



October
School
México 2019

ECOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE.
STORIES UNTOLD BY HISTORY



ANGELUS NOVUS. Paul Klee. 1920



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OCTOBER SCHOOL, Mexico City 2019.

ARTS & DESIGN FACULTY.

NATIONAL AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF MEXICO.

Project proposal of Prof. José Miguel González Casanova. March 2019.

“There is a painting by Klee called Angelus Novus. It depicts an angel who seems on the verge of distancing himself from something that has him astounded. His eyes are wide and staring, his mouth is open and his wings are spread. It is, no doubt, how the Angel of History must look. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see before us a chain of events, he sees an unending catastrophe that ceaselessly piles up wreckage upon wreckage, and throws it at his feet. Surely he would want to stop, wake the dead and rebuild what has been broken. But a tempest blows from paradise and lifts his wings with such strength that the angel can no longer fold them. The tempest drags him inevitably into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of wreckage keeps growing before him till it reaches the heavens. That tempest is what we call progress.”

Walter Benjamin

“The Angelus Novus, the Angel of History, is the metaphor used by Walter Benjamin to show his discontent with the theory of the history of Western modernity, a theory that has deprived the past of its redemptive character, transformed the present into a fleeting instant and delivered the future to all excess in the name of progress. Without completely agreeing with Benjamin, I consider that it is necessary to have a new theory of history



that fulfills two objectives. On one hand, it should expand the present in a way that makes room for many of the social experiences that today are wasted, marginalized, discredited, silenced for not corresponding to that which, at this moment, is consonant with the monocultures of knowledge and the dominant practice. On the other hand, it should shrink the future in such a way that the glorification of progress – which so frequently becomes cynical realism – can be substituted by the search for alternatives both utopian and realist.

We have titled the topic that we propose to work on during the next session of the October School in Mexico City “Ecology of Knowledge. Stories Untold by History”, inspired by two sources: first, the concept of ecology of knowledge by the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who is in favor of the decolonization of knowledge subject to what he calls an abysmal thought that has separated it from concrete realities by a line that marginalizes and hides them. A frontier that separates the one, conceived as unique and true, from the others.

“It is an ecology because it is based on the recognition of the plurality of heterogeneous knowledges (one of them is modern science) and on the continuous and dynamic interconnections among them without compromising their autonomy. The ecology of knowledges is based on the idea that knowledge is interknowledge”.

The second source is this year’s winning samba-enredo song at the Rio de Janeiro carnival, by the Escola da Mangueira that says:

“Let me tell you
the story untold by history
the flip side of the same place
in the struggle is that people find each other”

On this occasion that the October School meets in Mexico, we propose to organize the study of public art around the discovery of histories and



knowledges that are marginalized, silenced, or excluded from the order imposed by hegemonic History, modern science, capitalist economy, and in general by the Western monoculture that erases the heterogeneous epistemology of the South. From the organization of illustrated, academic and formal educational knowledge, knowledge has been specialized and separated from life, from subjective and intersubjective experiences, it is subordinate to the knowledge of the conquering reason that controls and limits it according to a system of political and economic power based on the expropriation and domination of what is different. Faced with the ruling order of sameness and the quantifying measurement that uniforms all differences, the particular, that excludes, ignores, and makes invisible, to the point of disappearing the knowledges, identities and sensibilities, of that which does not correspond to its own sameness, it is necessary to find an ecological balance of knowledges procuring that the production of knowledge be collective, interactive, intersubjective and networked, starting with the recognition of knowledges in an epistemology in which, according to the thinking of Souza Santos, the diverse is not necessarily disunited, the unified is not necessarily uniform, the same is not necessarily identical, the different is not necessarily inferior or superior.

There are countless knowledges and possible practices, which is why each exercise of the ecology of knowledges involves a selection and a field of interaction in which the exercise takes place. The October School 2019 will endeavor to explore theoretical proposals and social and artistic practices that, more than seeking professionalization, are looking to be defined by their pragmatic contribution to a determined practice in which knowledge is integrated. We are selecting three fundamental practical fields to begin our study:

- 1.- The preservation of biodiversity can lead to an ecology between scientific knowledge and rural or indigenous knowledge.
- 2.- The struggle against discrimination can lead to an ecology between knowledges produced by different social movements: feminist, antiracist,



freedom of sexual orientation, human rights, indigenous, Afro-descendant, etc.

3.- The development of economic models of production, distribution and exchange, alternatives to the capitalist system, in which an exploitative relationship is not exerted and work is not separated from consumption by the intermediation of the market, as in cooperativism and tequio, can lead to an ecology of knowledges by favoring the conditions to build knowledge as a result of the collaboration of producer-consumers in a horizontal relationship, with no expropriation or imposition of any kind.

For two weeks the October School will be graced with the presence of lecturers, university academics, artists, and activists, who will present theoretical research projects and practices contextualized in these fields of common action.

Simultaneously, the students of this program will participate in the creation of a Public Art project in the environment of the neighborhood of Los Pedregales de Santo Domingo, located next to the University City campus of the UNAM, originally formed by the settlement of 5000 squatters from different states in the country, who in 1971 illegally occupied these lands in what has been the largest individual land invasion in Latin America, and which today constitutes one of the most populous neighborhoods of Mexico City with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Santo Domingo is located next to University City in the zone geographically known as "badlands", due to the soil being considered useless because of the impossibility of cultivation due to their being a rocky extension provoked by volcanic lava, with layers of up to 40 meters formed by the explosion of the Xitle volcano approximately 1670 years ago. In this territory gather people from all regions of the country, often settled in neighborhoods organized by the inhabitants' states of origin, in which they maintain their traditions, often their native languages, and even restaurants with traditional food from their provinces.



The idea is to take advantage of this pluricultural context of the neighborhood of Santo Domingo to develop a research project and collaborative creation. To start, the students of the October School will impart a class or conference, in which they will teach their peers and inhabitants of this neighborhood some hidden, marginalized, censured or endangered knowledge, gathered in their original environments. It is necessary for the participants of the October School to send in advance the synopses of the knowledges that they propose to transmit in order to find potentially interested audiences in the community, and in order to announce the class activities of the October School at the "Escuelita Emiliano Zapata" Center of Arts and Trades, neighborhood cultural space with 25 years of operation, which we propose as the base of the development of this arts education project.

In this process we will also have the participation of students from the FAD, from the "La Colmena" Interdisciplinary Workshop and the previous participants of the October School, who will assist in community mediation. It should be noted that the participation of English to Spanish translators will be necessary to facilitate communication.

Based on this experience of teaching-learning with the community, research/creation teams will be formed from the participants. These may correspond to the three aforementioned fields of Preservation of Biodiversity, Defense against Discrimination, and Creative and Solidary Economies, or to those that develop naturally from the October School student proposals, which will create public art intervention projects that can operate effectively in this social context. The projects developed can be of a concrete or abstract nature, and should draw attention to a problem, support the construction of communities and identities, and foment the exchange of knowledges through collective experiences and the creation of networks of intersubjective communication.



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The group of the *October School 2019* will take place from the 26th of October to the 10th of November, and will be comprised of 45 students from Costa Rica, China, India, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, and Switzerland, with the support of professors and artists from the same countries, as well as students from the Arts and Design Faculty of the UNAM.