

Linguistic Frontiers

Semiotic Boundary Spaces: An Exercise in Decolonial Aesthesis

Original study

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Abstract: The main purpose of this essay is the analysis of the discourses expressed between Jaider Esbell's Brazilian artistic sculptures and the monuments of the urban space. Based on J. Lotman's notion of semiotic boundary space of culture, the analysis focuses on the controversial discursive relationships, such as intelligibility and unintelligibility; translation and untranslatability, and so on, observed from the historical tensioning of cultural languages. This analytical path leads us to intercultural relationships in which artistic languages in semiotic boundary spaces manifest the Aesthesis condition that has given the theoretical foundations for the Decolonial studies and the arising of a new episteme in the understanding of intercultural relationships. Thus, the semiotic concept of boundary space allows us to analyse various discursive relationships in historical-political contexts in the contemporary debate.

Keywords: Semiotic boundary space; Discursive relationships; Modelling semiotic systems; Contemporary Indigenous Art; Decolonial Aesthesis.

INTRODUCTION

To celebrate the 34th São Paulo Biennale of Arts in 2021, Jaider Esbell – an artist and native of the Raposa Serra do Sol indigenous territory in Roraima, Brazil – was invited to take one of his **Entities** [Entidades] to compose with the landscaped surroundings of the Biennale building in Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo. The artist installed his **Entities** on the lake (Figure 1) without repeating the experience created in the Santa Tereza district of Belo Horizonte¹. And what location could be more appropriate for a work of Contemporary Indigenous Art than one that celebrates – in its landscape – the site that gave rise to the name of the district and the park? The **Entities** remained installed in the lake for the run the length of the exhibition.

Attempting to perform a reading of the installation in the urban space in which it was installed, but



Figure 1 – Entities (Esbell 2021) **Entities**, Jaider Esbell. 34th São Paulo Biennale of Arts, 2021.

without wishing to stray into the scope of curatorial decisions, it can be said that the lake had acquired a new

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¹ In September 2020, the artist transformed an overhead walkway in the Santa Tereza district of Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais, into a scenario in which his entities were installed so as to cross, at a height, the traffic routes of the space.

aesthetic-urbanistic potential, since the installation could be viewed from various angles, mainly from the main access route to the park and the Biennale Pavilion. What is hard to see immediately is the semantic potential of the installation in that particular location. Looking at the etymology of the name "Ibirapuera", we find a new set of meanings. "Ibirapuera" corresponds to "Ypy-ra-ouêra" in the Tupi-Guarani language, meaning "rotten wood", due to it being a boggy area. The neighbourhood used to be home to the indigenous people during colonization times. Thus, the location maintains a bond not only with the traditions of the indigenous peoples who lived – and still live – in the city of São Paulo, but also with the whole lineage of their ancestry. In this sense, the **Entities** installed there are replete with deeper historical and cultural meanings.

Esbell's **Entities** allude to legendary beings of his people, the Makuxi ethnic group. They were designed and planned with the artistic shapes of great serpents that, in the Amazonian myth, correspond to "Boiúna" (Mboi-Una – "mother of the river" or "lady of the waters"), consecrated as the "Cobra Grande" [Great Snake]. According to legend, Boiúna was a gigantic serpent that lived in the waters of rivers, lakes and streams. Its shining body could reflect moonlight, and its eyes emitted an intense light that was confused with torches and disoriented fishermen to attract and devour them. Boiúna transformed itself to mimic boats or large ships to achieve its goal.

For Esbell (2020b), the Cobra Grande symbolises "the path of the waters, of abundance, because it lives under the earth, in great subterranean rivers, maintaining a constantly pulsating movement of the water to maintain the springs". By conferring on it an artistic form using instruments and constructive processes of his historical present, the myth is revived in another dimension of time and space. With this, Esbell's art keeps alive the cosmogony of Pajé [Shaman] Makunaima, whose transformative nature has the mission of recreating the world and keeping it alive. As a legacy, the Makuxi people received the mission of being guardians of the Earth (Esbell 2020b).

This commitment is not forgotten – even when building 10m-high and 20m-long inflatable sculptures supplied with electrical power and lighting. On the contrary: inserting mythological beings into the urban environment restores their existence – even when recreated with technological devices. For this reason, the intense shapes and colours of the artist's paintings on the "skin" of the digitally modelled creatures translate the signs left by Pajé Makunaima. On the "skin" of the serpents, the artist designed and painted forms that help the sacred environments they inhabit not be forgotten. In their new living space, the beings help maintain absolute respect for the greater law of nature – not human law, but a greater law of entities that sustain the maintenance and equilibrium of peoples. The **Entities** represent one of the main procedures of Esbell's artistic creation. As well as referring directly to the spirituality that defines the character of Contemporary Indigenous Art, the **Entities** manifest themselves as criticism against the dominant narratives still sustained by the mistaken notion of handicrafts as a minor art. For Esbell, indigenous practices – such as the braiding of hammocks, chants, dances and rituals – are elements of the artistic ensemble whose signs manifest the semiotic power of recomposition of the cosmology of his people committed to transforming practices that threaten the preservation of the Mother Earth (Esbell 2020b).

