

Graphs, charts, maps: plotting the global history of modern art

[*Gráficos, cartas, mapas: traçando a história global da arte moderna*]

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RESUMO • Diversas novas tendências filosóficas nos estimulam a rever as metodologias em história da arte no sentido de descolonizar a mais poderosa de suas narrativas: o cânone modernista. Com este fim, o presente artigo explora como as abordagens quantitativas, cartográficas e estatísticas, combinadas com a utilização de outras abordagens mais tradicionais, podem nos ajudar a reconsiderar as hierarquias existentes no campo da história da arte. Utilizado geralmente para analisar grandes corpos de fontes similares, especialmente catálogos de exposições e periódicos, em longos períodos de tempo e em escalas globais, “o olhar distante” é útil para a construção de uma narrativa coerente e global, presente nas geopolíticas modernistas em suas dimensões sociais, quando a complexidade é restaurada e a agência das circulações artísticas encontra seu lugar. • **PALAVRAS-CHAVE** • História da arte global; narrativas modernistas; métodos quantitativos e cartográficos; fontes e meto-

dologias em história da arte; história da arte transnacional. • **ABSTRACT** • Many new philosophical tendencies incite us to renew the methodologies of art history in order to decolonize her foremost narrative: the modernist canon. To this end, this paper explores how quantitative, cartographic, and statistical approaches, combined with more traditional modes of inquiry, can help us to reconsider existing hierarchies in the art historical field. Used to analyze large bodies of similar sources, namely exhibition catalogues and journals, over long time spans and at global scales, “distant reading” is useful in the construction of a coherent and global historical narrative of the geopolitics of modernities and their social dimensions, where complexity is restored and where the agency of artistic circulation finds a place. • **KEYWORDS** • Global art history; modernist narratives; quantitative and cartographical approach; sources and methodologies in the history of art; transnational art history.

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Many new philosophical tendencies incite us to reflect on the methodologies which might allow us to decolonize the foremost narrative of the history of art: the modernist canon. To this end, this paper explores how quantitative, cartographic, and statistical approaches, combined with other modes of inquiry, can help us to reconsider existing hierarchies in the art historical field. These methods, used to analyze and compare large bodies of similar sources, namely exhibition catalogues and journals whose formats have remained relatively consistent since their inception, can produce original visualizations that are useful in the construction of a coherent and global historical narrative of the geopolitics of modernities and their social dimensions. This “distant reading” of sources incites to further our understanding of the formation of a canon that continues to dominate, and to better account for the hitherto neglected peripheries. With this horizontal re-reading comes a new perspective on the history of art: one which nuances national histories through a necessarily transnational approach; which attenuates the monocentric tendencies of a discipline that accords an excessive importance to a handful of cities (Paris and New York in particular), and which instead emphasizes circulation and exchange; and which challenges the relevance of monographic studies and their ever-present danger of hagiography in favor of a more comparative approach. These methodologies can thus offer a starting point for a mobile and decentralized history of artistic modernities, where complexity is restored and where the agency of artistic circulation finds a place.

INTRODUCTION

The history of modern art and of the avant-gardes, a story of continuous liberation from the old, is one of the ideological bases of Western liberalism. Valorising the activity of a small number of groups and their dynamism, this narrative demonstrates their superiority and contributes to legitimize the cultural, economic, and military domination of their centres of activity. Unfair geocultural asymmetries find here a spiritual, cultural, artistic explanation that naturalizes them. However, the main narrative of art history has much to answer for, namely a disproportionate

focus on Paris and New York, the absence of non-western cultures save for a few idealized and decontextualized exceptions, a linear conception of history as a series of triumphant negations of the constantly denigrated past, a refusal to recognize socioeconomic and colonial realities. The calling into question of modern art collections and museums is one of the consequences of this postcolonial awareness, and has contributed to the chronic crisis of art history in general since the years 1980s.

Renewals in the choice of subjects have become necessary, and many art historians have accepted to take what can be called the “global turn” of art history, be it in considering art pieces and movements from non-western regions, or in studying artifacts that do not meet the traditional definition of the beaux-arts (painting, sculpture and graphic arts). And yet, in the wake of postcolonial debates, some “décolonial” thinkers have deepened the critique against modernist historical narratives and against what is often called a Western way of thinking. With his call for a “new ecology of knowledges”, for instance, Boaventura De Sousa Santos insists against the *epistemicide* generated by colonialism, so far the knowledge and cultures of entire populations, their ancient memories and traditional links, their relation to nature and humanity have been and are still negated: “after five centuries of “teaching” the world, the global North seems to have lost the capacity to learn from the experiences of the world”². Santos proposes to splice scientific methods with other ways of thinking, so that there would be no place for a perception of the world where *my* culture takes precedence and offers salvation.

How to make place to these “other ways” of thinking? Depending on our geocultural and social origin, this task is far from simple. How can we adopt, internalize a culture we do not know *from the interior*? How can one eradicate culture in one’s way of thinking? The decolonization of our hearts and our minds is a profoundly difficult process.

Yet, even if we cannot decolonize our *beings*, why not decolonize *our methods*? The methodological principles of the modernist canon not only contribute to the asymmetries, the absences, and the abuses that the postcolonial approach seeks to address, but indeed allow for their valorisation and their normalisation. Firstly, methodological nationalism assigns art to a nationality, whereas art has never been a secluded reality over time. The national approach implies a naive idea of art and the global geopolitics of culture, where nations would compete for domination and where only the best would naturally win. This idea has been nurtured by an excessive focus on press-primary sources in art history, where political and polemical interpretations of art have dominated since the 19th c and are often still dominating. Methodological nationalism itself is a natural result of another methodological bias in art history, namely the excessive focus on a small group of capitals (Paris and New York for contemporary period). Each capital is

