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The Transatlantic Triangle of Artistic Circulation

Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel
Ecole normale supérieure, beatrice.joyeux-prunel@ens.fr

Catherine Dossin
Purdue University, cdossin@purdue.edu

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South-North-South

The Triangle of Transnational Artistic Circulations

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Editorial Statement

Editor-in-Chief

Catherine Dossin
Purdue University

Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel
École normale supérieure

The *ARTL@S BULLETIN* is a peer-reviewed, transdisciplinary journal devoted to spatial and transnational questions in the history of the arts and literature.

The journal promises to never separate methodology and history, and to support innovative research and new methodologies. Its ambition is twofold: 1. a focus on the “transnational” as constituted by exchange between the local and the global or between the national and the international, and 2. an openness to innovation in research methods, particularly the quantitative possibilities offered by digital mapping and data visualization.

By encouraging scholars to continuously shift the scope of their analysis from the national to the transnational, *ARTL@S BULLETIN* intends to contribute to the collective project of a global history of the arts.

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Cover: *Past Disquiet: Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition for Palestine, 1978*, exhibition view, 2015, MACBA. Photo: La Fotogràfica.

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The Transatlantic Triangle of Artistic Circulation

The international circulation of art has today become a rapidly expanding field of study, yet transcontinental circulations have thus far received less attention. In much the same way, a great deal of research has been conducted into bilateral artistic and cultural exchanges, yet scholarship around triangular systems is still somewhat lacking. This latter term refers to instances in which artistic circulation – whether in the form of artworks, artists, aesthetics or styles – involves at least three cultural reference points, and wherein effects of transformation, adaptation and readaptation are all the more complex. Despite the focus on bilateral exchanges, even a relatively cursory investigation of cultural transfers reveals that the majority are in fact triangular.¹ By bringing together in this volume the twin questions of transcontinental circulation and of triangular artistic and cultural transfers, we hope to broach a third and largely unexplored question: that of “South-North-South” circulations.

With the notion of “South-North-South,” we hope to go beyond the commonplace “North-South” interpretative prism; though the latter framework undeniably has the advantage of simplicity, all too often it overdetermines historical interpretation according to a model of a dominant/dominated binary. We would do better to consider the cultural connotations that the terms “North” and

“South” have assumed – connotations which are likely to endure for some time. While “North” implies a broad notion of economic and cultural power, and therefore domination, “South” holds connotations of marginalisation and of economic and cultural impoverishment. This binary pairing reduces the history of global artistic circulations to a phenomenon of straightforward domination, a conclusion that is unsatisfying both intellectually and historically. While questions of coloniality and postcoloniality are integral to any study of artistic and cultural circulations between Latin America and Europe, to give just one example, they must not replace this study altogether.² This is particularly true since “North” and “South” are highly relative terms. Galicia lies to the north of Spain, but in the south of Europe; Brazil is to the south of Portugal, whose position on the global artistic scene has often been considered, since the 19th century, as “meridional,” and therefore marginal. Similarly, the circulations of Spanish artwork to Argentina figures in a highly complex symbolic system.³ Even in the “Souths of the South” — such as Argentina — northern poles such as Buenos Aires are to be found, cities where cultural cross-pollination and international connections flourish.

By shifting our focus to a triangular dynamic, that of “South-North-South” circulations, it is possible

¹ On the question of triangular cultural transfers, see Michel Espagne and Katia Dmitrieva, eds., *Philologiques IV. Transferts culturels triangulaires : France - Allemagne - Russie* (Paris : les Éditions de la MSH, 1996).

² We have previously approached this question in Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, eds., *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

³ See the contribution to this current issue by Laura Karp Lugo, « L’art espagnol de l’Europe à l’Argentine : mobilités, transferts et réceptions (1890 – 1920) ».

to move beyond the rigidity that divides geographic areas into dominant and dominated: the connotations of a given area shift according to the given perspective. Within a given geographic area, artistic circulations and their hierarchies are subject to a constant process of renegotiation. It is this process that we have sought to explore with the contributions to this current issue. A region or city that appears as a periphery for some may well represent a centre for others, while, in much the same way, one cultural centre might be considered as the periphery of another. For an example of such a phenomenon, we need only look to the case of artistic circulations between former Spanish colonies and the cities Madrid and Barcelona – the metropole’s two competing cultural and political capitals – and the influence of further circulations towards Rome and Paris upon these.

Such circulations together offer a configuration that is markedly different from the “centre-periphery” model that is so often invoked in the history of global artistic circulations, and all the more so for the modern and contemporary periods. In this alternative configuration, we see that artists are not spontaneously drawn towards the cities that have generally been considered as central (i.e. Paris before 1945 and New York in the post-war period), but that they instead frequent multiple artistic and cultural hubs.⁴ The way in which artists were able to *personalize* their trajectories – in the psychological, social, and aesthetic senses of the term – is one of the marvels of the history of art. Highly personal factors always enter into play – as in the case of the Swiss-Brazilian couple John and Regina Graz, who are credited with the introduction of modern decorative arts to Brazil.⁵ Many artists who trained, exhibited, published, sold their artwork and forged their reputations abroad made their geographical and symbolic choices not according to some magnetic attraction to major artistic centres – even if they always took these into

⁴ For an example, see the contribution to this issue by Lucile Magnin, « Les peintures de paysages de Johann Moritz Rugendas : un exemple de transferts artistiques entre Europe et Amérique latine au XIXe siècle ».