Contemporary Indigenous Art – practised, theorised and disseminated by Esbell (2020a) – bears witness to his commitment to linking the cosmology of his people to the political debate sustained, above all, by the continuous threats to the various indigenous populations. For this reason, all the elements of his art show that everything in his universe interacts with his ancestors. Both the creation and the choices of the artist fulfil historical and cultural functions, and challenge the understanding of their meanings, not only in aesthetics and landscaping, but also politically (Esbell 2020a, 2020b).

The meanings of Esbell's artistic and political thoughts can be scaled if we examine the dialogue between the **Entities** and the other sculptures installed in the park, articulating discourses that deserve to be heard with great attention because they manifest discursive relations with the surroundings and with the cosmology of his ancestry. In the context of creating Contemporary Indigenous Art, committed to interactions with the world of current experience, the serpents installed in the lake utter a discourse of attack. For Esbell, they are "ready to strike at Pedro Álvares Cabral", who, on landing on Brazilian soil, opened the doors to the bloody colonization of the indigenous peoples who lived there and have been struggling to continue to live there for more than five centuries (Magalhães 2021).

How should we "hear" the dialogue of the serpents with the other park sculptures? How should we understand the gesture of readiness for attack? This is what we look at next.

Among the many sculptures installed in the park, the **Entities** created a direct political discourse directed not only at the Monument to Pedro Álvares Cabral (Figure 2) but also at the Monument to the Bandeiras ² (Figure 3) and the Memorial to the victims of the dictatorship (Figure 4). The **Entities** shared with the last of these a solitary discourse of those on the same side concerning the attempts made by official history to erase people and peoples who have gained sculptural expression. With the other two monuments, however, the tone of the discourse is very different. They direct their protests at both. On the one hand, they make a statement against the domination

² Settling and exploration expeditions into the interior of Brazil. The "bandeirantes" were the people who participated in these expeditions.







Figures 2, 3, 4 – Monument to Pedro Álvares Cabral (da Rocha 1988); Monument to the Bandeiras (Brecheret 1953); Memorial to the victims of the dictatorship (Othake 2014)

of the foreigner who arrived here, subjugating the original peoples and reducing them to the condition of servants; on the other, they rebel against the persecution of the Bandeirantes who captured them, decimating peoples as if they – the indigenous – were the foreigners.

Thus, the political dialogue of confrontational discursive relations was incorporated into the 34th Biennale, opening an unprecedented space not only for Contemporary Indigenous Art, but also for the discourses of its various peoples. With their art, the artists have translated a state of readiness that configures citizens' awareness in entire exercise of their ability to produce and circulate ideas. A perspective such as this modifies the vision of space. Instead of the prevalence of a single point of view, what is observed is the dimensioning of a boundary space and discursive relationships in conflict.

From the analytical point of view in which we are situated, this is a semiotic boundary space whose plurality of points of view in confrontation is in line with the theoretical thinking that, since the end of the last century, has been building the field of Decolonial studies. It is a movement of cultural ideas and practices in which artists, activists and intellectuals struggle to construct thoughts and emancipatory artistic practices on behalf of the emancipation of colonized peoples. In the field of the arts, the Aesthetic procedures based on different sensory regimes possessed by beings committed to maintaining coexistence with all living beings on the planet, not limited to humans, oppose the aesthetic regime prevailing in the West. Contemporary Indigenous Art is one of the fields in which Aesthesic experiences are developing.

This is the synthesis of the motivation that underpins the reflection that resulted in this work. The essay's fundamental hypothesis is that, in the semiotic boundary space, the breaking of the limits imposed promotes the emergence of a new poetic *episteme* that not only recovers the *poiesis* – in the Greek sense for Art as a skill resulting from a practice (Mignolo, Vazquez 2013, 11), but also shows itself capable of facing up to the Aesthetic parameters consolidated in the West.

To this end, we turn to the theoretical foundations of the semiotic concept of boundary systematized by Jurij M. Lotman (1985, 1990). Far from calling on the imaginary line of geolocalisation to divide geopolitically delimited territories, Lotman notes that, in cultural encounters, the boundary is much more a place of possibility and transformation than of limits and exclusion. This is because the boundary designates the field of forces in which two distinct parties are in constant confrontation. While one force acts in the sense of exclusion, the other fights to break barriers. In the process of the struggle, the forces in conflict are equally intense, meaning that the opposing parties compete on equal terms.

