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## THE DECOLONIAL DEBATE: TERRITORIES O DEBATE DECOLONIAL: TERRITÓRIOS

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## Abstract

This essay addresses the growing interest in the spatial dimension of coloniality. It argues that such an interest is out of step with other fields of Social Science not only because of the coloniality of knowledge that still operates in the disciplines responsible for designing human environment — Architecture, Urban Design and Spatial Planning —, but also the absence of a voice representing these areas inside the first generation of decolonial thinkers. In that sense, the essay vindicates young voices that had studied different manifestations of coloniality in the last ten years based on the concept of "territorial coloniality". To reach those goals, a self-reflexive analysis is used on personal experience linked to decolonial criticism in Architecture, as well as a review of the writings of some other invisible authors. Additionally, the concept of "architectural coloniality" is proposed as a category that describes the systemic nature of the spatial dimension of coloniality.

**Keywords:** Architectural praxis, Design, Coloniality, Modernity, Academy

## 1 Introduction

The modernity-coloniality perspective has finally emerged as a necessary discussion of, without any absolute pretensions, what I usually define as "disciplines responsible for designing human environment", which means Architecture, Urban Design and Spatial Planning. An evidence of this shift are the recent papers about the subject published in the Chilean journal *INVI* (38(107), 2023) and the Colombian journal *Dearq* (36, 2023), as well as the appearance of the concept of decolonization in the Venice Architecture Biennale 2023 curated by Lesley Lokko. Another evidence, prior to this account, are the Brazilian journal *Redobra* (15, 2020), the Chilean journal *ARQ* (110, 2022), and so it will be the latest call of the *VIRUS Journal*.

We are talking about a logical intellectual event because the general architectonic, urban and terrestrial models continue to achieve the materialization of a civilizing project — of European modernity — whose final crisis is clear. However, it is contradictory that the *boom* of this concern occurs with a noticeable discrepancy with respect to other areas of Social Science. In this assertion resides the motivation to write this essay, which I pretend to, on one hand, argue that this discrepancy is due to the coloniality of the knowledge that operates in the disciplines responsible for the design of human environments — Architecture, Urban Design and Spatial Planning — and also because of the absence of a voice that represents these areas within the first generation of thinkers and decolonial thinkers. On the other hand, I aim to contribute with some concepts that might be assumed as directions for a decolonial way of looking at the architectural praxis.

To develop these ideas, previously I will present a conceptualization of the professional scope of the design and an approximation to the modernity-coloniality perspective. Then, I will dedicate the article to a self-reflexive analysis on my own personal experience linked to the critics of decolonial architecture. I will assume a narrative writing style as a research method (see Vargas, 2010) to contrast a chronological revision of personal events with commentary on texts published about the spatial dimension of coloniality during the last decades. For that, I will use my own texts and the texts from young authors.

## 2 A necessary historical and conceptual revision

To achieve the aims of this essay, it is appropriate to use two conceptual explanations about the professional scope of architecture. The first one refers to the disciplines responsible for the design of human environments. This is a disciplinary delimitation I propose following the lessons of Roberto Segre and Eliana Cardenas, of the Faculty of Architecture of the José Antonio Echeverría Higher Polytechnic Institute (currently Technological University of Havana "José Antonio Echeverría"), who were marked by the Marxist critique about the city, the structuralist influence on the architectonic theory and also the Latin-American cultural studies. This definition

assumes that the design is a creative activity of multiple scales and historically conditioned by factors that, broadly, I sum up as physical-environmental, socio-cultural and technical-economic<sup>1</sup>.

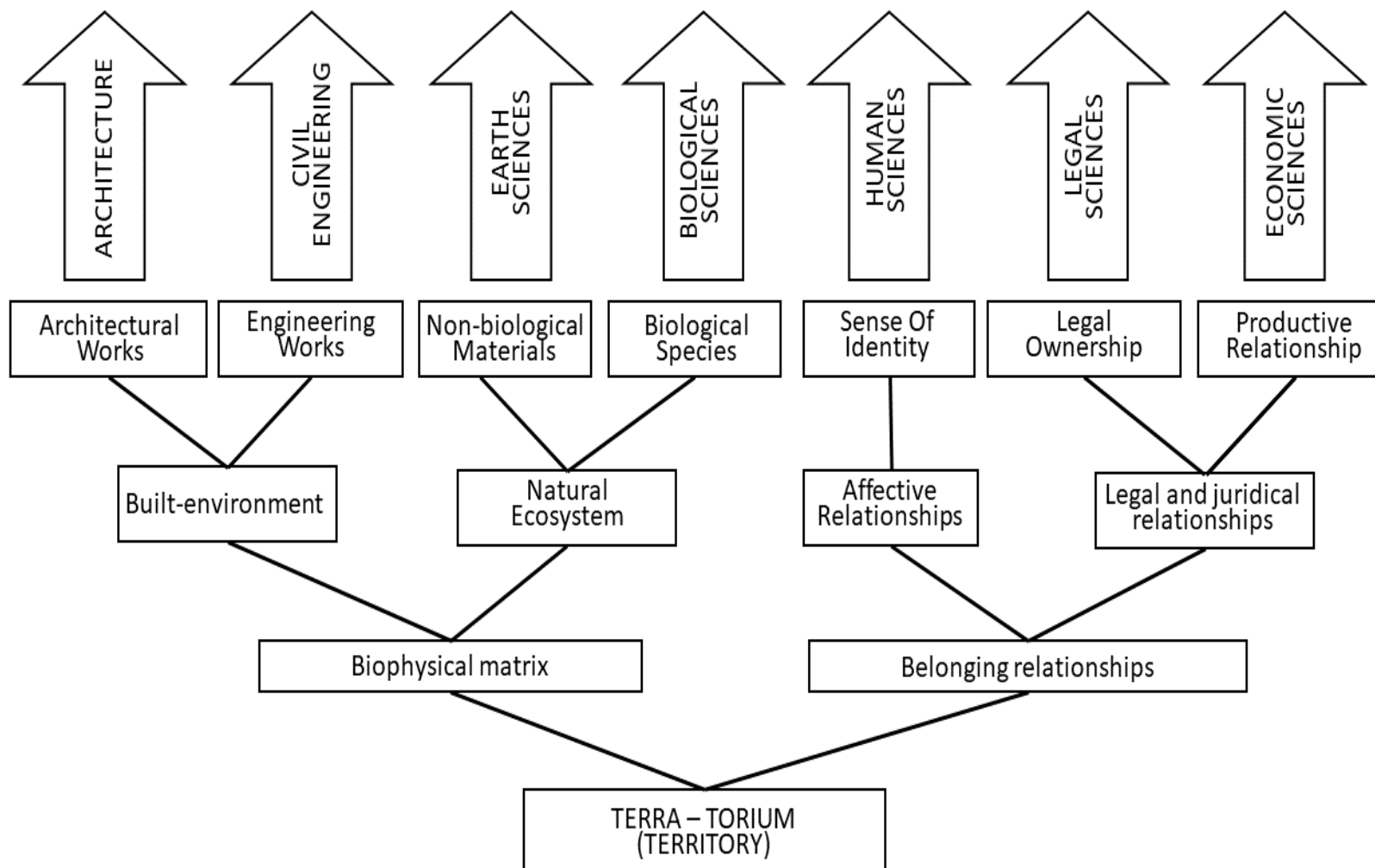
## 2.1 Conceptual explanations about the architectural praxis

