Transcultur@

Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History 18th-21st cent.

Transcultur@ is an international collaborative research project led by a Franco-Brazilian team of scholars in the humanities, social sciences, arts and literature. Its purpose is to produce a Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History, i.e. a digital online encyclopaedia edited in four languages (English, French, Spanish and Portuguese) whose aim is to analyze the cultural dynamics of the Atlantic Area and its central role in the contemporary process of globalization.

1. A dictionary of transatlantic cultural history

Transcultur@ intends to produce an interconnected history of the contemporary Atlantic Area using the new possibilities offered by the digital support. Led by French and Brazilian teams, in partnership with the University of California-Berkeley,¹ this project will bring together a vast network of researchers in order to analyze the cultural relations between Europe, Africa and the Americas in an interdisciplinary perspective associating historians, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, specialists of literature, visual arts, theatre and cinema. Reflecting the most recent research and debates, the project engages the question of transatlantic circulations and cultural globalization as well as the process of identification and the role of borders –political, linguistic, cultural, symbolic– which contributed to the creation and the reshaping of major cultural areas since the 18th century.

Traditionally envisaged within a national perspective, cultural history has undergone a “transnational turn” since the beginning of the 21st century [Gienow-Hecht et Schumacher, 2003 ; Iriye, 2004 ; Tournès, 2011]. Recent research on international cultural relations and on the different stages of globalization [Boucheron, 2009 ; Suppo et Lessa, 2012 ; Dulphy et al., 2010 ; Chaubet et Martin, 2011] have laid the groundwork for a transnational history focusing on representations and practices, modes of existence and symbolic productions. It is within this perspective of a “multi-level history, comprising regional, national and universal aspects” [Lyons & Mollier, 2012], that Transcultur@ positions itself.

The Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History intends to renew the traditional framework of analyzing objects, practices and cultural movements by paying particular attention to the historicity of circulation systems [Hartog, 2003 ; Saunier, 2008] and to the numerous changes occurring during the late modern period, such as the massification of printing in the 19th century, the consolidation of mass cultures during the 20th century and the globalization of media cultures at the end of the 20th century. Within the old area of circulation that constitutes the Atlantic world [Gruzin, 2004 ; Games, 2006], we intend to test such theoretical notions as “cultural transfers”, “comparative history”, “connected history”, “transnational history” or “cultural areas” [Subrahmanym, 1997 ; Ukaegbu, 1998 ; Espagne, 1999 ; Werner et Zimmermann, 2004 ; Iriye et Saunier, 2009]. The Dictionary entries will allow us to develop this line of thought starting from concrete case studies, enriched by the online addition of archive documents, maps, cultural statistics and timelines.

Transcultur@ wants to lay emphasis on the phenomena of appropriation and rejection which contributed to the creation of a “transnational cultural space” [Boschetti, 2010] but also to the elaboration of national cultural scenes in Europe and in the Americas during the contemporary period. The research produced on Brazilian modernism –this “national foreign art” [Miceli, 2003] which was both a reflection of European

¹Transcultur@ is led by four main institutions: the University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, the University Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3, the University of São Paulo and the University of California-Berkeley. The assistance required within the framework of PRCI ANR-FAPESP concerns only the realization of the European and Latin-American part of the project. Specific financing has been and will be demanded for the Franco-North-American part of the project.
avant-gardes and the spearhead of Brazilian cultural nationalism—emphasizes the difficulty of interpreting cultural circulations in a univocal way. Indeed, the mere analysis of cultural flows cannot suffice in itself to comprehend transatlantic exchanges. If “cultures travel”, the displacement is never a mere translation; movement changes objects but it can also be a source of cultural production [Clifford, 1992; 1997]. Moreover, reception constitutes a real challenge for interpretation. Examining the different modes of appropriation, the researcher enters into the “domain of metamorphoses” [Bastide, 1957]. Hence, the questions of hybridization and cultural hybridisms, which represent realities in themselves which cannot be reduced to the initial entities from which they have sprung [Burke, 2009; Canclini, 1997; Turgeon et al., 1996]. The encounter and mixing of beings, of their ways of life and imaginaries has engendered, early on, in the Atlantic Area, new, unclassifiable objects foreshadowing present-day cultural globalization. The first objective of the Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History is to apprehend and render this complexity by integrating the theoretical contributions of various disciplines that have endeavored to analyze cultural and artistic circulations—history, anthropology, cultural sociology, political as well as comparative literature, cinema and theatre studies, musicology and cultural geography [Jay, 2010; França, Lopes, 2010; White, 2011; Yon, 2008; Cook, 2000]. At the same time, the Dictionary will adopt an empirical approach based on the analysis and gathering in “dictionary form” of a series of concrete cases.