2 SANTOS, Boaventura de Sousa. Epistemologies of the South and the future. *From the European South: a transdisciplinary journal of postcolonial humanities*, 1, 2016, p. 17-29 (page 19). Available in: <http://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/media/Epistemologies%20of%20the%20south%20and%20the%20future_Poscolonialitalia_2016.pdf>. Access in: 31 may 2017.

taken as a metonymy for a whole country, eradicating the activity of other centers in the country. Thirdly, monograph – often better understood as hagiography –, dominates art historical approaches. Focusing on a single figure, clearly a genius, capable of understanding, innovating, deconstructing, and revolutionizing more or less everything in one fell swoop, most of the times the monographical approach prevents from looking for structural and social patterns that could explain artistic creation. Art history becomes a linear chronology of aesthetic revolutions prepared by a handful of geniuses, each genius building on the achievements of his (not her) predecessors. Hence an evolutionist idea of art history, a fourth bias in art history. Evolutionism inhibits recognition for artists who would not take part to the advancement of artistic practices or confines them to imitation, epigone-situation, or at least to marginality and isolation. Last, but not least, formalism, with its inherent denial of social and economic dimensions, has contributed to the domination of a heroic narrative of modern art made of individual ruptures against a constantly dismissed past. Here, the commentary of artworks (usually taken as images and not as objects) takes precedence over the comprehension of contexts. Art history becomes the projection of the sophisticated ideas of another genius, the art historian him/herself who finds revolution where s/he wants, but still looks at art produced in the same places and by the same artists – without reflexivity on art history's practices.

Without negating the positive aspects of the national approach, of the focus on a limited number of capital cities, of the monograph, or indeed the real added value of a formalist point of view, I still contend that we can and should adopt methods that offer an alternative to these approaches. At least, combining new methodologies with the latter opens our horizons and incites to make place to the peripheries of the art historical canon, be they geographical, sociological or artistic. Quantitative, cartographic, and statistical approaches can help. Even for historians working on fine arts, such as painting, sculpture and graphic arts. Used to analyze and compare large bodies of similar sources, namely exhibition catalogues and journals, and crossed with sociological approaches of the artists and their productions, serial methods help us to reconsider existing hierarchies in the traditional history of modern art, before examining more limited aesthetic and formal lines of enquiry. Working with these methods without a specific decolonial programme at the beginning, I can be an example of how the use of global and quantitative methodologies can actually led to take decolonial issues into consideration. Presenting a personal research on the “field of modern art” and its globalization, from the birth of artistic modernity after 1850 to that of contemporary art in the 1960s, I will therefore set out to discuss the value of working from broad, international, comparable corpuses, and the ways in which this transformation of the scope of modern art history has in turn transformed my own way of thinking. This lateral and transnational re-reading can help to constitute an alternative story of artistic modernities and understand the constitution and imposition of the current canon.

SOURCES AND METHODS

The history of art provides numerous and homogenous sources that remain remarkably consistent over time: exhibition catalogues, journals, and auction catalogues. For a historian working on the field of modern art – that is to say, giving an international sense to the concept of Pierre Bourdieu³, a transnational social space where art is created, discussed, exhibited, reproduced, sold and collected, and where artists' reputations are produced, a space polarized and regulated by values and institutions accepted or contested by the diverse agents of the field (such as artists, critics, journalists, dealers, brokers, collectors, curators, institutional etc.) – journals and exhibition catalogues are particularly interesting. They contain vast quantities of information (about the field, about its agents, their circulation and their networks etc.), that have only rarely been considered as a whole⁴. Taken as long series, over a long time-span and over large geographies, these sources give the possibility of a first “distant reading” of art history which proves to give even more than the distant analysis of publishers's catalogues in literature studies⁵.

Catalogues and journals: a view on the field

In the history of art, magazines were a means to express one's belonging to international modernism, by talking and taking position about it, as well as by proposing new contributions and agendas to modernity. As Parisian journalist, critic, and writer Fernand Divoire wrote in 1912 in a book entitled *Stratégie littéraire*, “The simplest way to enter literary life without crash is to found a journal”⁶. Once entered, artists and writers needed to build their networks. Inviting contributors to ones journal could help, and news clippings that are still in so many artists' archives proved how much one was discussed and appreciated. As another French art critic, Georges Turpin advised artists in 1929 in a book he dedicated to ambitious creators, *La Stratégie artistique*, an artist had to advertise how much journalists wrote about him; art critics had to be taken care of, as the licensed producers of a treasure for artists: “l'article de revue” (the journal article)⁷. Proving the internationality of

3 BOURDIEU, Pierre. *The rules of art: genesis and structure of the literary field*. Trans. Susan Emanuel. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

4 See: JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice. L'histoire de l'art et le quantitatif. Une querelle dépassée. Introduction to the special issue of *Histoire & Mesure*, “L'art et la mesure”, XXIII-2 (January 2009), 3-34. Online. Available in: <<https://histoiremesure.revues.org/3543>>. Access in: 31 may 2017.

5 Cf. MORETTI, Franco. Conjectures on world literature. *New Left Review*, 2000, v. I. Online. Available in: <<https://newleftreview.org/II/1/franco-moretti-conjectures-on-world-literature>>. Access in: 31 may 2017.

6 “La façon la plus simple d'entrer sans fracas dans la vie littéraire est de fonder une revue”. DIVOIRE, Fernand. *Introduction à l'étude de la stratégie littéraire*. Paris: E. Sansot, 1912. Book reedited by Francesco Viriat. Paris: Éd. Mille et une nuits, coll. La petite collection, 2005.

7 TURPIN, Georges. *La stratégie artistique: précis documentaire et pratique suivi d'opinions recueillies parmi les personnalités du monde des arts et de la critique*. Paris: Éditions de l'Épi, 1929.

one's networks was even more useful. In the constructivist Magazine *75 HP*, for instance, a journal published in Bucharest by Ilarie Voronca and Victor Brauner in 1924, the editors claimed their "polynationalism", and gave a list of international collaborators. An interesting comment written in bad French summarizes the central role of internationality: "Our group counts among its collaborators the best writers and artists of the modernist movement of the world"⁸. To keep abreast of major international trends, magazine founders translated articles from other magazines, sent foreign correspondents abroad, and tried to recruit international contributors. A majority gave regularly the lists of their "brother-magazines" with whom they want to be allied, especially in the interwar when these lists were printed on journals' back cover.