In this way, it is understood that all product from the design activity, all designed object, regardless of the scale in which it is framed, must value with a vocation. In other words, the object must be valued beyond its compositional, functional, or economical aspects, to which the disciplinary knowledge of the design is usually limited to, including in this valuation social, environmental, and cultural implications linked to the specific contexts and users. This position might seem a truth of Pedro Grullo, but it has mostly been ignored in the design practice under the pretext of universality of the user, the objectivity of the process, the rationality, the innovation, and a continuous list of reasons associated with the hegemonic discourse of the development, as mentioned by Quijano-Valencia (2002), that makes sense to the commercial production of the modern world-system.

The second explanation is related to the notion of “architectural praxis”, which is useful, at least, for the Latino and Latina Critical Theory. As a result of the first explanation, I propose the adjective "architectural" to make generalizations about the "architectonic", "the urban" and "the territorial". In this sense, the adjective "architectonic" is dedicated to refer to one of three major scales of the activity of design (architectonic, urban, and territorial). while "architectural" encompasses them but, most importantly, emphasizes the necessity of repairing the incision that the modern academy — meaning the institutions that promote occidental knowledge — made in the understanding of the systematic character of the human environment (as shown in Figure 1). This incision, related to the "disillusion of the world", was translated in the objectual management of the territory and the parcellation of the knowledge that each new discipline reclaims authority (Farrés, 2013a). This can be explained from the epistemological assumptions of modern science (dualism, rationalism, empiricism, positivism, reductionism...) at same same time this also responds to the administrative questionings related to the commercialization of knowledge that has thrown the representativeness of the university as institution into crisis (Lander, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding this discussion, see Segre and Cárdenas (1982); Segre (1985), Cárdenas (1998), Farrés & Segre (2013), and Farrés (2021).



**Fig.1:** An approximation to a general classification of the components of the territory and its relationship with an approach from the disciplines. Source: Farrés, 2013a. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10481/29967>. Access on: 07/07/2023.

By understanding these concepts (“disciplines responsible for designing human environment” and “architectural praxis”), the question I am going to deal with in the final considerations starts to make sense: regarding the emergence of the decolonial approach, why did the minor scales of the designer’s (graphic design and industrial design) scope had place a couple of years ago, while for the major scales (architecture design, urban design and territorial design) a *boom* is only happening now?

## 2.2 Historiographic and conceptual explanations about coloniality and the modernity-coloniality perspective

Another necessary explanation relates to the history and meaning of the term of coloniality, but also to the what is often interchangeably called “colonial power perspective”, “modernity-coloniality theory”, “colonial power theory”, “decolonial turn”, “decolonial inflexion”, or “decolonial perspective”. These terms allude to an approach on the conformation of the modern world-system that encompasses diverse critics based on the category “coloniality”. In my opinion, these terms have not been totally understood. An evidence of this misunderstanding is the variety of recent texts that use “decolonization” to allude to this approach even though the first authors of this approach never used this term. This is confusing because it seems to suggest a unified trend of thought similar to the European suffixes “-isms” of the XX century, and this never happened. In fact, the Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel, one the pioneers, has mentioned several occasions that it had never been a “modernity/coloniality group” but a network of thinkers

with different nodes, geographically situated, that has extended beyond the context of the Americas in which it appeared. A network that coincides with interests and points of view, but also has confrontations regarding interpretations<sup>2</sup>.

It could be stated that this perception of a group may have expanded due to the article *Worlds and knowledges otherwise* written by the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2003), which has more than 1400 citations on Google Scholar to this day. The author alludes to a “research group in Latin America and in the United States that is elaborating an original interpretation of modernity, globality, and difference” (Escobar, 2003, p. 51, our translation). He proposes to refer to it as the Research Program of Modernity/Coloniality following a free interpretation of the notion of Lakatos (1978). The author mentions the existence of a group of researchers with an emergent perspective, directly connected with the texts of the Peruvian sociologist and theoretical politician Aníbal Quijano. He also insists that the group is a program of research linked to diverse genealogies of thought, Latin-American or not, among which includes the Liberation theology, philosophy of liberation, autonomous social science, dependency theory, Latin-American debates about modernity and postmodernity, discussions about hybridity, postcolonialism, subordination studies, cultural studies, and others.