2. A tool for analyzing cultural and artistic circulations

The Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History is of encyclopaedic nature. It will take stock of the literature in the field but it will also stimulate research in less explored domains of the circulations between Europe, Africa and the Americas. The results of this collective enterprise will be presented in the form of analytic dictionary entries concerning the knowledge, the practices and the cultural objects that circulated in the Atlantic Area or were issued from the exchanges between the three continents. All the major domains of cultural studies will be dealt with, without exception: visual culture, literature, music, live spectacle, architecture, sport, religion, scientific knowledge, cultural policies, education, media, food, travel, etc. In each of these domains, the entries will focus on the analysis of mediations.

The actors of the exchanges will be crucial to our reflection whether they were mere mediators or cultural go-betweens [Bénat Tachot & Gruzinski, 2001; O’Phelan & Salazar-Soler, 2005] between the two sides of the Atlantic. Migrants—in the large sense of the word—will be given special attention: the African slaves of diverse origins whose numbers increase until the abolition of slave trade and the end of illegal trade [Alencastro, 2000, 2015]; the huge waves of European migrants between the mid-19th century and the early 20th century [Mörner, 1992; Bergquist, 2009], but also the Latinos who have contributed to the emergence of new cultural scenes, forms and cultural identities in North-America since the mid-20th century [Cohen & Treguer, 2004; Smith, 2006]. The exiles, banned from their country because of religious creed or political convictions, also played a major role in the circulation and in the very definition of cultural areas. Thus, it is in Paris, during the Second Empire, on the eve of Napoleon 3rd Mexican expedition that the notion of Latin America saw the day within a microcosm of pan-Latin intellectuals that included Chilean and Columbian exiles. In 1900, it is in Westminster Hall, London, that the first pan-African conference was held. The upsurge of totalitarianisms, the Spanish Civil War and World War II led many European intellectuals and artists to flee to the Americas, to Mexico, Argentina and Chile [Compagnon & ali, 2011], but mainly to the United States where Central European musicians co-opted by Hollywood exercised a lasting influence on the specific sound-track of “American” movies [Crawford, 2009].

However, cultural exchanges do not depend only on artistic diasporas and migrant communities—whether free or enforced. The presence of French culture in the Americas, with the exception of Canada and the Caribbean, was never supported by large migration flows [Luca & Vidal, 2011]; likewise, the recent success of Latin-American evangelical churches in Africa is not all due to a massive displacement of individuals [Kramer, 2003; Oro, 2004]. To comprehend the cultural transatlantic circulations one has to take into account the entire gamut of cultural mediators: voyagers, missionaries, diplomats, intellectuals and international experts, collectors, editors, producers, journalists and simple tourists. Transcultur® will examine these various actors insisting on the diversity of their objectives and strategies (from soft power to love of art via the strict economic stakes of cultural business) and on the cultural networks they initiated and contributed to construct. In this respect, the recent research on the transatlantic circulation of printed matter offers interesting perspectives on the networking of editors during the 19th century [Abreu, 2014; Cooper-Richet et Mollier, 2012]. Similarly, the concept of networking lies at the heart of the research on the circulation of scientific knowledge and the role of big philanthropic U.S. foundations in Europe during the 20th century [Tournès, 2010]. Thus, one of the main challenges of the Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural
History will be to identify the transatlantic cultural networks and to analyze their evolution since the 18th century.

Transcultur@ will also take into account the material support of cultural exchanges which plays, alongside the actors an equally important role in the dynamics of the circulation. The Dictionary will analyze the multiple vectors of mediation (books, magazines, plays, movies, songs, TV programs, blogs, etc.) in order to better evaluate the weight of cultural industries (poles of production, networks of distribution, etc.) and of public policies (cultural diplomacies, educational policies, decentralized co-operations, etc.) in transatlantic circulations. Owing to the digital tool, the dictionary entries will be enriched through a selection of archive documents (digital sources and/or audiovisual archives).