These international strategies can be approached through a distant, statistical and geographical reading. Indeed, a journal means a title, a year, a place of publication and a publisher; editors, writers, translators and illustrators; articles with titles, text, and images. This variety of information tells a lot about the field of art, all the more since it can be serialized. We can then create maps and visualize networks; we can trace the connections between journals, and the themes, authors, and artists that they share or not. Such panoramas offer a basis for a transnational study of social and geopolitical spaces as well as the ideological and artistic spaces of the journals themselves. Some visualizations drawing on avant-garde journals from the 1920s alert for instance to the gradual split between the innovative milieus of central Europe and Germany, and the logics at work in Paris in the 1920s. It encourages exploring the hypothesis that Paris was not the world capital of the avant-garde in the 1920s using less discussed sources⁹. This is a first step towards a plurifocal and decentered narrative about modernisms in the Interwar, against the canonic and short assumption that Paris and surrealism dominated the international field of modernism in the Interwar¹⁰.

Exhibition catalogues talk a lot about the art field too. They represent a plentiful source of literature, dating back to their invention in 1673, and today they crisscross the world art market. This source allows one to study more than avant-garde networks and places. It makes it possible to work on the geographies of exhibitions and artists, on the circulation of artworks, on the trajectories and carrier paths of artists, as well as to study artistic mediators. An exhibition catalogue gives – or claims to give – information as to the existence of an exhibition, its address, its dates, its title, and sometimes, its organizers and committees; the catalogue claims to list the artists who participated in a given exhibition and often the works that they exhibited. Catalogues provide a rich source of data, whether social, commercial, geographical or even political: artists' names and first names, addresses, genders,

8 VORONCA, Ilarie; ROLL, Stéphane; BRAUNER, Victor (Ed.). *75 HP*, n. 1, Bucharest, October 1924. Only one issue published.

9 JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice. Provincializing Paris. The center-periphery narrative of modern art in light of quantitative and transnational approaches. *Artl@s Bulletin*, v. 4, n. 1, 2015. Article 4. Available in: <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol4/iss1/4>>. Access in: 31 may 2017.

10 Ibidem.

places of birth, the names of their masters, the names and addresses of their art dealer and collectors; the places where works are stored, and their prices, are worth studying for the history of collections and collectionism; the titles of art pieces which are listed in catalogues, may reveal recurring patterns of words or themes, or even fashions. Catalogues are sometimes accompanied by critical texts, as well as illustrations and reproductions, or even advertisements. As such, exhibition catalogues taken in series and analyzed with geo-digital tools can be very useful to reconstitute a broad sociology of artists and artistic mediation, over large geographies and long periods.

This is what encourages me to continue with the Artl@s project¹¹, a research program dedicated to the study of art globalization with digital sources. A growing international team of scholars are taking part to the construction of a database using data from exhibition catalogues from all over the world, especially from the so-called “peripheries”, from Africa and the Middle East to Latin America, to Southern, Northern and Eastern Europe, to Asia. The Artl@s database will give scholars and broader communities an easy digital access to this essential source for art history, from the invention of exhibition catalogues to today, and for catalogues published all over the world.

From the distant and transnational approach towards new perspectives

Journals and catalogues are historical documents: this means they cannot be taken at face value and demand contextualization and a critical eye. Yet it also means that they can be analyzed using quantitative methods, so far with the use of larger series of comparable sources, the capacity of erroneous or inaccurate information to skew results is minimized and the pattern outweighs the exception¹². Once a comparable set of sources has been established, data can be extracted from catalogues and journals and ordered according to sociological and geographic criteria – let’s say objective criteria, in the sense of “which I cannot decide too much about”–: Where do these artists come from? Where do they exhibit? Where do they publish articles? Who collects what? This information can be quantified and transposed into visual representations such as maps and infographics. Such visualizations are very useful for a first-hand survey of sources. They bring out trends one can not see with monographical analysis, and thus they help to better orient ulterior research work.

In my own research on the internationalization of Parisian avant-garde art from realism to cubism, for example, in an attempt to gain some critical distance on the notion of painting that circulated “from Paris” to other cities, I began with a survey of all of the regular exhibitions of modern art between 1870 and 1914, and the artists who exhibited there, before identifying the Parisian artists within this data set.

11 ARTL@S. Programme d’histoire spatiale et transnationale des arts. Direction: Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel. Available in: <<http://www.artlas.ens.fr/>>. Access in: 31 may 2017.

12 JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice; MARCEL, Olivier. Exhibition catalogues in the globalization of art. A source for social and spatial art history. *Artl@s Bulletin* v. 4, n. 2, 2016. Available in: <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol4/iss2/8>>. Access in: 31 may 2017.

Maps made clear that artistic activity was by no means confined to Paris between the turn of the 20th century and the outbreak of the First World War. By intellectual honesty and rigor, focusing exclusively on Paris was no more possible. I had to realize that the most interesting events were not necessarily taking place in Paris: London and Brussels also emerged simultaneously as sites of “modern” activity. What was signified by the appearance of these points on the map at the same point in time? In order to answer this question, I had to look at which artworks were circulating and where they being displayed. Here I could go back to the traditional methods of the art historian who identifies, recognizes, dates and locates and compares artifacts, using usual sources found in archives and museums. I thus had to conclude that not all art circulated in the same way nor through the same networks. Certain figures decided what circulated and what remained in Paris; and it was this circulation itself that ought to be investigated, along with the discourses surrounding it. In this case, “diffusionist” hypotheses must be abandoned: the works exhibited abroad by Courbet, Matisse, and Picasso were consistently less innovative than those which they were producing in Paris¹³. As such these artists were taking advantage of a disparity in information across different segments of the international art market.