In a paper published later — the introduction of the book *The decolonial turn. Reflections for an epistemic diversity beyond global capitalism* (2007) — written by the Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez in collaboration with Ramón Grosfoguel, the term “Modernity/Coloniality group” is applied in a way that it has the same meaning that Escobar (2003) used. Yet, they narrate a story of encounters of research labs where “new and critic generations are being formed of the modernity/coloniality” (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2005, p. 13, our translation). In other words, this is the place where the modernity/coloniality network originated, which, back then, had “a good number of young researchers that have already incorporated the decolonial perspective in their studies” (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 12, our translation). This idea is also presented by another Colombian of the first generation, the anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo, in *The decolonial inflection: sources, concepts and questions*, written with Axel Rojas, a book that is very didactic to understand modernity/coloniality (Restrepo & Rojas, 2010).

As usually happens in historical sciences, the distance in time could contribute to explanations about historical facts. As two decades have passed since the publication of the paper by Arturo Escobar, one should get rid of any vision of the Modernity/Coloniality Network group as monolithic. This position, which, by the way, usually is taken by those who seek to discredit the decolonial perspective by branding it as intellectual fashion. It happens either to vindicate fair recognition — as it is the case of the Bolivian sociologist and activist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui — or to insist on defending eurocentrism and, apparently, the unfinished project of modernity.

To avoid wrong interpretations, it is convenient to insist on the difference between “colonialism” and “coloniality” as world phenomena. Aníbal Quijano, the author of the second term, outlined the differences in *Coloniality and modernity/rationality* (1992)<sup>3</sup> in which he defined colonialism as a “relationship of direct, political, social and cultural domination of the European over the conquered people of all continents.” (Quijano, 1992, p. 11). Its political aspect, formally and explicitly, was defeated in most countries but not in other dimensions. In that essay, the author argues that coloniality “is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed.” (Quijano, 1992, p. 11). In that same book, Quijano let the reader foresee that it begins with the European colonialism in America, but it transcends to become a “cornerstone of any global power and main framework of the modes of exploitation and domination in the last 500 years” (Quijano, 1992, p. 11). He also states that the structure of power installed during the colonial period imposed certain intersubjective and discriminatory constructions that continue after the national independences as categories with “scientific” and “objective” pretensions of ahistorical meaning. It is equally treated as a natural phenomena not related to the history of power; these categories are coded as racial, ethnic, anthropological or national, according to the moment, agents and implicated populations (Quijano, 1992).

Indeed, if we observe the main lines of exploitation and social domination on a global scale, the matrix lines of the current world power, their distribution of resources, and the work of the world’s population, it becomes impossible not to see that most of the exploited

<sup>2</sup> As his doctoral student, I heard this argument around 2010, at University of Granada.

<sup>3</sup> The text had two publications: see Quijano (1992a) and Quijano (1992b) in the references list. I will use citations that correspond to the first publication.



people, the dominated people and the discriminated people, are exactly the members of the "races", "ethnic groups" or "nations" that were categorized as colonized peoples during the formation of that world power since the conquest of the American (Quijano, 1992, p. 12).

In this way, Quijano, whose thought aligns with the Marxist perspective until then, assumes a theoretical inflexion about the explanation of the world-system where the notion of "race" displaces the category "class" of the centrality awarded by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1979). The same Wallerstein confirms this perspective when he published in collaboration with Quijano that same year *Americanity as a concept, or the Americas in the modern world-system* (see Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992). This argument on the role of organizer of the racism and ethnicism in the social and epistemic structure of the modern world-system will remain more explicit in *Race, ethnic group and nation in Mariátegui: open questions*, when he expresses:

Racism and ethnicism were initially produced in America and then reproduced in the rest of the colonized world as foundations of the specificity of the power relations between Europe and the population around the world (...). Since then, all other decisions and guidelines of social classification of the world's population and their location in the power relations act out in interrelation with racism and ethnicism, specifically, but not only, between Europeans and non-Europeans (Quijano, 1995, p. 4, our translation).

However, as I mentioned in a previous paper (Farrés, 2019), it will be necessary to recognize that Quijano (1992) did not give a clear definition of the concept of coloniality back then. Therefore, his essay generates questions about the concept, specifically when it is used as an adjective. In this way, when the use of "cultural coloniality" (Quijano, 1992, p. 19), leaves the door open for thinking about the existence of other kinds of colonialities, and idea that is emphasized when we read "coloniality of power" (Quijano, 1992, p. 19). This also occurs when he uses "political colonialism" (Quijano, 1992, p. 19), because it pays attention to the other two dimensions of colonialism that he highlighted (the social and the cultural). Then, it would make sense to also talk about "social colonialism" and "cultural colonialism". Another indeterminacy lies in not explaining what he means by 'power', although his discourse undoubtedly and implicitly recognizes that it is exercised in the most dissimilar areas of human existence. In the same way, the indifferent use of the terms "coloniality" and "coloniality of power" is confusing because he does not give an explicit definition of the latter. For instance, if the indifferent use of all terms is possible, what sense does it make to use the term "coloniality"? Would it not be enough to overflow the less known economic meaning of the concept "neocolonialism" and then to talk about "cultural neocolonialism" or "political neocolonialism"? Why would it be necessary to use a new word?

Such questions have been afterwards clarified by Quijano and other authors, but there was something already clear in his 1992 text: the concept refers to racialized power relations. This means that "marked by a hierarchy ethnic/racial in which the European colonizer self-defined as superior to the rest of the world's populations, and in this way, presents its rationalities as superior to the rest of rationalities." (Farrés, 2019, p. 33, our translation). Therefore, talking about coloniality implies the recognition of the original global character of the processes as well as its foundations and its consequences.

Considering all the above mentioned, it is important to provide two other clarifications already presented by Ramón Grosfoguel. The first one is that idea contained in the word coloniality — "the race is an organizing principle of the capitalist accumulation, the political economy, and the international division of labor of the global capitalist system of the Sixteen century" (Grosfoguel as cited in Martínez, 2013, p. 43, our translation) —, which was already present in the Chicana Feminist Thought before that Quijano coined the term and, before that, in the African thought and the Black thought of the Americas. But the novelty of Quijano exists on, when using the concept of "coloniality of power", offering an original way to designate the links between the notions of "race" and other power relations that help to distinguish "colonialism" and "coloniality" (Martínez, 2013, pp. 43-44, our translation). The second annotation reaffirms the first one: the idea of racism as a foundational element of the modernity/coloniality has been reinforced by several sources today, highlighting the notion of the construction of epistemic racism/sexism (see Grosfoguel, 2011, 2013).