To comprehend the Aesthesic experiences of Contemporary Indigenous Art, this study bases its analysis on the concept of *poiesis*, which encompasses artistic creations whose nature is oriented toward human practices that precede the concept of art established in productions in which sensitivity, beauty and the sublime are delimited by previously defined standards. Thus, we refer to the Decolonial studies, in which Aesthesis is freed from the notion of power that favoured the establishment of hierarchical aesthetic categories. The theoretical and conceptual foundations for this approach are based on the formulations systematised by artists, activists and intellectuals who have propagated the concept of Decolonial Aesthesis from South America to other countries and continents (Mignolo, Vazquez 2013, 1–18).

Based on the assumptions presented in this introduction, the aim is to construct an analytical path in which: (i) the cultural boundary space is understood as a semiotic space modelled by various socio-historical languages and discourses; (ii) cultural languages are understood to be a result of cultural encounters, in which there are manifested mechanisms of complementary actions of intelligibility and unintelligibility; translation and untranslatability, such as observed in the advent of the creolisation of languages; and, finally, (iii) the analysis

of Contemporary Indigenous Art productions created by indigenous Brazilians, with their distinct languages, cultural codes, discourses and cosmologies, is dimensioned as an aesthesic experience of *poiesis* claimed by the decoloniality studies.

It remains to be said that referring to Lotman's semiotics at this moment is not merely a way of appreciating the heritage of semiotic formulations committed to cultural processes, but also – and above all – a way to celebrate the centenary of his birth. At this point, we would like to record our humble homage to Lotman and deep thanks to Jaider Esbell, who, in such a short time on this Earth, produced and left us so much in terms of decolonial aesthesic production and political thinking. As a dedicated scholar of mythology, Lotman is in the good company of Esbell in the different spheres of existence.

1. MODELLING OF THE SEMIOTIC BOUNDARY SPACE

Any definition of space is confused with the notion of place and, therefore, with its vast field of designation. The semiotic boundary space does not escape this conception; however, there is a difference: The notion of place, like that of space, is not disconnected from its semiotic and discursive nature. This means that the concept of place only shows its differential quality when equated to the semiosis of discourses in languages without which communication with the space is not constituted. And it is also with codes and languages that place is dimensioned as a geographical space.

We are indebted to Jurij Lotman for the concept of semiotic space as a relationship, or rather, as that in which semiosic actions or experiences occur. Given the importance of semiosis, Lotman, J. (1990, 123) states: "So paradoxically, semiotic experience precedes the semiotic act. [...] For it to work, it has to be 'immersed' in semiotic space." Being immersed in semiotic space means the relational condition of everything that produces meaning and that, consequently, defines the nature of the elements that come into a relationship, such as that which manifests itself between space and communication; place, codes, languages and discourses.

Lotman's semiotic studies developed in the context of a relationship and a specific mechanism of semiotic generation: The modelling of codes and languages without which the dynamics of culture do not occur. Among the various approaches of his studies, of particular interest to this work is the reasoning in which Lotman asks himself: "Why and under what conditions in specific cultural situations does a foreign text *become necessary*." (Lotman, J. 2019, 70). This shows the character of the definition of semiotic boundary space in the context of intercultural relationships manifested in languages and discourses. The modelling mechanism contributes to the understanding of this demand. This concept was drafted in a controversial context that deserves to be remembered.

When it was proposed by one of the participants in the summer seminars dedicated to the study of semiotics in the USSR in the 1960s, the group was seeking a solution to an ideological problem that was preventing the advancement of semiotic studies as a scientific field. The term "semiotics" was prohibited by political order. At that time, the USSR was experiencing the impact of cybernetics and information theory, but under the censorship of semiotics, the regime considered a bourgeois science without credibility. The mathematician Vladimir Andreyevich Uspensky then proposed the term "secondary modelling systems". The concept of modelling underlying the denomination made it possible to express what was of interest: the examination of the mechanism for generating codes and languages by various cultural systems (Lotman, M. 2013, 246).

For scholars coming from such distinct fields of knowledge, modelling proved to be a process of investigation that did not comply with the political and ideological precepts of the regime. It proved to be a heuristic principle of new possibilities of relationships of meaning in the semiotic space of culture at its boundaries immersed in the plurality of discourses. From the epistemological and methodological point of view that interests us, modelling, on the one hand, made it possible to understand how relationships in semiotic space are revealed both to delimit the place that is of "one" and that of the "other", as well as to enter into the understanding of the discursive conflict as a constructive force in the cultural encounters of peoples, languages and codes. If myths have bequeathed us names as a way of extending the senses for the understanding of limits, for the consolidation of the concept of boundary, it was decisive to understand the process of translation and creolisation of cultural languages. These are formulations in which the importance of the modelling of language in boundary spaces is evident for understanding the importance of the culture of the other as alterity - different, but not opposite.