Testing the hierarchies of modern art against its facts

Therefore, the comparison and visualization of sources offers a means of decentralizing our approach of modern art. Firstly, it extends geographical scope to a worldwide scale. Secondly, once we begin investigating the circulation of art, any place can potentially be a centre or a periphery depending on the chosen point of view. Local sources confirm this hypothesis. Throughout history, the elites of many major cities beyond Paris and New York have sought to claim the mantle of artistic centre indeed: London in the 19th c. and up until the 1930s, Brussels in the 1890s, Vienna at the turn of the 20th, Berlin from 1910 and during the interwar period, Mexico City in the 1940s and 1950s, and São Paulo in the 1960s... Hence the question of strategies deployed by the actors of the history of art and the necessity of a sociological approach. From the 1850s to the 1970s, a host of global mediators used their international skills and networks to encourage or limit the circulation of modern art in line with their own interests. What exactly were these interests? Mediators have often modified or transformed the messages that they imported from one system to another, sometimes distorting them entirely (e.g. the Christian aesthetic of the Nabis were introduced into Germany by Nietzschean atheists)¹⁴.

13 JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice. “Nul n'est prophète en son pays?”. L'internationalisation de la peinture avant-gardiste parisienne (1855-1914). Paris: Musée d'Orsay/Nicolas Chaudun, 2009; JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice. ¿Exponer al cubista sin cubismo? De cómo Kahnweiler llegó a convencer a Alemania – e incluso al mundo entero – del aura de Picasso mediante su pedagogía expositiva (1908 1914). *Picasso*. Registros Alemanes. Exh. cat. *Malagá*, Picasso Museum (Fall 2015), p. 258-273.

14 JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice. Paris-Weimar-Berlin: le “pivot merveilleux”?. In: KOSTKA, Alexandre (Éd.). *Weimar-Paris/Paris-Weimar. Kunst und Kulturtransfer um 1900*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2005, p. 131-158.

The transnational approach also shows that international mediators were not always benevolent figures with a cosmopolitan outlook: their engagement with international art was sometimes nationalistic or even xenophobic.

Sometimes, artistic exchange between certain places and over certain periods does simply not take place. Modern art could have circulated between Paris and Vienna at the turn of the 20th c. just as it circulated between Moscow and Paris or between Prague and Paris. The transport links were in place, and social and political circulation can easily be observed, such as that between French republican circles and Vienna's liberal elite¹⁵; but this circulation did not happen. This state of affairs could be the result of the action or the inaction of certain intermediaries, but could also be explained by markets that varied according to geographies, disciplines, styles and populations. These instances are not to be considered as a result of hierarchical differences between cities but rather are the result of different international artistic fields.

Finally, a serial, transnational and sociological approach moves us closer to this horizontalization of information that late Piotr Piotrowski used to call for¹⁶. Artists and the spaces of art are transformed into data which is de-individualized, non-hierarchical, and relative.

WRITING AN ALTERNATIVE STORY

Put simply, new emphasis on other facts, figures, and geographies combined with a transnational and sociological approach, allow us to imagine an alternative story to the one offered by modernism. A number of narratives are possible. I chose myself to reconstitute the international field of modern art and its inner workings; and to translate this research into a three volume available, pocket book history covering the periods of 1848-1918, 1918-1945, and 1945-1968¹⁷.

A tri-scalar approach, focusing on the intermediate scale: circulation

With this history I aimed to study the international development of artistic modernism and how its trajectory produced the symbolic imbalances that we know today. To do so, I first collected long-term statistical data on a global scale

15 See: WEIRICH, Armelle. *Berta Zuckerandl (1864-1945)*. Salonnière, journaliste et critique d'art, entre Vienne et Paris (1871-1918). Unpublished PhD. Thesis. Dijon: Université de Bourgogne, 2014.

16 PIOTROWSKI, Piotr. Towards horizontal art history. In: ANDERSON, Jaynie (Ed.). *Crossing cultures*. Conflict, migration, and convergence. Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2009, p. 82-85.

17 JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice. *Les avant-gardes artistiques (1848-1918)*. Une histoire transnationale. Paris: Gallimard, 2016. (Collection Folio Histoire n. 249); JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice. *Les avant-gardes artistiques (1918-1945)*. Une histoire transnationale. Paris: Gallimard, 2017. (Collection Folio Histoire n. 263); 3d volume in preparation.

and sought to visualize these data in as many ways as possible. Next to this distant and global level, I looked at the medium scale of social groups, their movement and circulation, as well as the various strategies deployed and the underlying geopolitical positions taken: where did they look to establish a reputation, and how were such reputations made in different environs? I then went to the micro scale and worked on a microhistorical scale, analyzing trajectories, crises, individual biographies, aesthetic turning points, and individual artworks.

Many will catch the allusion to Fernand Braudel's work on the *Mediterranean*¹⁸, and to the methods proposed by the first *École des Annales*, who are considered in France as key-founders of global history. Braudel's PhD (written in a German prison camp), *La Méditerranée à l'époque de Philippe II*, was organized in three parts. The first, "La part du milieu". examined the geographical milieus in which history took place, from the Mediterranean mountains to its seas to its deserts. The second considered the economic, political, social, and military structures in which the men of the sixteenth century were living. Braudel did not offer an overview of the national history of each Mediterranean country, but rather he paid attention to their encounters and interactions, thereby providing a history of connections and combinations. Working in Spanish, French, and Italian archives, he followed the circulations of ships, goods, armies, men, ideas, and images from Spanish harbors to France, Italy, Sicily, and North Africa¹⁹. Only in the third part did he study events, the men involved, and their politics and little stories. Even if the scales I work on and propose to talk about are not exactly the scales of Braudel, I consider a triscalar approach very useful to reconstitute the international field of modernism. I work first, with a so-called distant approach: that of the overview made of serial sourced, with computer-analysis, quantitative, statistical and geographic visualizations, that of the long period and the broad geography, where everything is connected and where frontiers and hierarchies have no sense – where the historian is blind, is aware of it, and makes no apology for this sin. Then, I adopt an intermediary scale, that of the history of the group, but also the scale of circulations, where one can study the trajectories of art pieces, of reputations, of styles, of actors, etc. – the scale where things get connected or disconnected. Then only, but not least, I work on micro scales, which is mainly the traditional scale of art historical approach, when the scholar works on one single artist, one single art work, etc.