Finally, Transcultur@ will grant a significant place to zones of contact, confrontation and exchange as well as to sites that favor transnational cultural sociability. Port cities play an essential role in this respect: from Boston to Buenos Aires, from London to the Cape via New York, New Orleans, Rio de Janeiro, Valparaíso, Liverpool, Lisbon, Dakar or Lagos. These ports of entrance are supplemented by the weight of cultural capitals like Paris, Berlin or Los Angeles which, given their prestige and their cultural productions, exert a strong influence on the Atlantic Area [Salvatore, 2005; Charle, 2009]. By pursuing the exploration within the cities, identifiable sites come to our attention. Great cultural stages like the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires or Carnegie Hall in New York have enabled the diffusion and the symbolic acknowledgment of foreign musical and theater pieces. International cultural manifestations also have to be taken into account: the London and Paris universal exhibitions whose principle has been taken up and multiplied in the Americas on the occasion of independence centenaries (the Philadelphia exhibition in 1876 or the one in Rio in 1922) played a major role in the diffusion of new media like the cinema [Morettin, 2011]. Similarly, scientific conferences and international festivals frequently served as sites of encounter. In the wake of African independence, the World Festival of Black Arts (Dakar, 1966; Lagos, 1977) and the pan-African Festival in Algiers (1969) initiated new collaborations between Africa, Afro-American and Latino-American artists [Fléchet & al., 2013].

3. A new cultural geography of the Atlantic Area

These various research tracks will enable us in fine to offer an overall panorama of the cultural circulations in the Atlantic Area from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 21st century along three transversal axes of research.

The first one is meant to put the concept of Atlantic history whose theoretical developments have mainly concerned the early modern era to the test of the contemporary period [Godechot, 1947; Bailyn, 2005]. The Atlantic revolutions which led to the political emancipation of most of the American continent (with the exception of Canada, Cuba or Jamaica, which deserve however attention), confer a new meaning to Euro-American cultural relations at the very moment when European empires place themselves in Africa. A hundred and fifty years later, African decolonizations transform again the political framework of the Atlantic Area. These different conditions weigh heavily on the mechanisms of cultural circulation and could lead us to infer the deconstruction of all coherence in an Atlantic space that died at the time of the first generation of European empires, i.e. an “impossible panoptic view of the Atlantic world” [Vidal, 2012]. The empirical observation of the circulations between the United States/Canada, Latin America, Europe and Africa during the 19th and 20th centuries testifies however both to the long term heritage of the colonial period (concerning the circulations between Africa and Latin America within the South Atlantic) as to the vigor of cultural circulations and invites us –without giving in to a form of essentialism that considers the Atlantic as the internal ocean of a monolithic Western civilization [Armitage, 2002]– to elaborate a new definition of the Atlantic Area by insisting on its plurality and polyphony [Burke, 2010]. In that respect, the Dictionary of Cultural Transatlantic History will examine the increasing cultural dominance of the North Atlantic as well as the issue of Americanization [Ory, 2007; Tota, 2000 et 2014; Rinke, 2013]. It will also focus on the bonds between African and Latin American countries in the South Atlantic [Alencastro, 2015], the intercultural growth of a diasporic Black Atlantic [Gilroy, 1993 and 2010], the central role of the Caribbean space [Dubesset, 2014] and the long history of cultural exchange within the “Euro-Latino-American area” [Guerra, 2002]. The participation of African scholars will help reevaluate the role of Africa in the cultural history of the Atlantic Area, as well as will the participation of Luiz Felipe de Alencastro and the Centro de Estudos do Atlântico Sul in the Transcultur@ team.

Closely linked to the first, the second axis of the research underlying the Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History will attempt to break away from the traditional approaches to cultural relations in terms of
center and peripheries. Indeed, it is impossible to reduce the cultural transatlantic circulations to a single flow from the North (Europe and the U.S.) to the South (Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean). Numerous recent works have shed light on the complexity of multi-directional exchanges prompting the scientific community to construct a history made of “equal parts” [Bertrand, 2011], from the American dances that hit the Parisian cabarets between the two World Wars [Jacotot, 2013] to the Latin American songs ubiquitous on U.S. and European radio stations, TV channels and stages throughout the 20th century [Storm Roberts, 2009; Fléchet, 2013] including the intellectual circulations between the Latin-American and the African “Souths” [Oro, 2004; Devés Valdés, 2003 and 2005; Capone, 2010]. Taking into consideration the reversibility of exchanges and the multiple back-and-forth phenomena between the “four sides of the Atlantic” should not make us forget the existence of undeniable economic and cultural hegemonies which, given the consolidation of mass culture since the mid-20th century, place the United States in a forceful position and appear as a key factor in the Americanization of the Atlantic Area [Ory, 2007; Tota, 2000 et 2014; Rinke, 2013]. Likewise, state intervention in cultural policies during the period of mounting danger between the two World Wars [Pernet, 2007; Gobbel, 2009] or in the context of the Cold War, when the soft power of cultural diplomacy gains in intensity everywhere [Spielmann, 2000; Calendra et Franco, 2012; Niño Rodríguez et Montero, 2012] – are crucial to understanding the cultural geography of the Atlantic Area between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 21st century, to which the international team Transcultur@ will confer a choice place. These considerations lead us to choose carefully the concepts used to reflect on and describe transatlantic cultural exchanges: the old concepts of “influence”, “international reach” or “model” charged with determinism [Compagnon, 2009], will be substituted those of “transfer”, “flow”, “network” or “circulation” [Bock, 2004] – as they are more neutral, more malleable and more apt to account for the multi-polarity of exchanges.