Let us start with the question: What is the role of myth and mythological constructions in culture? For Lotman, myths, which deal with the origins of phenomena and the constitution of matter and its elements, have the attribute of giving names to all that they designate. Therefore, the myth fulfils a modelling function by defining human nature by its ability to create its proper names through the activity of choice based on the awareness of places, be they physical or imaginary. On naming something, awareness is acquired of the property of the designated object, as well as its qualified distinction. This is what Lotman outlines in the following passage when referring to individuals:

Perhaps the sharpest manifestation of human nature is in the use of proper names and, linked to this, the isolation of the individuality, the uniqueness of the individual personality as foundational values for "other" and "others"; "I" and "other" represent two sides

of the unified act of self-consciousness and one is impossible without the other (Lotman, J. 2009, 31).

Names amplify the meanings not only of the things of the world, but also of the world itself, then unfolded into possible worlds. On this subject, Lotman speaks about the extension of proper names, observing uses of language by animals and children, reasoning that we can follow in this excerpt:

The language of the animals, insofar as it is possible to judge, without the interference of man, does not possess proper names. Meanwhile, it is precisely these that create that tension between the individual and the general which is fundamental to human consciousness. By mastering the tension between the individual word, created in such an ad hoc fashion and the general word "for all", the child includes itself in a fundamentally new mechanism of consciousness. Most frequently, this is manifested in the aggressive nature of the sphere of proper names, in which a tendency towards limitless expansion appears, although the opposite is also possible. What is important is the very fact of semantic tension and not the victory, which is always short-term, of the other. This is the period of the turbulent creation of words, as only the new and unique word which has only just been created is absolutely inseparable from its signification (Lotman, J. 2009, 31-32).

The amplification of meanings with the subsequent potentiation of the awareness of the limits between "I" and "the other"; "individual" and "collectivity"; "singular" and "plural"; "own" and "of the other", etc., also reveal fundamental mechanisms of culture. On the one hand, structural binarism; on the other, the different ways of constructing the world. With this, Lotman infers: "And so the semantic boundary appears, which will subsequently play a fundamental role in the social, cultural, cosmological and ethical construction of the world" (Lotman, J. 2009, 32).

Here, we have to observe two distinct modelling forces in the structural mechanism of the elementary binarism of culture: the amplification and distinction by which the difference and quality of creations can be achieved. This is the fundamental point for understanding the modelling process of myth in the dynamic creation of the semiotic space. Not without reason was Lotman's semiotic thinking built on a strong mythological basis. For now, we will concentrate on the dualism revealed by the binary structure of culture modelled by the exercise of self-awareness of the cultural space in our surroundings. To this end, we return to the sculptures – Jaider Esbell's **Entities** – focusing on their potential for amplifying and distinguishing the meanings of the world and their possible developments.

The positioning of the sculpture created a discursive architecture that deserves to be examined from the point of view of the chronotopic dynamics of the ethical and aesthetic process of its construction. When we looked at the indigenous etymologies – both the name of the area where the park is located and the name that created the **Entities** – an understanding of the process of modelling semiotic space by indigenous mythology started. The names "lbirapuera" and "Boiúna" produced both amplifications of meanings and distinctions of senses. The name "lbirapuera" – originally meaning "swamp" – has been amplified by the meanings of urbanisation that modelled the landscape language of the district in both physical and social terms.

Thus, the semiotic space becomes a combination of various semiosis: the district is merely a general designation for housing, studies, artistic manifestation (of visual, musical, and sculptural arts, etc.), tourism, leisure and other socio-cultural practices. However, there is also a temporal semiosis modelled by the name: an indigenous village of ancestral peoples and a metropolitan urban space. Due to the name, the flow of time in space configuring the semiotic space modelled by the ancestral and occidental cultures.

Thus, the artist's work also models artistic languages with the cultural codes of the Makuxi ethnic group, which differ from the languages of the other sculptures. With this, it produces discursive confrontations that both permit translation and maintain regions that are inaccessible and untranslatable to the other in a full exercise of the dynamics of cultural boundaries.

2. MECHANISMS OF LANGUAGES IN CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

We recognise that the dynamics of culture are mainly fuelled by the clashes resulting from the cultural encounters where differences shape conflicts that delimit boundaries at the same time as creating different relations between parties. Another question now becomes necessary: How do different cultures communicate so that different languages can guarantee the intelligibility of the discourses produced between them? There is no direct answer to that question in Lotman's studies, but rather investigative paths such as the one that supported the examination of the mechanisms defining the dynamics in semiotic boundary spaces.

To this end, the starting point for the proposed question is the notion of cultural space as a place where different relationships take place. It follows that, in culture, nothing produces meaning as an isolated, self-sufficient unit. This means that the fundamental mechanism of culture is the production of semiosis, which also defines the nature of the relationships processed therein. For Lotman, things and the phenomena of the world only have meaning when signs in semiosis both generate a space of relationship and are generated by them; a reasoning set out in the following:

The starting point occurs not in a single isolated model, but rather in semiotic space. This space is filled with a conglomeration of elements whose

relations with each other may be encountered in a variety of ways: they may emerge as semantic collision, oscillating in the space between complete identity and absolute divergence. These multilingual texts simultaneously include both possibilities, i.e., one and the same text may find itself in a state of non-intersection in relation to a given semantic range and in a state of identification with yet another. This variety in the possible connections between semantic elements create a multi-dimensional point of view, which can only be fully understood in terms of the ratio of each element to the other and all elements to the whole (Lotman, J. 2009, 172).