The intermediate scale of circulation is most important, as it gives sense and completion to quantitative, distant methodologies that can often be dry even if they incite to look at the peripheries of usual art historical geographies. First, the study of circulations is a good way to escape national prejudices that are so prevalent in art history, and to contribute to the general project of a globalized history of art and

18 BRAUDEL, Fernand. *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1949.

19 On Braudel's intellectual evolution, see: BRAUDEL, Paule. Les origines intellectuelles de Fernand Braudel: un témoignage. *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 47, n. 1, 1992, p. 237-44.

artifacts, a story that would include “the peripheries” and not only the centers²⁰. Moreover, studying the cultural transfers at play in international processes means exploring the ability of “peripheries” to translate, reinterpret, and manipulate what they take from the “centers” indeed²¹. Therefore, the international artistic field is not necessarily a single and shared entity; far from being merely the sum of the various national fields, it coincides, contradicts, and reinforces them all at once. International figures were able to take advantage of the informational asymmetries between different cultural systems. The struggles for influence surrounding the establishment of artistic centers have been too often overlooked; by studying them, we can demythologize the question of centre and periphery. Finally, working on medium scales emphasizes the importance of circulation in the construction of artistic career paths and in the accumulation of symbolic capital for artists, styles, movements and artworks. While circulating, art pieces are semantically enriched; their value is increased by the history and trajectory they carry along. What is presented and sold on the art market is not only a material piece, nor a prestigious signature, nor a style; it is often what could be called a “circulatory capital”. For a collector, or even an art critic, circulation produces desire. It proves that other art lovers have seen and desire the artwork. Thus, the one who buys and finally owns it actually owns what others have seen, appreciated and desired²². A commodity is far from being a monolithic and immutable object, unlike the picture made by traditional economic theories²³. Its trajectory and its past are important. Its cultural biography, which evolves according to circulation and interpretations, its successive appropriations, the spaces, times and past and present populations surrounding it are often the most important factors in determining an artwork’s value.

Re-writing a general history of modern art and modernism over one century and at a global scale, with a decentered and pluriscalar approach that would take the global, the local, as well as circulations into account is a crazy yet ultimately necessary project. Many different narratives are possible. I will only summarize chronologically the positions of my own attempt to understand of the history of modernism from the 1850s to the 1869s, from local to global spaces, and from small to the long time span.

20 See: KAUFMANN, Thomas DaCosta; DOSSIN, Catherine; JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice (Ed.). *Circulations in the global history of art*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015.

21 On the history and ambitions of the Cultural Transfers, see: ESPAGNE, Michel. Introduction. In: _____. *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999, p. 1-33.

22 Cf. GIRARD, René. *Mimesis and theory: essays on literature and criticism, 1953-2005*. Edition by Robert Doran. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

23 An idea evoked in: BOLTANSKI, Luc; ESQUERRE, Arnaud. *Enrichissement. Une critique de la marchandise*. Paris: Gallimard, NRF Essais, 2017.

For the late 19th c., the history of modern art talks about global circulations and international negotiation

As my last examples already showed, the late 19th c. Art *market* was made of multiple centers. An international *field* of modern art began to take shape after 1850, and consolidated after 1890, with Paris as its symbolic Capital city. Yet, as the Realists in the 1850s and 1860s of the Impressionists in the 1880s, until 1914 European vanguards needed both Paris and abroad: regardless of where they produced, they pointed to their warmer reception abroad as evidence of their talent, yet exported work to other countries without daring exhibit this work in Paris (be it more or less innovative than what they exported)²⁴. Artists, critics, and art dealers would frequently adapt their production, exhibitions, and discourses to suit the tastes of local, regional, and international audiences and to accumulate what mattered: the circulation of art. Reputations were constructed in a circulatory process from one place to the next, most effectively when international information asymmetries were thicker.

After 1890, modern art circles established selective and market oriented modern international Salons, and modern art became an integral component of a city's cultural capital and global standing. Consequently, the centre of the field of modern art was not a city but a social milieu, one that was simultaneously cosmopolitan and nationalist, and one which, as a prosopographical study shows, was growing ever more elitist and closed²⁵.

In such a context, we can understand the growing international reaction from 1904 onwards against the modern system of consecration. From Fauvism to German Expressionism, which were soon joined by Flemish and Viennese expressionism, Russian Fauvism, etc., *after 1905 new avant-garde groups displayed a systematic, structural opposition to modern art and to Paris as its symbolic capital city*: intense colours rather than light ones, stifling interiors instead of outdoor scenes, primitive rather than sophisticated portraits, popular forms such as posters and graffiti rather than allusion, references to local and folkloric traditions rather than a refined, urban, denationalized culture, and nationalism in the place of cosmopolitanism.

Yet, the immediate media success of this new wave of avant-gardes quickly intensified international rivalries between them. Fauves, cubists, expressionists, futurists and cubo-futurists entered into open combat as early as 1910. The symbolic challenge to Paris drew strength from the growing appeal of new centers for the new generation of artists. A strong competition between avant-gardes now played out in new arenas: the art press and large-scale international art fairs. With increasing pressure to gain traction in the press, artistic discourse took on a tone that went from competitive and theatrical to nationalist and even xenophobic.