Beyond these imprecisions, the text written by Quijano (1992) will be a foundational element to many interpretations about the historical reality of the Research Program of Latin-American modernity/coloniality. Henceforth, a global network of thought has appeared. The originality and pertinence of the term coloniality has been reaffirmed over time with subsequent contributions of Quijano himself and

other authors. This line will have a fundamental role in the notions of "coloniality of knowledge" and "coloniality of being", which are theorized respectively by the Venezuelan Edgardo Langer (2000) and the Argentinian Walter D. Mignolo (2000). They were created in a context of meaningful discussions between thinkers of different geographical origins, disciplines, and world views.

The concept "coloniality of knowledge" by Edgardo Lander appeared because of the incapacity of the academic and political debates in multiple fields of the social sciences to suggest theoretical and practical options as alternatives of the current neoliberal system, the total preponderance of the market, and the globalized lifestyle. In this way, his thesis about neoliberalism appears as a hegemonic discourse of the civilizing model imposed by the West. It is a synthesis of the "basic assumptions and values of the modern liberal society around the human being, the wealth, the nature, the history, the progress, the knowledge, and the good life" (Lander, 2000a, p. 11, our translation). In this manner, his argument is elaborated on the necessity of looking for alternatives of models or theories outside the liberal cosmopolitanism that marks the economy as a discipline. In this way, his proposal relates the colonial hierarchy of the modern/colonial paradigms with the role of the university as promoter of such civilizing models.

(...) the professional development (that the university offers), the research, the texts that circulated, the journals that are received, the places where the graduation programs are made, the standards of the assessment and the recognition of the academic staff. It all points to the systematic reproduction of a view of the world since the hegemonic perspectives of the North (Lander, 2000b, p. 65 as cited in Castro-Gómez, 2007, our translation).

Lander explains that the colonial organization of the world begins hand in hand with the colonial constitution "of the knowledge, the languages, the memory and the imaginary" (Lander, 2000a, p. 16, our translation) — which is he alludes to the "colonial knowledge" and the "coloniality of being" — and that, by the 19th Century, the great universal narrative that subdues the "totality of space and time — all cultures, populations, and territories of the planet present and past" (Lander, 2000a, p. 16, our translation) will be formed. Regarding the concept of "coloniality of being", Puerto Rican philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007a) recognizes the ownership to Walter D. Mignolo and explains it as a consequence of the book *The darker side of the Renaissance* (1995). In this regard he explains:

(...) The idea was that, in addition to the coloniality of power, there will also be the coloniality of knowledge, hence there could be a specific coloniality of being. And because the coloniality of power refers to the interrelation between modern ways of exploitation and domination, then the coloniality of knowledge must deal with the role of the epistemology and the general tasks of the production of knowledge in the reproduction of regimes of colonial thinking. The coloniality of being refers to the vivid experience of colonization and its impact in the language (Maldonado-Torres, 2007a, p. 129-130, our translation).

Nevertheless, in such book there is not a direct reference to the concept of coloniality, even though its demarcation on the differences between the locus of enunciation of the postmodernity and the locus of enunciation of the postcoloniality have a total affinity with what Quijano (1992) has written. The concepts of "colonial difference", "colonial matrix of power" or "coloniality of being" were explained by Mignolo a while after in *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge and Border Thinking* (2000). In fact, Mignolo (2009) recognizes that he did not know about Quijano (1992) when he wrote *The darker side*, but reading him was like an epiphany and motivation to write *Local Histories/Global Designs*.

Texts published later by Quijano are clearer in many of the points aforementioned. For example, Quijano (2001) makes explicit the difference between colonialism and coloniality: while the former refers to a political and economic relationship where the sovereignty of a nation or people rests on the power of another nation, which converts the last one on an empire, the second one, for instance, alludes to patterns of power that emerged with the colonialism, but were extended beyond it because they define the cultural, intersubjective relationships, of distribution of the labor and the production of knowledge in the context of the now Nation States. In the same way, he makes more explicit his definition of "coloniality of power":

The coloniality of power is one of the constitutive elements of the global pattern of capitalist power. It is founded on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world's population, serving as the cornerstone of such a pattern of power. It operates in every material and subjective plane, sphere, and dimension of everyday social existence, doing so at a societal level. (Quijano, 2007, p. 73, our translation).

Other authors have also insisted on that difference. For example, Grosfoguel specifies that colonialism is not new in the history of civilizations — as regional phenomenon (not global), it might be found in different moments and geographical latitudes before of the conquest of the New World —, but it is the coloniality and its racial discourse:

Colonialism is older than coloniality (...). What is new in the modern/colonial world is the justification of such domination and the colonial exploitation crosses over the articulation of the racial discourse about the inferiority of the conquered people and the superiority of the conqueror. (Grosfoguel as cited in Montes & Busso, 2007, our translation).

In this context, Restrepo and Rojas (2010) emphasize that colonialism implies a political and military control deploy over the colonized territory to “guarantee the exploitation of labor and the wealth of the colonies for the benefit of the colonizer” (Restrepo & Rojas, 2010, p. 15, our translation). Its scopes are more punctual and reduced than of the coloniality because it is a historical phenomenon more complex that it reaches us today:

(...) a pattern of power that operates through the naturalization of territorial, racial, cultural, and epistemic hierarchies that enables the reproduction of relations of domination. This pattern not only guarantees the exploitation of the capital of some human beings by others on a global scale, but also the subalternation and obliteration of the knowledge, experiences, and lifestyles of those who are dominated and exploited. (Restrepo & Rojas, 2010, p. 15, our translation).

As Maldonado-Torres explains, coloniality “maintains alive in books, in the criteria for the academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience” that as modern subjects “we breath coloniality all the time and every day.” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b, p. 243). It is a vision that confirms Restrepo and Rojas’ perspective when they express that the modern world-system is structured by a pattern or matrix of power where “work, subjectivities, knowledge, places and, human beings of the planet are organized hierarchically and governed through the racialization in the operation framework of a certain way of production and distribution of wealth.” (Restrepo & Rojas, 2010, p. 16, our translation).