If it is possible to speak of determination in the semiotic space of relationship, it is only defined by its fundamental elements: heterogeneity, irregularity and asymmetry. The semiotic boundary spaces are determined by the same elements that, in this case, generate the arena for the confrontation of points of view - the unequivocal basis of the concept of semiosphere (Lotman, J. 1990, 123-150). Considering the question with this bias, would intelligibility between different languages not be a paradox? A contradiction in terms that the argumentative logic calls contradictio in adjecto? Perhaps. Especially when one considers that Lotman does not ignore the fact that clashes can lead to paradoxical relationships, but facing up to them seems to be the challenge and the nourishment that motivates science, with the manifestation of some kind of paradox being common in semiotic research (Lotman, J. 1985, 49).³ In the case of heterogeneity and irregularity observed in the semiotic concept of boundary, the contradiction manifests itself in the binary structure of the culture, which led Lotman to state: "Every culture begins by dividing the world into 'its own' internal space and 'their' external space. How this binary division is interpreted depends on the typology of the culture." (Lotman, J. 1990, 131). Such a structural contradiction has revealed how much intercultural boundaries operate in regimes that exclude one culture from another. This was the path that led him to the study of the typology of culture.

Far from accommodating an approach to cultural types, typological studies are guided by the examination of the field of opposing forces whose purpose is exclusion. Deviating from methods for observing the functions that, starting from structural binarism, perpetuated dichotomies – such as the supremacy of one human group over another – Lotman turned to the study of a mechanism in which typology reveals a process that is hardly visualized when exclusion prevails. This is the transgressive movement for generating new information, capable of dismantling the most solid conventions (Lotman, J. 2019, 149–160; Lotman, J., Uspenskij 1995, 25–81).

In cultural encounters, transgression manifests itself as a force of survival without limits and, therefore, able to introduce possibilities for the emergence of unpredictable actions, generating new information (Lotman, J. 2013). One of the forces that drive that process is the translation mechanism, understood as a possibility of guaranteeing the intelligibility of relations between radically different cultures. By translation, boundary clashes interrelate and produce different interactions, defining relationships within space itself. This can be read in the following:

The notion of boundary is an ambivalent one: it both separates and unites. It is always the boundary of something and so belongs to both frontier cultures, to both contiguous semiospheres. The boundary is bilingual and polylingual. The boundary is a mechanism for translating texts of an alien semiotics into "our" language, it is the place where what is "external" is transformed into what is "internal", it is a filtering membrane which so transforms foreign texts that they become part of the semiosphere's internal semiotics while still retaining their own characteristics (Lotman, J. 1990, 136–7).

Lotman defines the boundary as a polylingual space when proposing the boundary as a translation mechanism. It is not a question of quantifying the number of languages, but of realizing that, when different languages meet, new socio-interactive and communicative possibilities are also created. Thus, we arrive at the importance of the semiotic concept of creolisation (Lotman, J. 2019, 40-1) – one of the historically produced semiosis as a manifestation emerging to ensure the intelligibility of interlinguistic and intercultural communication. Here, we will treat creolisation as a semiotic boundary space.

"Creolisation" is the name for a process of forming an emergency language to establish contact that, on becoming a native language, gains the status of a community language, as we have already examined in another study (Machado 2016, 59). Before becoming "creole", the mere contact observed in very simplified linguistic formations received the philological denomination of "pidgin". With the structural complexification of the initial pidgin that transformed it into a native language, the term "creole" acquires a differential quality: the language gains a differential quality: it becomes a contact language whose terms do not always guarantee intelligibility. This is because creolisation constitutes itself as a doubly oriented linguistic process: On the one hand, it manifests itself through a constrictive centripetal movement, i.e., a language of interaction limited to the active speakers of a community; on the other, by an expansive centrifugal movement that leads the creole to explore other expressive possibilities, mainly in the language from which it started. With this, creole has both delimited a native language and followed a movement that led to decreolisation, observed when creole continues its expansion toward the European language (Couto 1996, 18).

³ In the original Italian: "[...] nella sfera delle ricerche semiotiche si rivelano sempre più chiaramente alcuni paradossi."

The semiotic concept of creolisation implies the heterogeneity of the languages involved in the interaction, emphasizing the diversity of "mutually unintelligible languages" (Couto 1996, 15). We return to the paradox of the unintelligibility observed in linguistic mutuality, however, not for Lotman, who considered it from an angle that amplified his field of theoretical vision.

