecture in Ibirapuera Park, where the São Paulo Biennial Pavilion stands out (Fig. 12.4 and Fig. 12.5).

In terms of broadening voices, and diversity, the curatorial team achieved its goals: 92% of the participants were black, and 76% were born in the Global South.⁴⁹

In the last two years, however, there have been cases that call into question the commitment of art institutions. Contemporary Brazilian curators, and critics, such as Luciara Ribeiro,⁵⁰ point out how the decisions of institutions in the task of decolonial revision have been left in the hands of white agents.

In this sense, it is necessary to refer to the case of the Instituto Inhotim in the state of Minas Gerais. This centre is considered to be the largest open-air museum. On 19 November 2022, the collective exhibition of 34 Afro-descendant artists, *Quilombo: vida, problemas, e aspirações do negro*, was inaugurated. One of the main artists, Maxwell Alexandre, decided on 18 November to withdraw his work from the exhibition. The problem for Maxwell was the lack of transparency in the construction of the exhibition's narrative by the curators, and the museum. The way in which they had approached blackness in an objectifying way had returned the black person to being treated anthropologically by a white institution with white agents making decisions, Maxwell condemned via his social networks. To this, the artist complained about the lack of commitment on the part of the museum, as the artists' work was reduced to a temporary exhibition, and not as permanent pieces in the collection. Two curators, Sandra Benites, and Clarisa Diniz experienced a significant case at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo during the process of curating *Núcleo Retomadas*, part of the exhibition *Histórias do Brasil*. They revealed the elimination of essential works by the MASP, demonstrating a form of censorship, especially in the photographic series of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST). Negotiations were unsuccessful, but the intervention of the media, and artists led the museum to reconsider.

Until 2018, the museum had only white curators. In 2019, Sandra Benites, the first indigenous curator in Brazil, joined the institution. Despite her professional background, she was not involved in curating for about three years. Her first collective project opened after her resignation in May 2022.

⁴⁹ Attendance at the presentation of the 35th edition of the Sao Paulo Biennial. Recorded presentation <https://www.youtube.com/live/_PGoXpDfvus?si=3_GC8R9vSJgz5zJ9> [28 April 2023].

⁵⁰ Ribeiro, Luciara, 'Pluralidad versus centralización. La leyenda de los "blancos universales"', in Gohete Institut <<https://www.goethe.de/prj/hum/es/dos/ctr/24707542.html>> [accessed 30 November 2023].

Although the museum claimed to be reviewing its colonial positions, it rejected Benites, and Diniz's request, showing little interest in retaining the only indigenous curator. Benites' departure demonstrated a lack of ethics in negotiations, and relationships, especially with dissenting bodies in the institutional structures of the art world.

However, in terms of the development of community historiography, there are positive cases of work being done by and with the community.

In addition to the work of the Afro-Brazilian Museum mentioned above, which is closely linked to various communities in the vast region of São Paulo, there are community projects such as that of the Guarani Indians of São Paulo, Tekoa Pindimirim, who apart from being involved in the recuperation, and recovery of the land from which they were expelled at the beginning of the twentieth century, and during Bolsonaro's last term in office, are trying to consolidate their community memory through an eco-museum.⁵¹

Similarly, outside São Paulo, the project Sertão Negro Ateliê e Escola de Artes, a community museum, and artist residency promoted by the well-known artist Dalton Paula, stands out.

Other dissident narratives that have emerged through the activist work of artists include the work of Glicéria Tupinambá, who will be the first indigenous artist to have a solo exhibition in the Brazilian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2024. Among other projects, Glicéria has focused on researching indigenous cloaks that are in Brazilian, and European museums and have not been returned to their communities.

Conclusions

Brazil, as a continental country, is a space of creation, and experimentation, but also of the defense of its independence in the face of the Global North, of community, artistic, and curatorial struggle, very much aware of its historical past.

As we have seen, there are remarkable achievements, and experiences that reflect authentic, and significant efforts, even within the dominant system. The outstanding work of the educational sector, and social museology professionals is an example of this. Through committed community-based projects with social participation, and an accumulative approach to research and critique, these fields show that it is possible to change the exhibition narrative and include social demands in the contemporary museum conversation.

For all these reasons, these projects require a great deal of research, and creation, which are undoubtedly a driving force, and a beacon of the values of

⁵¹ Ruiz Gómez, Ariadna, 'Interview with Luciara Ribeiro' [30 November 2023].

critical, and social museology that we in European countries need to take into account, both when facing problems of social demand, and repercussions, and in terms of our colonial history, and our construction of the narrative from the curatorial work of museums, which requires continuous research, and revision.