⁵ Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni, « Les transferts de « l’art total » de la Suisse au Brésil : une modernisation très particulière ».

account in their calculations – but rather according to their own realities and situations: potential opportunities, pre-existing cultural and economic capital, as well as professional and personal networks and affinities. What’s more, these artists sought to make gains from their trajectories and the hierarchies which they implied, both at home and abroad. The significant cohort of South American artists that established its political and artistic avant-gardism between Paris and London in the 1960s and 1970s – thus preferring these capitals over the United States, despite the proximity of North America – were not only seeking a viable market;⁶ they were also looking to connect with established communities, some of which had existed for generations, and a cultural context that was more open to political radicalism.

In this instance, then, where is the North, and where is the South? Which is the centre, which is the periphery? By adopting a transcontinental and triangular – or even quadrangular – approach, the question of centres and peripheries becomes a less evident one, as does that of the hierarchies between North and South. With the object of their study thus complexified, historians are obliged to reconstitute a transnational social space that differs significantly from the binary and hierarchical one which tends to emerge when research focuses on just two geographical and cultural entities. A triangular starting point gives rise to a space that is less familiar, a priori, than the kind which results from a binary approach, and thus to a space which demands greater attention to sources. The triangular approach encourages historians to retrace the constitution of networks and the progressive development of creative friendships, as well as to recognize the importance of particular groups in the circulation – and non-circulation – of art and of artworks. Even the study of styles is altered by such an approach, as the study of “colonial” architecture in Algiers in the 19th century shows: rather than a uniform, Haussmann-esque import from Paris, this style was in fact the fruit of multiple cultural

⁶ Maria de Fátima Morethy Couto, « Between Paris and London: Contacts and Exchanges of South American Artists in Europe (1950-1970) ».

currents.⁷ A valid study of the colonial style must take into account the makeup of the groups – masons and architects, planners and labourers – who participated in the reorganisation of the city of Algiers. Many arrived from Italy and from Spain, and far from simply following to the letter the orders from the French metropole – they were, after all, amongst the future inhabitants of the districts which were under construction – they imported their own techniques, styles, and approaches to the habitat.

The triangular perspective also forces us to recognize the extent to which the North-South hierarchy served as a *sales argument*, albeit one which can be employed in a number of manners. It underpins, for example, the fabrication of the fantastical Latin American visual identity embodied by the clothing, the style and the colours of the *costumbrismo* engravings collected in Chile and Peru in the 19th century.⁸ Often considered a European concoction, closer historical investigation reveals this fantasy was the product of a far more complex – and more exciting – set of factors: a remarkable process of mimetic desire was at play, one which encouraged Europeans to imagine what they might discover in Latin America⁹; some would find a way to profit from these fantasies, such as the Parisian merchant who looked to quench his clients thirst for an adventurous identity by inventing – or reinventing – the figure of an endeavouring European artist who had supposedly “discovered” the costumes of the “authentic” and timeless Latin America.

We ought to interrogate, using a range of philosophical and perhaps even psychoanalytic notions, why the cultural hierarchy is so consistently produced with reference to some elsewhere, to a faraway place that we cannot know but which cultural mediators are more than happy to explain to us; we ought to question the choice of one ‘elsewhere’ as opposed to another and

consider what this choice might mean. The principle characteristic of this elsewhere is its capacity to generate a sense of shame that is at once individual and collective, and generates its own specific set of choices. It is as if the fabrication of tastes, styles, and artistic trajectories was determined by a cultural super-ego that is less informed by local cultural heritage or an ethnic, religious, or national culture, than by an interior motor fuelled by the existence of an other, a foreigner, be they real or imaginary, or both.

This volume concludes with a fine example of transnational research, which we were all the more drawn to for the fact that it draws on a single and unique source: an exhibition catalogue. Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti assembled an exhibition that was met with unanimous acclaim when it opened at the MacBa in 2015.¹⁰ The story they tell is characterized by a welcome absence of reasoning based on binaries such as centres and peripheries, dominant and dominated, friend and foe; such couplets have no place in an exhibition that looks to reconstruct an international network that sought to use art as a means of working towards peace. These pairings were further rendered useless by the curators’ choice to work from a single source: the catalogue, a veritable treasure map which allowed them to create a successful visual and sonic narrative. Similarly, the success of the ARTL@S project and its database of exhibition catalogues will be measured against its ability to inform this kind of referenced and contextualized art history once the data collected is made available to the public. In closing we would like warmly thank Nasser Soumi, who participated in the original 1978 exhibition, who spoke to us for this volume,¹¹ and who worked to ensure that images of the exhibition were made available to all.

⁷ Asma Hadjilal, « L’architecture des premières maisons européennes d’Alger 1830-1865 ».

⁸ Josefina de la Maza, Juan Ricardo Rey, Catalina Valdés, and Carolina Vanegas, « Art Collectors in Network and Identity Narratives: Contributions to a Cartography of the Genre of Types and Costumes in South America ».

⁹ René Girard, *Mimesis and Theory: Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1953-2005*. Ed. by Robert Doran (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti, « Past Disquiet: From Research to Exhibition ».

¹¹ Nasser Soumi, « Sondage Autour de l’Exposition Internationale Pour La Palestine 1978 ».