The concept of translation observed in boundary spaces does not go against untranslatability. Much to the contrary: it is part of the semiotic mechanism of culture. From the point of view of cultural relationships, there are spheres in the languages in interaction that remain inaccessible to the culture of the other. According to Lotman, this is what preserves the fullness of views that occupy opposing spaces. The same structural binarism can be observed. Whereas translation opens up the possibility of intelligibility (amplification), untranslatability guarantees preservation and singularity (constriction) of the language - and this is favourable terrain for the flourishing of new information, which is not automatic. The autonomy of the two mechanisms - translation and untranslatability - is therefore justified. For this reason, in creolisation, the generation of creole as a new language and the induction of the linguistic process of decreolisation occurred. One mechanism unites, and the other separates.

Untranslatability creates a favourable condition both for the emergence of the new and for the struggle between culture and non-culture, in which both sides obviously understood themselves to be a culture of their "own".

Instead of elimination, untranslatability allowed Lotman to move forward to another horizon of meaning: the one in which conflicting spheres act in a system of equal conditions, which, perhaps, may represent another paradox for the thought consecrated by the logic of the excluded third (*tertium non datur*). Tensions in confrontation are equally probable, as he defines the process that leads to cultural explosions. It can be inferred that the impermeability of the untranslatable shows that the limit is part of the boundary. Therefore, the other is necessary for its differences, not its similarities.

The need for the other, not to eliminate it but to guarantee oneself as a culture. So, binarism not only divides and separates, but also opens up the possibility of bilateral relationships manifesting themselves. This is what we aim to examine in the exercise conducted in the next segment.

3. INTERCULTURAL BOUNDARIES IN AN EXERCISE OF DECOLONIAL AESTHESIS

The exercise proposed here emerged within the scope of semiotic lotmanian thinking, but obviously was not one of his concerns. What motivated the possibility of opening the dialogue between Lotman's semiotic studies and Decolonial studies, particularly the dialogue in the field of the arts, was undoubtedly his perspective of understanding the boundary as a semiotic space of untranslatability, and unintelligible and unpredictable relationships. A field of knowledge marked not only by resistance and utopia, but also by the notion of re-existence (Lockward et al. 2011; Mignolo, Vazquez 2013, 5) as the emergence of something radically unusual. This field of knowledge remains in line with ideas taking shape in recent debates about the Anthropocene, a notion in which the different situations in the contemporary world shape the image of clashing worlds. Another paradox now seems to give way to the dilemma – yet nothing prevents hypotheses from being drafted. In this respect, the Contemporary Indigenous Art thinking overflows with predictions.

Decolonial studies have been proposed to examine the cultural disruptive of all denominations forged in the geopolitical power game. To this end, these studies work to expand states of consciousness that demonstrate what Lotman observed as a bilateral relationship in the case of the untranslatability of languages. In other words, two confronting worlds in dispute with equivalent fight conditions. Instead of the foreign condition being the reason for the domination of one over the other, we see conscious and questioning voices that cast suspicion on established truths like Esbell's **Entities** – "ready to strike".

This state of self-consciousness has driven the studies of decoloniality that have taken theoretical shape in the post-colonial movement with the firm purpose of cultivating the emancipation of subjectivities, of the imaginary, of the mind. Decolonizing the mind, as the work of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (2007, 25–32) assumed in his criticalcreative works in theatre, literature and cinema. Emancipation, whose struggle is driven by the awareness that all the wonders created by the colonial empires depended on the servitude of indigenous and tribal peoples of the American and African continents, respectively.

The historical review underway by the decolonial studies merely embarked with the lotmanian inquiry into the need for the culture of the other to benefit the culture that is understood to be its own. To this end, scholars start from the historical revision of the notion of power. In addition to shifting modernity from the axis of the Enlightenment–Industrial Revolution to the expansion of the line of geopolitical dominance, which, from the 15th–16th centuries, began to control the Atlantic and the new continents, they contributed to the decolonialisation of the mind, producing an "epistemological turn" (Baliana 2020, 11) in the field of knowledge, not only western.

For W. Mignolo and R. Vazquez, when adopting the expression "modernity"/"(de)coloniality", a semiosis acts, which accentuates the confrontation at the boundary of meanings that interfere with each other. Therefore, at the same time as combining modernity with coloniality, it expresses how much decoloniality arises from the transformation that is neither one nor the other, as can be read in the following:

"Decoloniality" appears inbetween modernity/ coloniality as an opening, as a possibility of overcoming their completeness. Decoloniality refers to the variegated enunciations springing from globallocal histories entangled with the local imperial history

of Euro-American modernity, postmodernity, and altermodernity (Mignolo, Vazquez 2013, 2).