The third transversal axis is diachronic nature and will attempt to reflect on the chronology of transatlantic cultural exchanges between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 21st century. On the one hand, our task will be to identify ruptures and continuities, within a global perspective and in the long period covered by these two centuries, to shed light on the various sequences of intensification of the circulations, in close relation with the history of technical advances (history of transportation, history of mass cultures and of media cultures) and with the history of international relations (e.g. World War I as a moment of profound reconfiguration of transatlantic cultural relations and of Europe’s relative marginalization [Compagnon, 2013; Rinke, 2015]), and to analyze the evolution of cultural polarities within the Atlantic Area to the present day. On the other hand, it will be necessary to articulate this chronology built on the Atlantic scale with that of the multiple spaces of production and reception that constitute this area. this interplay between the local and the global will enable the elaboration of a timeline capable of restoring both the specificity of national experiences and their inscription within the dynamics of global history.

4. The contribution of digital humanities

If the fact that humanities and social sciences have entered the digital era is undeniable, the project of creating a community which is profoundly reassessing its practices involves fundamental stakes for research [Schnapp, 2008; Doueïhi, 2011; Rieffel, 2014; Rooney et Weed, 2014]. A fertile field, providing tools that have increased bibliographic mastery, renewed the practice of sources, such as archival funds resulting from digitalization and free access, the digital humanities have opened new sites of research and postulated new collaborative practices [Le Deuff, 2014]. This epistemological turn also confronts researchers to the limits of their capacity for investigation and for the use of these new tools [Delalande et Vincent, 2011; Rygiel, 2011].

It is these new challenges that Transcultur@ also wants to meet by exploring the possibilities offered by the digital tool to measure, map out and analyze cultural circulations. The contributions of digital humanities seem essential at least on four levels: the creation of a corpus and of data bases (e.g. producers and cultural mediators, the sources), the itineraries of migrants and the logic of diasporas), the treatment and presentation of sources (in particular for audiovisual sources); the cartography of flows and cultural networks [Velut, 2004; Pinol, 2011]; the construction of interactive timelines.

The creation of the Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History will enable the application of these new tools which will be put to the service of a collaborative research project envisaged itself on a transatlantic scale. Resulting from the collaboration between American, European and African researchers, the Dictionary will be published online in four languages (English, Spanish, French, Portuguese). The digital tool will allow, on the one hand, the creation of a reasoned system of links between the large thematic chapters and each entry, between the different chronological sequences considered and the geographic areas on the other
hand. The conjunction of these three structures (thematic, temporal, spatial) will enable a diversity of readings: starting from an entry by country (Cuba as an example of transatlantic cultural circulation since the end of the 18th century) to an entry by period (what does the “Belle Époque” signify on the Atlantic scale?), going through a multiplicity of thematic entries ranged by large domains (literature, scientific knowledge, religion, sports, music, theatre, etc.) which are then declined by means of detailed notes (jazz, football, telenovelas, etc.). The digital tool will also allow us to devise cultural statistics and maps to measure the flows and to analyze the transatlantic networks and to put online various types of sources. The successful achievement of this ambitious project relies on the gathering of data by means owing to the digital tool. The accessibility and the long term sustainability of the data, as well as the setting up of an innovative technology will represent a fundamental contribution to the research on cultural circulations in the same way as the On Line Encyclopedia of Mass Violence (http://www.massviolence.org) in the domain of the history of genocides and massacres, L’encyclopédie du patrimoine culturel de l’Amérique française (www.ameriquefrancaise.org) for the history of Canada, the New Georgia Encyclopedia (www.georgiaencyclopedia.org) for the history of the American South or the site European Memories of Gulag (http://museum.gulagmemories.eu) on the concentrationary history of the Soviet Union. It needs however to be emphasized that the articulation of the three levels of reading –thematic, temporal and spatial– will represent a major innovation put forward by Transcultur@.