24 Cf. JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice. "Nul n'est prophète en son pays?", 2009, op. cit.

25 JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice. Apports, questions et limites de la prosopographie en histoire de l'art. L'exemple de l'élite moderniste européenne au tournant des XIXe-XXe siècles. In: CABOURET-LAURIoux, Bernadette (Ed.). *La prosopographie au service des sciences sociales*. Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2015, p. 339-357.

In the interwar years, the regionalisation of the 1920s and 1930s calls for further study, as does the return of Paris as center after 1934

The First World War saw a critical change in the circulation of artwork and aesthetics as large regional zones formed that were connected via neutral nations. These large regions did not disappear entirely with the Armistice. New avant-gardes from Spain to Germany rejected the modernism of the pre-war period. Most of them dismissed Paris, a fact that has been generally forgotten. Many admired the participation of Russian avant-gardes in the Soviet effort, the communism of German Dadaists, and the revolutionary avant-gardes emerging in central Europe. This relegation of the French capital to a minor player calls for further study²⁶. Painters in cities such as Berlin, Weimar, Cologne, Prague, Vienna, Budapest and Milan drew inspiration from Giorgio De Chirico's *Pittura Metafisica*, the geometric abstraction of the Bauhaus, the reproductions of Russian constructivist art that were being published in journals, and from New Objectivity in Germany. Even Salvador Dali, then an avant-gardist in training living between Madrid and Barcelona, was influenced as much by *Valori Plastici* and New Objectivity as he was by Picasso. At this same moment, a modern movement was taking shape in Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil, one that proudly affirmed its roots in local culture and its independence²⁷.

In the cultural hubs of Germanic and Central Europe, vanguard aesthetic took a general constructivist turn after 1924. The constructivists frequently contributed to the same journals, importing reproductions of one another's work and translating articles. Congresses and exhibitions in Weimar, Dusseldorf, Prague, Brno, Belgrade, Bucarest, Bielefeld and Warsaw provided them with ample opportunity to meet with one another. These artists were not exhibited in Paris until the Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs in 1925, and even then the constructivists were isolated. Until their disappearance around 1929, constructivist networks constituted a polycentric scene that was clearly focused on Weimar, Berlin, and Milan, and in which Paris was merely a periphery. This relegation of the French capital to a minor player changes our interpretation of trajectories and artworks²⁸. Some artists, such as Marcel Duchamp, Diego Rivera, Theo van Doesburg and Alexander Archipenko even left Paris in this period. They could find better contexts abroad. As its artistic journals and even Parisian Dadaist and Surrealist publications show indeed, the city's stable of artistic talent remained inward looking.

In addition to these two international fields of modern art (Paris for Painting and the polycentric constructivist field), transatlantic and transamerican circuits formed

26 JOYEUX PRUNEL, Béatrice. *Géopolitique des avant-gardes 1918-1939. Une histoire transnationale*. Postdoctoral Thesis (Thèse d'Habilitation à diriger les recherches). Paris, Institut des Sciences Politiques, 2015.

27 For a general approach, see: ADES, Dawn (Dir.). *Art in Latin America: the modern era, 1820-1980*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989; and FRANK, Patrick (Ed.). *Readings in Latin American modern art*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

28 JOYEUX PRUNEL, Béatrice. *Géopolitique des avant-gardes 1918-1939*, op. cit.; JOYEUX PRUNEL, Béatrice. *Les avant-gardes artistiques 1918-1945*, op. cit.

a third major space for the international circulation of art and reputations. From Mexican Muralism to the new avant-gardes from Brazil to Argentina to Colombia, artists gradually looked to import a European strain of vernacular modernity that enjoyed an immediate success on the art markets of Paris and the United States, at a time when trade in pre-Columbian, African, and Oceanic objects was flourishing²⁹. Latin American avant-gardes negotiated revolutionary politics, national aspirations, internationalist ideas and the demands of the local and transnational markets.

The start of the 1930s saw the geography of international art shift decisively in favor of Paris. On the social and economic front, constructivism had lost its momentum as its figures became ever more integrated into professional structures. Above all, Surrealism became one of the few artistic movements to survive throughout the Great Depression and into the 1930s, thanks to the elite support of rich European collectors in search of distinction. Surrealism further benefited from the growing bipolarization of the French scene that had begun in 1934, as antifascists squared off against fascist movements. International modernism was soon politicized too. As the Second World War loomed, surrealism dominated the symbolic territory of the avant-garde, with Paris established as the unchallenged global capital of progress. Abstract painters had become marginalized due to their supposedly apolitical and ineffective aesthetic, and began to emigrate to the USA. As a result, history has often considered surrealism, itself the offspring of Dada Paris, as the only real avant-garde movement to have existed between 1920 and 1940. This narrative has seen its day.

1940-1970s: Modernism and the competition for center stage

And yet, the canonic story continues as follows: the wave of surrealist exiles to New York around 1940³⁰, along with abstract painters and former German Dadaists, would be the beginning of a symbolic victory of the USA, confirmed by the “American

29 See for instance: VAUDRY, Elodie. *Présence et usages des arts précolombiens dans les arts décoratifs en France de 1875 à 1945*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Université de Paris Nanterre, 2016.

30 E. g. SAWIN, Martica. *Surrealism in exile and the beginning of the New York school*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995.

victory” over Nazism³¹, and swiftly followed by the “triumph of American art”³². According to this version of events New York became the cultural capital of liberalism’s empire and the heart of artistic innovation as embodied by Abstract Expressionism. Paris, by way of contrast, was doomed to languish in cultural autism. The unanimous acceptance of this new world order seemed to be confirmed at the 1964 Venice Biennale when the *Grand Prix de Peinture* was conferred upon Robert Rauschenberg.