The process of the world's westernization is placed under suspicion, and the worldview is shaken by the reverse of the imposition of the foreign condition on native, black and indigenous peoples. That is, the Europeans who arrived on the Latin American continent encountered different native peoples and cultures. As the Europeans was the conqueror, the natives were no more than foreigners.

The epistemological turn propagated as decoloniality brings to the forefront the idea that investigation and investigated objects are active agents of the forces that move history. Turning to Lotman again, we are faced with historical thinking subjects, capable of making choices, not merely supporting actors, condemned to follow the causal and predictable route of events over which they exercise no control (Lotman, J. 2019, 184). As subjects, they produce questions, such as those on the agenda in the epistemological turn.

Decolonial aesthetics was the concept introduced in 2003 by Colombian artist, activist and intellectual Adolfo Albán Achinte in the group discussions inaugurating the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality Research Project, whose objectives were to study epistemology, political theory and economics. These gave rise to the theoretical and artistic works that were the origin of the field of decoloniality studies. With the maturing of the reflections, the announced epistemological turn submits to review the field of aesthetics instituted in the philosophical field. The project expanded o the study of modernity/(de)coloniality, and the concept of Decolonial AestheTics was relabelled as "Decolonial AestheSis". We aim to approach this concept in the exercise proposed here.

This is not just a terminological replacement. There is a whole review of the field of Aesthetics as explained by Mignolo and Vazquez (2013, 4-5),

Decolonial aestheSis is a movement that is naming and articulating practices that challenge and subvert the hegemony of modern/colonial aestheSis. Decolonial aestheSis starts from the consciousness that the modern/colonial project has implied not only control of the economy, the political, and knowledge, but also control over the senses and perception. [...] In the work of Adolfo Albán Achinte and Zulma Palermo, we witness the working of decolonial aestheSis as a re-valuation of what has been made invisible or devalued by the modern-colonial order.

This is not a merely theoretical proposition, but a demand that arises from the artistic activity of poetic making or, more particularly, of the *poiesis* that generates the capability produced by practice. For Mignolo and Vazquez (2013, 11), it is a possibility that has become a standard process of "transmogrification" that establishes parameters of taste, beauty and sensitivity based on Kant. Although the terms "Aesthetics" and "Aesthesis" originated from the Greek language, the option for "AestheSis" as the designation of artistic making is considered an alternative because "Decolonial Aesthesis has become the critique and artistic practices that aim to decolonize the senses, that is, to liberate them from the regulations of modern, postmodern, and alternmodern aestheTics." (Mignolo, Vazquez 2013, 8). After all, "aestheTics' became the western norm but that every society in the world has its own notion of aestheSis, the sensible, the beautiful..." (Mignolo, Vazquez 2013, 10).

The conceptual framework presented here is not exhaustive of all the assumptions elaborated by the group. However, it is sufficient for us to perform the exercise that aims to analyse the decolonial aesthesis in artistic practice, that is, in the poiesis of Contemporary Indigenous Art by artist Jaider Esbell, who contributed much to the formulation of this work, particularly with his notion of *poiesis* so firmly tied to the need to understand signs in the semiosis of the tradition of his people in dialogue with his present as a contemporary artist in the 21st century. It is here that the concept of boundary formulated much both by Lotman and by the decolonial studies appears with all its vigour, showing that the contemporary indigenous artists are "dwelling in the borders, sensing in the borders, doing in the borders, they have been the propellers of decolonial trans modern thinking and aesthetics" (Lockward et al. 2011).

Jaider Esbell explores various boundaries in his work. In **Entities** (Figure 1), he scrambles the boundaries of time and space – examined earlier in the dialogue with different discursive intonations among the sculptures installed in the landscape. He plays with temporalities of the knowledge of ancestral peoples, with their mythology and technology, with his technical rationality that allowed him to build the serpents as a luminous object based on an inflatable piece fed by a source of electric energy, which requires some engineering knowledge. This, however, is not all that can be said of the boundaries of contemporary indigenous art.

Esbell's aesthesic thinking recovers the cosmogonies of his people in the current scenario. Cosmogonies are made up of narratives about the origins of the world, beings, and phenomena. Guided by the principle of transformation, the cosmogonies apprehend the moments of transformation in which beings, objects and phenomena are caught in the movement of their transmutation of quality into another dimension that does not preserve any inherent characteristics or properties. In the West, the cosmogonies that Ovid recorded in Metamorphoses are at the base of western thinking. Nonetheless, they are not the only ones. People banished from the Eurocentric sphere, such as the black ethnic groups of the African and South American continent indigenous peoples, created their cosmogonies, which became the inheritance from their ancestors. Esbell interacts with the cosmogonies of his Makuxi people, seeking to understand the semiosis operated by the signs that often appear to him as a message from the unconscious.

According to Esbell, the pictorial work "A conversa das entidades intergalácticas para decidir o futuro universal da humanidade" ["The conversation of intergalactic entities to decide the universal future of humanity"] (Figure 5) is a synthesis of his work. It is a panel that holds a dialogue with the unconscious, whose images develop from signs that open up the possibility of an urgent reflection posed by the inquiry about our presence and our action on the idea of life and the planet.