All definitions are integrated by Santiago Castro-Gómez in an analysis about the role of the universities in the persistence of coloniality. He proposes to understand coloniality as a triangular structure between the coloniality of being, the coloniality of power and the coloniality of knowledge; a structure eternalized by a colonial view of the world that professes the modern science that obeys “an epistemic model deployed by the western modernity” (Castro-Gómez, 2007, p. 79, our translation) and is characterized by the hubris of the starting point: “to make a point of view about all other points of view, but without that point of view to have another point of view” (Castro-Gómez, 2007, p. 83, our translation). In this sense, the author offers a very pedagogical explanation about coloniality in the relationship between being-power-know.

### **3 Towards an understanding of the spatial dimension of coloniality**

#### **3.1 Contextualization of an experience**

In 2008, after the publication of *A decolonial turn*, I started my studies in the doctoral program City, Territory and Sustainable Planning at University of Granada (Spain) thanks to a scholarship of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) I have postulated with a project called *Towards an architecture of liberation*. The research project aimed to argue on the necessity to liberate the professional scope of architecture in Cuba of certain homogenized and unsustainable dogmas that — I used to think — were the result of a bureaucratic form to manage the production of the habitat and the acrylic implementation of the principles of modernity. For me, that would explain the reproduction of certain urban, architectonic and international models in Cuba.

The concept “dogma” as a category of analysis came into play through a recent text that arrived in my hands as student and disciple of Eliana Cárdenas: *Architecture dogmas and unlearning: reflecting about the practice and practicing the reflection*, written by the Mexican Enrique Urzaiz (2005). The author debates the dogmas of pedagogy of architecture in modernity, among other issues. Since this reference, the questioning about modernity remained implicit, but in line with what I learned from Segre and Cárdenas. I believed faithfully in the idea that an “appropriated modernity” suggested from a “critic regionalism” of a very strong environmental and cultural

source could be the alternative to the anonymous production of the global esthetics that was installed in the country since the 1990s as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the forced opening to international tourism. On one hand, the concepts of "dogma" and "unlearning" led to the fortuitously emergence of the idea of "liberation" without any influence of Enrique Dussel's thought, who I had not heard when I drafted my research proposal. A little after I left Cuba, I read something about his work and, of course, he became one of my first interests to enter the University of Granada.

In Granada, having as tutor the environmental scientist and urban planner Alberto Matarán — he was already working in the Italian Territorial School and in Alberto Magnaghi, nearly to be the translator to Spanish of his most important book, *Il progetto locale* (see Magnaghi, 2011) — the category of "homogenization" led to "deterritorialization of the metropolis". Additionally, the broad access to the Internet facilitated me to start reading Enrique Dussel. By serendipity, the mention of this Latino philosopher in the bibliography of a course promoted by the Institute for Migration Research (UGR) during the first months of 2009 made me know about Ramón Grosfoguel and through him, the modernity/coloniality perspective.

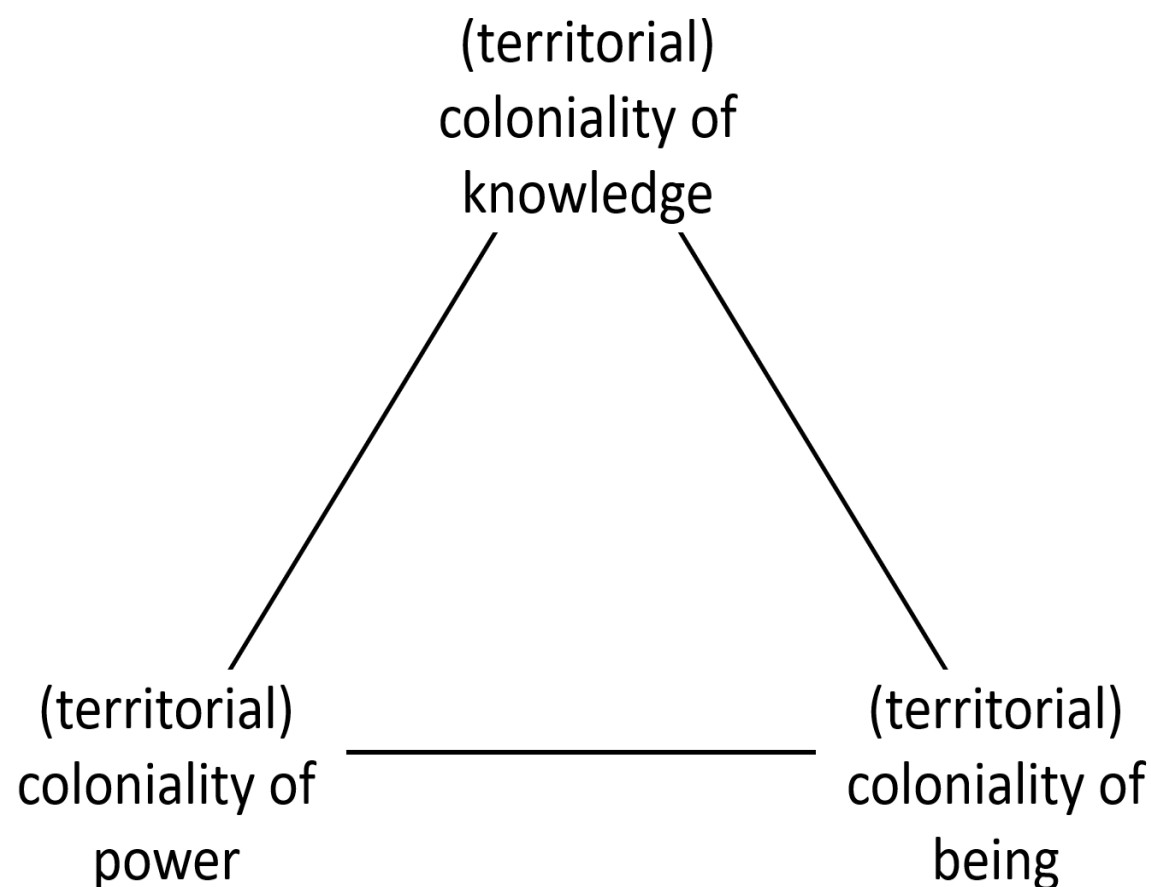
In this manner, I gave a "decolonial turn" to the explanation of my problem: I understood that the deterritorialization of the metropolis presented in capitalist countries and as well as in Cuba, a socialist country, could be explained because of the western epistemological hegemony of the modern and colonial world-system. Around this idea, I wrote the text *Decolonize the territory: epistemological considerations for Habana* presented for the obtainment of my Advanced Studies Diploma (DEA) in September 2010, in which Alberto Matarán would use it as reference in his introduction to the Magnaghi's book when he mentions the possibility that represents the territorial perspective to negotiate with the Global South. With some modifications, that text was presented afterwards as my doctoral dissertation (n.d. Farrés, 2013a). During that process, I participated in lectures, I wrote chapters of books and papers (see Farrés & Matarán, 2012a, 2012b) and subsequently, other additional texts (see Farrés, 2013b, 2015, 2016, 2019; Farrés & Toro, 2014; Farrés, Matarán & Avello, 2015). Some of them have been translated into Portuguese (see Farrés & Matarán, 2021).