The superiority of New York and the validity of this simplistic version of events seems to be supported by Serge Guilbaut’s work, the most commonly cited history of how New York “stole” the promethean torch from Paris. Few mention that Guilbaut’s study relies exclusively on sources from these two cities³³. In contrary, in her study of the “diffusion” of the art of the United States in Europe, Catherine Dossin shows that abstract expressionism failed to gain acceptance in Europe before the very end of the 1950s, and that even then it was considered as a counterpart of European lyrical abstraction³⁴. Parisian abstract painting – which was produced by artists who were not, for the most part, French – was a safe bet on the international art market until the early 1960s, and was sought after even by American collectors. The work of the United States’ avant-garde only began to gain market traction after 1963, when New York art dealers began to talk about and export pop art. And Pop Art itself only gained acceptance in the United States after first having been exhibited in Europe in 1963³⁵.

If we further widen the scope of our investigation, the 1950s are better seen as a decade in which all was still to play on the global cultural scene. From Japan to

31 This narrative neglects the role of Soviet Russia as well as the sacrifices of resistance movements; by the same token, the colonies which gave vast numbers of workers, troops, and indeed lives, are entirely forgotten. The United States (by no means to be confused with America) thus assumed what was to be the long-term role of the protector of freedom against all kinds of nefarious totalitarianism; from now on, it was to be the central figure of a harmonious historical narrative of western democracy, one in which the avant-garde could be fully and comfortably integrated...

32 SANDLER, Irving. *The triumph of American painting: a history of abstract expressionism*. New York; London: Harper and Row, 1977. *This narrative neglects the role of Soviet Russia as well as the sacrifices of resistance movements; by the same token, the colonies which gave vast numbers of workers, troops, and indeed lives, are entirely forgotten. The United States (by no means to be confused with America) thus assumed what was to be the long-term role of the protector of freedom against all kinds of nefarious totalitarianism; from now on, it was to be the central figure of a harmonious historical narrative of western democracy, one in which the avant-garde could be fully and comfortably integrated.*

33 GUILBAUT, Serge. *How New York stole the idea of modern art: abstract expressionism, freedom, and the cold war*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

34 DOSSIN, Catherine. *The stories of the Western artworld, 1936-1986: from the fall of Paris to the invasion of New York*. Ph.D. in Art History. University of Texas at Austin, USA, 2008; DOSSIN, Catherine. *The rise and fall of American art, 1940s-1980s – a geopolitics of Western art worlds*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015.

35 Ibidem; IKEGAMI, Hiroko. *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the global rise of American art*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2010.

South America, regions around the world stood to benefit from Europe's fall from grace. Further inquiry in local sources confirms this hypothesis, from Mexico to Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires, to Belgrade Yugoslavia Tokyo and Alexandria Egypt. Already in 1944, in the correspondence of the *Sociedad de Arte Moderno*, created in Mexico City 1944 in order to promote the capital's cultural activity, we can find the following proclamation:

Mexico is a nation endowed with a great artistic vitality and characteristic personality, and whose prowess in the visual arts is already renowned the world over; the extinction of the traditional artistic centres of Europe has created for Mexico the obligation to take up the mantle of the protector and supporter of art, an obligation which can only be met by its transformation into a centre of global culture³⁶.

These cultural politics did not end with the return to peace after 1945, and became even more strategic with the Cold War. Countries seeking for international influence organized touring exhibitions in the great capital of the world for instance. A deep comparative work on these propaganda exhibitions is to be done, from the USA to France to Mexico and the USSR³⁷. Biennials also contributed to power struggles, as between Mexico and the USA for the definition of "Panamericanism", or between Francoist Spain and Latin-American countries (Mexico in particular) for the lead of "Hispano-Americanism", or when Tito and Nasser created their "Mediterranean" biennials in Ljubljana and Alexandria in 1955, in a common fight against the cold-war bipolarization³⁸.

Artistic activities were also considered as a necessary part of modernization. After 1950, the establishment of a museum of modern art became an imperative for cities looking to gain a foothold on the international scene³⁹; and cities which

36 CORRESPONDENCIA personal. *Folleto de la Sociedad de Arte Moderno*. Mexico, 1944. Quoted in: ORTEGA OROZCO, Adriana. *Les expositions d'art mexicain dans l'espace transnational: circulations, médiations et réceptions (1938-1952-2000)*. PhD Thesis. Paris: Univ. de Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2016, p. 165.

37 I can only refer to the excellent work made by: ORTEGA OROZCO, Adriana, op. cit.

38 On Spain's "hispano-american biennials" of 1951 (Madrid), 1954 (Cuba) and 1955 (Barcelona) see: BARREIRO LÓPEZ, Paula. *Avant-garde art and criticism in Francoist Spain*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017. On Mexico's Panamerican biennials (1958-60) I am referring to a paper given by Fabiola Martínez Rodríguez at the Artlas Seminar in Paris, Ecole Normale Supérieure, May 2017 (unpublished research). On Ljubljana's Biennial of Graphic arts see the official website <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/biennials/biennial-of-graphic-arts-slovenia/>. On Alexandria's Biennials see: RAMADAN, Dina A. The Alexandria Biennale and Egypt's Shifting Mediterranean. In: GOLDWYN, Adam J.; SILVERMAN, Renée M. (Ed.). *Mediterranean Modernism*. Intercultural exchange and aesthetic development. New York: Springer, 2016, p. 343-361.