On the technical level, the Transcultur@ project will be carried out by the “Très Grande Infrastructure de Recherche” (grand research infrastructure) Huma-Num. Following our initial exchanges, a technical solution grouping together four databases has been envisaged:

1. an electronic edition of the entries (analytical notices and bibliographic references) with a system of markers (keywords) and a thematic classification associating several structures (XML editor)
2. an electronic database of documents which will gather the supports associated with the entries and with the large sections of the Dictionary: digital archives, iconography, audiovisual documents, etc.
3. a geographic information system which will assemble data on the different periods and spaces under consideration: political maps of the countries, city plans, localization of the main cultural spaces (theatres, operas, museums, etc.).
4. a quantitative database will allow us to measure and visualize the cultural flows (artists’ migrations, translations, tours, etc.) which will then be interconnected in space (GIS) and linked to the respective Dictionary notes. Combining quantitative analysis and geographical information, the visualization of cultural flows in the Atlantic Area represents the most innovative technical aspect of the research platform.

This system will be developed in France by a project engineer who will be hired for 24 months to develop the digital tool and the long-term archiving of the data. The web design will be done in Brazil with the support of the FAPESP.

Transcultur@ will be hosted on the of Huma-Num service grid which is setting up a technical cooperation for the treatment and interoperation of data, the maintenance of the site as well as the long-lasting archiving of the data. The digital tool will also enable us to develop an evolutionary approach (periodical updates) and to set up (through a series of filters and modules) interactions between researchers and readers/internet users.

5. An international strategic project

Transcultur@ will develop an innovative scientific and technical tool for the analysis of cultural circulations in the Atlantic Area. The project is doubly strategic: on the one hand, it corresponds to topics defined by the generic project ANR 2015, it aims at providing keys for understanding the cultural globalization at work in contemporary societies; on the other hand, it reinforces the scientific cooperation between France and Brazil in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences on the basis of existing partnerships that have already proved their fertility.

The benefits of Transcultur@ will be foremost scientific and technical. The project complies with challenge n. 8 of the ANR “Innovative, integrative and adaptable societies” and is also in compliance with axis n. 5 “Cultures, creations, patrimonies”. Owing to the mobilization of a vast network of researchers from Europe, Africa and the Americas, the project will develop a new approach to artistic circulations, cultural diversity and the process of contemporary globalization. The wide range of the topics and regions treated, the multiple combinations made possible by the system of exploitation (entries by country, theme, period, etc.) an the achievement of a cultural cartography of the Atlantic Area will represent major advances in research. The
Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History will provide strategic knowledge on the lines of force (political domination, economic dependence, cultural polarities) and on the borders/boundaries (geographic, political, symbolic) across the Atlantic Area, as well as on their evolution from the Atlantic revolutions to the present day. This dynamic and diachronic approach to Atlantic globalization is perfectly in sync with the questioning on the international circulation of artistic experiences described in axis 5. Transcultur® intends therefore to meet the challenge of a cross history of representations and imaginaries so as to promote –via a critical reassessment of contemporary exoticisms - a less ethnocentric relation to creations that remote from the “center”.

Transcultur® also contains an extremely important social and educational dimension. Written by specialists in a clear and accessible language, the Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History will be available online, free of charge. Translated into four languages, it is addressed not only to the scientific community but also to students and high school pupils by means of interactive modules. The detailed entries, the maps and the audio-visual documents of the Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History will provide the public at large with keys to understanding the stakes at work in cultural globalization. By insisting on the strategic partnership between France and Brazil at the heart of current debates on cultural globalization and digital humanities.

Finally, Transcultur® is part and parcel of the strategic partnership between France and Brazil. Led by a tight collaboration between the French and the Brazilian research teams (see part 2.4. “Partnership”), Transcultur® will reinforce the scientific cooperation in the field of social sciences and humanities. First-class researchers whose works covering different disciplines have participated in the recent renewal of transatlantic cultural history [Alencastro, 2015 ; Compagnon, 2013 ; Fléchet, 2013 ; Luca, 2011 ; Morettin, 2011 ; Soares, 2010a, 2010b ; Velut, 2004], will take part in the project, under the scientific responsibility of Anaïs Fléchet and Gabriela Pellegrino Soares. The realization of the Dictionary of Transatlantic Cultural History will place France and Brazil at the heart of social sciences and humanities.

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