### **3.2 Understanding the spatial dimensions of coloniality: from a territorial coloniality to an architectural coloniality**

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The unifying thread of those works has been the notion "territorial coloniality" gathered in Farrés and Matarán (2012) as the "combination of patterns of power that serve in the territorial praxis to establish hegemonically a conception of territory over others that result inferiorized" (Farrés & Matarán, 2012, p. 152, our translation). As Castro-Gómez (2007), we argue the peculiarity of the triangular structure between the "coloniality of the territorial being", the "coloniality of the territorial power" and the "coloniality of the territorial knowledge". In this sense, the colonial debate was territorialized, unveiling a spatial dimension of coloniality that had not been treated in that way previously, maybe because of the absence of professionals in architecture, urbanism, or territorial statutes as part of the first generation of decolonial thinkers





**Fig.2:** The territorial coloniality triangle. Source: Farrés & Matarán, 2012b. Available at: <https://revistas.unicolmayor.edu.co/index.php/tabularasa/article/view/1371>. Access on 07/07/2023.

If we consider the conceptual explanations that I presented in the first part of this essay, it is easy to understand that all the time I was conscious that I could talk in an equivalent way about the "urban coloniality" and the "architectonic coloniality", which is mentioned in various of the aforementioned texts. Now, I chose to reduce the explanation just to one of the scales because of a simple operational reason: I should hold a doctoral dissertation in an urban program in which my discourse was questioned by certain academic authorities that, rejecting the pertinence as disciplinary work in urbanism and territorial planning, classified it as part of the areas of sociology, political sciences, or philosophy. Fortunately, it was not the opinion of the dissertation committee.

I also found such position clinging to a reductionist academic concept that grants a privilege to the parcellation of the knowledge in the vicissitudes to publish an index paper that the UGR asked me as a requirement to defend my doctoral dissertation: when I sent my paper to a journal related to the urban field, the peer reviewers said that it treated very little the urban theory or it was from architecture. When I sent my paper to journals of architecture, it was not considered as part of that field of knowledge. Nevertheless, the truth was that, in general, these were European or American journals written in English. Along with the same lines there was the response of rejection I received of the text *Decolonizing Architecture and Urban Planning. A Theoretical Approach starting in Havana* that I sent to the *Journal of Arch'I & Planning Research* in the beginning of 2013. The feedback of one of the peer reviewers was to direct my paper "to a journal that accepts work incorporating broad, arbitrary theoretical claims like those presented here" and they proposed *Antipode* or *Space and Society*. I could not send my paper to the latter because of time constraints but the editor of *Antipode* considered that the article "does not fit well with what we publish". It is certainly true that every journal had a division of opinions between who evaluated it because some of them rejected my paper and others approved it, but the editors took the final decision of not accepting it.

Fortunately, a journal of humanities accepted my paper — the Colombian *Tabula Rasa* — and it was accepted by the school of doctorates of the UGR to allow me to defend my dissertation. In that way, I got my doctoral degree and the ability to write and publish without any institutional commitments. I centered my late works on making explicit the idea of "architectural coloniality". Two texts that are part of a more philosophical research that I am soon going to present (see Farrés, 2016a, 2016b) certify that. In this sense, considering the architecture, the city, and the territory as manifestations of different scales of a most general category (the built environment) and in line with the conceptualization of the architectural praxis that I presented before, I propose to think the *architectural coloniality* as a tetrahedral structure between the coloniality of being, power, and knowledge in different architectural scales as it is presented in the following diagram in the Figure 3.