Figure 5 – A conversa das entidades intergalácticas para decidir o futuro universal da humanidade (Esbell, 2021)

The artist's concern about the planet's life and health is part of his conception of "ecological urgency" (Esbell 2020a, 2020b), which echoes many of the assumptions of colonial aesthesis, notably by the character of critical consciousness regarding the inheritances of his people that were completely erased upon the arrival of the Portuguese and the domination over the lands that continues to this day. Besides being modelled in artistic works, many of his ideas were developed in his curatorial activities and essays published on the artist's website in the form of posts. The work "A descida da pajé Jenipapo do reino das medicinas" ["The descent of shaman Jenipapo from the kingdom of medicines"] (2021, acrylic and POSCA on canvas, 111×160 cm; Figure 6) is a painting modelled by the Makunaima cosmogony of his Makuxi people.

The canvas bears a design of a tree being transported by a canoe that turns into a guardian, with two entities that take Grandma Jenipapo (or Raku to the Makuxi) here and there. The jenipapo is a tree that symbolizes a complete being: a Pajé, a mediator of worlds. The canoe helps Jenipapo cross this great sea, a celestial ocean and all



Figure 6 – A descida da Pajé Jenipapo do reino das medicinas (Esbell, 2021)

galaxies. In the Makuxi cosmogony, Grandma Jenipapo lives for a long time and continues to navigate the continuity of her existence in space, free and fluid. Perhaps the unity ends, but the trees do not end – they continue to follow their path. They came long before us and settled, prepared to receive us, and at this moment, we are in a very complex relationship.

For Esbell, this work presents the reflection on the fact that our life is part of a much larger set of connections, energies and flows, whose dimension we do not know, just as we do not know how much the insistence on the development of our own system of evolution as humanity only generates waste that disturbs other forms of existence. In this sense, Jenipapo's poetics, practised in the cosmogony of her people, was conceived by the intention of the plants and what there is sacred and medicinal in each of them.

The healing capacity of the tree refers to the myth of Makunaima, who goes out in search of food in a time of great drought, and encounters seeds from a tree that produces fruits for food; but not only fruits, also animals that provide sustenance. This single image – of the tree that produces vegetable and animal fruits – translates the whole chain of semiosis of the ecological transformation of connections into different instances that Esbell translated into artistic languages.

The artistic implications of Esbell's work are not limited to nature. His poiesis extends to the making that moves him, through his orientation to the political movement as an amplification of the indigenous movement, by means of various arts, with emphasis on visual arts and performances that recover indigenous rituals in urban cultural spaces, exploring new boundaries. For him, art was the place that made official the place of a minority of the one who is oppressed. Therefore, he and all the contemporary indigenous artists of his generation have been appropriating the word "art" to conduct their investigations, comparisons, and counterpoints with the history that is still reproduced often to clear from memory, the environment and the space, the existence of his and many other peoples, ignoring their right to remain in the territory in which they were created and sheltered by the beings existing within it - such as the jenipapo tree.

CONCLUSION

With the interventions of Esbell's aesthesic thought, the semiotic boundary space addressed in this essay is not one more semiotic concept formulated to enshrine a theory. It is not even a category. In fact, what is observed is that it is a thought that contributes to the treatment of culture starting from its dynamic processes, however controversial, paradoxical and even dilemmatic they may seem. The artistic practices now claimed as *poiesis* do not refer to established Aesthetics, but to the Aesthesis that emerges when forces of the imaginary, of sensitivity and of the senses are joined with actions that fight for the transposition of limits. Boundaries exist not

to be preserved as dividing lines, but as places where forces in disputes act and react with equipollent forces. The aesthesis practised as *poiesis* by artists of the re-existence have proven to be one of the many places that human culture creates as a semiotic boundary space.

It should be remembered that, as a product of semiotics, aesthesis implies three instances: the plasticity of sensitive and synaesthetic transformations; the imaginary of frontier or kinaesthetic relationships; and the intelligibility of the senses. Instances do not always act in the same direction, given that the nature of aesthesic processes leads them to cross limits when operating at the fundamental, structural level of objects, phenomena, and minds. A transposition that artists of decoloniality understand to be the foundation of the ecological wor-Idview that is not restricted to artistic creation, but extends to every form of knowledge. Thus, the liberation of the mind is not an isolated process but integrates with the actions and reactions of the imaginary, the sensitivity, and the senses. Senses, in the Portuguese language, are manifested as a boundary space between intelligibility and unintelligibility, translation and untranslatability. After all, the semantics that nourish and move the meaning of things is not to be confused with the sensoriality of the pulsation that moves living beings. What would become of one without the other? Nothing other than the trickery and cunning of the boundary and its semiosis.

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