

Lessons of Another World, by Théo-Mario Coppola

Aulas de Outro Mundo [Lessons of Another World]

Mabe Bethônico

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Mabe Bethônico's exhibition *Aulas de Outro Mundo* defies what could be defined as a contemporary crisis of representation and transmission. The projects – or 'lessons' – it gathers develop potential methodologies for contradicting established knowledge. These methodologies are intended as exercises that may be shared and further elaborated collectively. The 'other world' referred to in the title is situated in an interstice between a past to be examined, a present of resistance, and a future to be invented.

The aesthetic formalisation of the projects and the exhibition is addressed through a reflection on the social, political, economic and environmental underpinnings of pedagogy. By reinterpreting various forms of institutional language that are associated with teaching and learning, Mabe Bethônico brings counter-narratives to the forefront. She gives voice to stories that dominant institutions have excluded from historical, scientific and cultural discourse.

The artist scrutinizes the power structures of knowledge. She looks at how fixed patterns have been used in academic disciplines and national histories to establish or reinforce approved knowledge. She also looks at how knowledge performativity has been culturally designed to fit specific political contexts and to maintain so-called social cohesion.

Both on their own and as a whole, the projects unravel the violence that this implies, and the ramifications it has to the domination of human and non-human beings, and to the perpetuation of resource exploitation.

Throughout the world, many communities are forced to partially or fully abandon their cultural practices in order to conform to the ones that prevail. With *Escola-Congado [Congado-School]*, Mabe Bethônico investigates the conflicting processes at stake in transcultural assimilation. The fabric banners – or 'textile boards' – explore the status of congado in Brazilian society and its inner workings in a relation to language. A syncretic Afro-Brazilian ritual practice that involves music and dance, congado is inextricably linked to how it is

passed on. Envisioning it as a 'school', Mabe Bethônico highlights the value of practised knowledge within its communities.

Educa-se nas Relações [Educating Through Relations] is a series of prints made from rephotographed transparencies and mounts. The human actions, other living beings and geological elements depicted in the original educational slides have been cut-up and reassembled into montages and collages that deconstruct the categories of naturalist taxonomy. Mabe Bethônico's analytical approach of these educational elements brings about a new set of representations forming an ecosystem that symbolically and structurally mirrors the porosity of the world.

The video *Mountains Thrashing Out* further examines the possibilities of knowledge reinterpretation. The artist has cut out clouds of smoke from a geology book and collected them to make a collage, which is featured in the opening sequence. The process of selecting these clouds and turning them into a single image is then shown in reverse, implausibly suggesting that an action might be erased through a reversal of time. The video echoes the dire consequences of the Capitalocene and, by extension, that while environmental awareness is increasing, past actions are nonetheless irreversible.

Mabe Bethônico's interest in historiography unfolds in *História do Brasil [History of Brazil]* and *Reverendo Legendas [Revisiting Captions]*. The two groups of mixed-media works examine the teaching of Brazil's colonial history and how this history was inscribed in modern consciousness through the dissemination of idealized representations of the country designed by those who colonized and named it, be they conquerors, priests, or political leaders. The works confront how children and adults have been constantly exposed to what oppressors want to force them to believe, and how attacks on indigenous peoples and lands were – and continue to be – hidden by distorted narratives.

Betty Bloomsfield raises the issue of knowledge density and potential information overload. In the video, a lecturer dressed up in a puppet mask speaks to a virtual audience through the camera. A committed researcher, the lecturer wants to share her knowledge of the planetary environmental crisis. But she cannot remember how she set out her reasoning, and gradually gets lost in the number and variety of current theories and analyses. Through this fictional character, the artist astutely considers the demands of keeping abreast of new theoretical contributions to research on the environment.

The exhibition is an opportunity to reconsider education from a critical perspective. Mabe Bethônico's work follows unacknowledged narratives and their inflections, uncovering traces on the margins of dominant discourses. Her work also emphasises the interrelationships between language and domination in human dynamics and activities, by revealing what has been made invisible by official histories. It demonstrates how knowledge is not superimposed on the world but is a dialectic aspect of it. The artist's practice lies at a transition point between a critical reading of nationalism, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and naturalism as systems of information, and an emancipatory future where vertical and horizontal forces are combined.

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