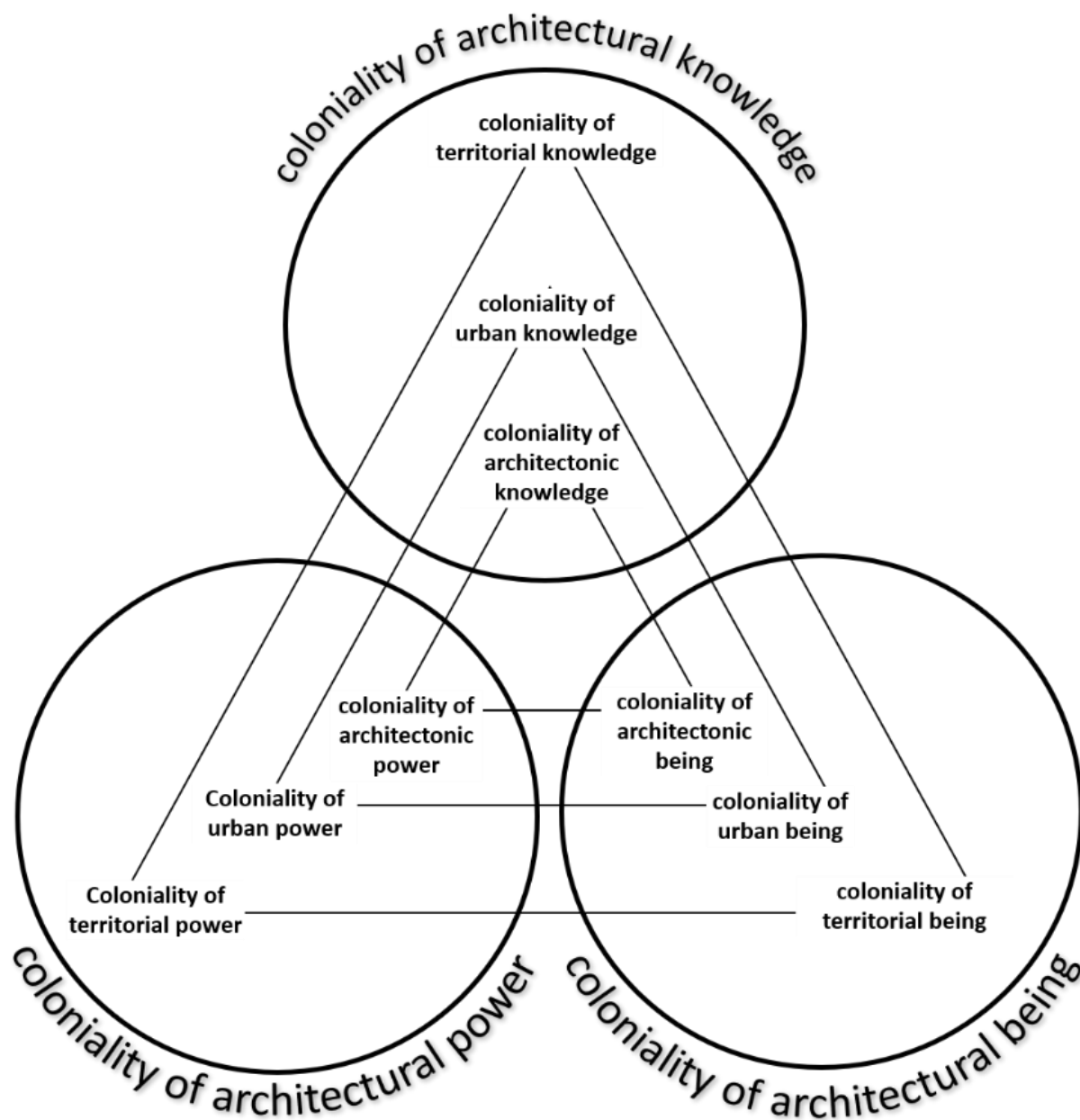


Fig. 3: The tetrahedral structure of the architectural coloniality. Source: The Author, 2023.

Therefore, we could talk about the "urban coloniality" and the "architectonic coloniality" as an analogy to the "territorial coloniality". Then, we would talk about the hegemony of a conception architectonic/urban about others articulated from the coloniality of the architectonic/urban knowledge. Or simply, we could define "architectural coloniality" in a multiple scale sense as awarded at the beginning of this essay, in a way each scale constitutes a particular manifestation. Consequently, we could affirm *coloniality of the architectural knowledge* as a empirical fact verified in two types of epistemic hierarchies different from each other but very relatable.:

1) *the hierarchy towards the exterior of architecture as a discipline*, given by the hegemony of the western architectural knowledge about the non-western architectural knowledge, and 2) *the hierarchy towards the interior of architecture as a discipline*, given by the hegemony of certain sub-disciplines about others (Figure 4). Such hierarchies are manifested in multiple forms, both inside and outside the walls of the academy. For example, in the sustained global deployment of the western notions of territory, city and architecture, or in the struggles between the archetypes of architects that I mentioned at the beginning, or also, in the disdain of architectural teaching that has assumed the ancestral, the traditional, the vernacular, and the popular relegated to a condition of patrimony or treated them as sources for the innovation, in the best scenario, without assuming that by themselves represent an alternative to the demands of the habitable spaces for the people.