39 The chronology of the establishment of modern art museums is fascinating: Dubrovnik 1945, Paris 1947, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in 1948, Tokyo in 1952, Zagreb 1954, Buenos Aires 1956-1957, and the Louisiana Museum in the north of Copenhagen and the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1958. Other, older museums meanwhile extended their buildings (such as the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, which gained a wing dedicated to experimental art in 1954, and the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, for which Mies van der Rohe designed in 1957 a new building to house modern collections that opened in 1968).

felt their status as “peripheries” more keenly often organized biennials⁴⁰. From Tokyo to Buenos Aires, each center fully intended to secure a position as a global capital of contemporary art, and thus also promoted new generations of local artists. Not only in the USA, but also in Europe and in Latin America, avant-garde circles developed with the full support of local institutions. Some movements were used to prove the modern side of a regime – Franco’s administration encouraged abstract non geometric painting, Mexico sent Tamayo’s abstract works abroad, as if to balance the Mexican School’s political violence with depoliticized paintings, and the USA used abstract expressionism, while the French sent Matisse and Soulages to foreign exhibitions. In Argentina, Jorge Romero Brest, the most influential figure in Buenos Aires museum circuit, carefully selected the representatives of the Argentine avant-garde according to the expectations of the world art market. At the end of the 1950s, this meant an expressive and colourful abstraction; Romero Brest put this kind of art centre stage at the expense of artists who had resisted Perón and his regime. In 1962, having realized that the appeal of lyrical abstraction was waning, Romero Brest turned his attention to junk art and performance art, forms popular in Paris, Dusseldorf, Milan and New York.

Only in France did institutions remain conservative, so far they relied more on classical modernity than abstract art, and never helped young generations. Private interests lacked the financial incentive and cultural habitus to influence official definitions of art. But in Europe, the conurbation that ran from Amsterdam to Venice via Frankfurt, Basel, and Milan became an exceptionally fertile territory for avant-garde art: the generation characterized by Nouveau Réalisme, Zero, and Azimut enjoyed an intense support from museums, local governments, and the market.

In the 1960s, the New York avant-gardes and their dealers suddenly discovered the richness of the European scene. A war quietly broke out. In an international art market that was increasingly competitive, and at the height the Cold War, artists were fast becoming pawns of a global geopolitical system that operated according to national, ideological, and commercial motives. One system emerged as particularly formidable in this new geopolitical order. The New York gallery circuit, led by figures such as Leo Castelli, took advantage of the support of MoMA and of a legal system that allowed fortunes, petrochemical or otherwise, to be laundered through the purchase of artwork. Above all, Castelli and his colleagues had a thorough understanding of the expectations of their largest clients – European museums and collectors! The openness of Europe’s industrial region to the local avant-gardes that formed after 1958, their curiosity for the art being created elsewhere, the fascination of the “American Way of Life”, and the relatively low prices of US art contributed to

⁴⁰ The Milan Triennial was re-launched in 1947, The Rome Quadrennial and Venice Biennial in 1948; the São Paulo Biennial in 1951, the Tokyo Biennial in 1952, Kassel’s *Documenta* in 1955, Paris’ Biennial in 1959 (by André Malraux who was anxious that Paris “catch up” with other cities). As mentioned above, even non-aligned nations joined the trend, with the 1955 Biennial of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana and the first Biennale for Mediterranean Countries in Alexandria, Egypt; or in Spain with the “hispano-american biennales” of 1951, 1954 and 1955; and in Mexico in 1958 and 1960.

the success enjoyed by Pop Art in Europe after 1963. But while European artworks were often purchased directly from artists who maintained close ties with curators and collectors, those interested by US art were forced to negotiate the market. Such sales were often the subject of major media coverage and pretentious exhibitions, and conducted against a backdrop of home economics, industrial progress, and the development of leisure society. “America’s” artistic “triumph” must be understood in the context of this asymmetry. It is also critical to knowing that in 1964, in awarding the Grand Prix to Rauschenberg who was the only member of his generation to exhibit at Venice, the Biennale jury was in fact endorsing an artistic global trend whose origins lay in Europe, rather than in New York, despite the boasts of the American pavilion’s organizers.

From market and media logics to political and imperialist strategies, it can explain why artists who had failed to break into the New York market began to display a growing animosity towards the art trade and institutions, despite their increasing reliance on such circuits -- from the ironic tone of artists who were more or less able to negotiate the system – Swiss artist Jean Tinguely and his *Hommage à New York* (1960) – to the more bitter and violent work of more peripheral artists such as the Japanese neo-Dada and the Viennese Actionists who have not been studied in their global context. After 1966, this new system spawned significantly more losers than winners, and the backlash spread. The broad politicization of avant-gardes, as embodied by their support for Latin American revolutions and their opposition to the war in Vietnam, dates from this period, whereas the previous generation had left unchallenged imperialism, war, the market, and the contradictions of “western” culture in general. Thus began an ongoing wave of protest and opposition to New York, the revered and reviled capital of the neoliberal cultural system in which artists’ success was determined by their ability to manipulate the speculative mechanisms of the market (we need think only of Jeff Koons). Yet since art thrives on dissent, and since the market, like the museum, is more than capable of incorporating any criticism, beginning with conceptual art, the backlash against New York became in turn a topos of new avant-garde art.

CONCLUSION

The approach and historiography I have outlined should encourage us to consider the chronology of modern art as more than the story of artistic innovations in Paris and later New York. By writing a history that is more spatial than temporal, we can begin to decolonize our narratives – an integral part of any challenge to the symbolic power of the canonical narrative, even though it is important to remember that we cannot rely on this method alone. This narrative takes into account the importance of international circulation in the construction of artistic reputations. It underlines the role of informational disparities between different countries and cities in these strategies – and the role of misunderstanding and re-appropriation in art’s mechanisms of import and export. It takes the role of the press in the victory of certain interpretations and narratives over others into consideration.

The involvement of economic and institutional players in the struggle to impose particular narratives at the expense of others is also an issue, as well as the element national pride and cold war ideologies that saw countries each try to select and promote artistic champions, and that often seem to be still at work.

There is certainly nothing to be gained from denying the limits of the quantitative and transnational approach, which depends on digital tools and the internet, and thus on a “global, western” way of life. But what does Western really mean, at a time when our computers are made in China? The limits of these methods stand in the way art historians use them, and their input is all the more interesting since they are combined with other scales of analysis. In such a plural and pragmatic use, they help decentre from our own places and milieus. And while this way of working uses detachment rather than polemic, it remains fundamentally political – hence why some historians of art consider it to be somewhat blasphemous.

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