## EPISTEMIC HIERARCHIES THAT SHOW THE COLONIALITY OF TERRITORIAL KNOWLEDGE

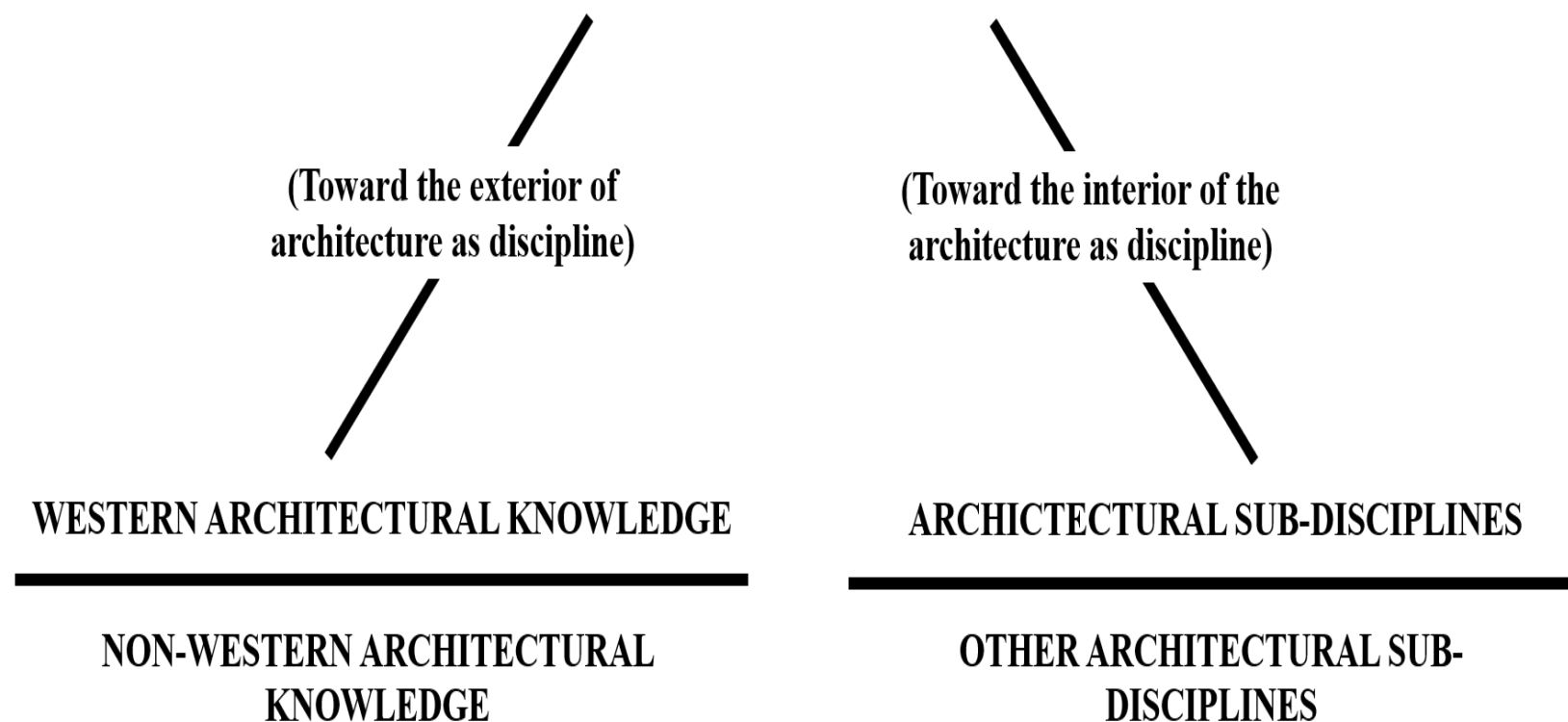


Fig. 4: Epistemic hierarchies that show the coloniality of territorial knowledge. Source: The Author, 2023 (original).

### 3.3 Early voices in the apprehension of the spatial dimension of the coloniality

Starting from the works mentioned before, in the last decades in Latin America, young researchers have appeared and formulated original interpretations in dialogue with the notion of "territorial coloniality". They are authors that address problems related to any of the design scales mentioned above. In the Hispanic context, Contreras (2016) stands out as an author that recognizes the epistemic value and its contributions to professional development, which he takes to direct the formulation of a research line in the Catholic University of Cuenca (see Sánchez, 2018). In the same manner, García-Chueca (2017) whose doctoral dissertation does a colonial critic to the concept "right to the city" proposes to delegalize and decolonize it while giving values to the non-normative expressions that emanate from the artistic-cultural decolonial field. Besides, Isasi (2018), whose master's thesis assumes the pertinences of the concept "coloniality of the territorial knowledge" and explains the recovery of the technologies of traditional construction (soil) as a possibility to develop decolonial aptitudes. On one hand, Mattioli (2018), whose doctoral dissertation directed by Ana María Falú, sees the communitarian practices and the cooperatives of social production of the habitats of social groups in the mountain range of Córdoba, Argentina, as an example of decolonization. From the Brazilian context, I would insist on the texts of Freire-Medeiros &

Name (2019), whose notion "epistemology of the favela rooftop" offers an inflexion in a way to understand urban informality beyond a certain idealization covered by postcolonial approaches, and Cunha (2019), who discusses the coloniality of knowledge in technical assistance for the construction of urban low-income houses.

#### 4 Final considerations

For what it is worth, the self-reflection and mentions I have just presented evidence that the field of knowledge related to the design of human environments are not exempt from the operation of the coloniality of knowledge. In this sense, it is easy to recognize from the cited bibliography that none of the publications prior to 2020 correspond to specific prestigious architecture and urban planning magazines for scientometrics purposes. This is not casual; these are texts written by master or doctoral students or by young professors, subordinated in their academic contexts, without a trajectory nor major relevance for the cognitive capitalism of the journals of high impact. People as visible as me in 2013, when I had to emigrate again, back then from Spain to Colombia, looking for any opportunity to facilitate me to continue my career as professor. People without a real ability to perform roles of importance in the academic networks of high impact were already established, and so, distant to homologate the big figures of the "the first generation of decolonial thinkers" in their respective fields.

In other words, to return to the question about why the *boom* that is happening now: in Architecture, Urban Design and Spatial Planning there was not a visible figure that played a similar role as of the first generation of decolonial thinkers in the last decade. This constitutes an opportunity for the voices of major academic relations to emerge as paladins of the territorial decoloniality, showing a questionable ignorance of the precedent works, an unjustified attitude today, because most of the texts mentioned here were published in open access journals or in institutional repositories with free access since Google Scholar. Such an attitude reminds the epistemic extractivism sometimes reported that is an inherent condition of the intellectual phallocracy institutionalized in the neoliberal university. And this is how the late *boom* in the inquiry about the spatial dimensions of coloniality, or similarly, the modern/colonial aspects of design in its major scales (architectonic, urban, and territorial). We are attending an intellectual occurrence that later or earlier had to happen in relation to the study of the spatial dimension of coloniality. However, we might take the risk that the academy might become another fashion.

Finally, it is worth insisting the decolonization of the architectural praxis demands the breakdown of the western epistemic hierarchy installed by modernity that take specific forms in the imposition of patterns to inhabit the different scales of human environments. Such rupture will require to lay out again the theoretical-conceptual relationships, methodological and administrative of the current conception of the disciplines responsible for the design of the human environments — this means to remove the structures of the academy — but also the relationships between these disciplines and the non-institutional knowledge. For instance, the ancestral knowledge, the peasants, and other emergent forms linked to the forms to conceive the inhabit, the being-in-the-world. In other words, it is required a systematic questioning about how the multi scale link has been conceived between the architecture, the city and the territory; and at the same time a bet to construct models to inhabit in accordance with the ecological limits, having as horizon of sense the spatial/environmental, social and epistemic justice.

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