

Introduction:

After Paris, What? Exile, Exoticism and Eccentricity in Latin America Intelligentsia and its New Capitals

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The outbreak of World War II (1939-1945) saw a series of exiles of European artists and intellectuals who traveled to the American continent. As a result, a worldwide transformation in cultural institutions took place. In this context, which immediately followed the fall of Paris, is it still possible to consider New York as the center of such transformations? In other words, is it feasible to insist on a global cultural center when one knows that countries from Latin America, Brazil included, also hosted exiled artists and, at such a historical moment, deepened diplomatic relations and cultural exchanges with the United States in a new manner? A more precise and profound gaze at the cultural exchanges in and from Latin America during the Second World War, as well as in the years following that conflict, is the subject of the dossier “After Paris, What? Exile, Exoticism and Eccentricity

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in Latin America Intelligentsia and its New Capitals.” The title is the same as the one which brought together a diverse range of researchers from several countries in the Americas and Europe to a seminar at New York University (NYU) on March 20-23, 2014, during the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) Conference. Part of the discussions also continued in the colloquium *The New Barbarians: Brazilian Cultural Criticism After the End of Modernity*, which took place at Boston University (BU), about a week after the New York seminar. In this second round of debates, which were specially composed of junior scholars, the majority of them Brazilians, the speakers had to respond (apart from their responses to the “After Paris” theme) to an intentionally provocative (in a fashion derived from Borges) *call*. This *call* tried to (de)localize this new generation of cultural critics within a certain tradition of making criticism itself from such a sphere as Brazil:

Those born after 1979, when Brazil was turned into a zombie searching for the myth of democracy, found themselves trapped in an environment of brutal, everyday violence and bureaucratic intellectual adventure. They walked into the desert of political mediocrity, where life was being ever more equated with arid statistics. Tired of the division between literature and criticism. Tired of the separation between theory and life. From such a landscape, a generation emerges bearing new cultural critics, writers, artists, translators, editors, outsiders, filmmakers, and other names of your preference. They are those who refuse the propaganda of Brazil (as a developing country) in the face of the systematic genocide carried out in its third-world metropolises and in the jungles of the Amazon. Tired of Bossa Nova. Tired of quotations from Walter Benjamin or Deleuze or Foucault or Derrida placed over everything. And perhaps, more tired of those who do not believe in them. What do these New Barbarians have to say? With whom do they want to break? How do they arrive at their *tabula rasa*? These are some of the questions to be confronted here. Join them in this tentacle of the vast and tropical wasteland.³

The New Barbarians’ colloquium was attended by historian Nicolau Sevcenko, who was then a professor of Brazilian studies at Harvard University. After the end of all the scheduled presentations, Sevcenko spoke from the audience:

³ On “democracy as an abuse of statistics,” see: (BORGES, 1976).

In a very strategic sense, I think you put the right point: at some stage something went wrong. What was it that went profoundly wrong within the Brazilian context? Let us call it modernity. In a sense that it was such an investment in this idea of modernity that everything that was not fitting into the picture was left behind. And, well, there were lots of things, not to say that perhaps everything was left behind. And the sequence that you have from that point on [is] the abolition of slavery (1888), the republic (1889), and the Brazilian flag [with] “order and progress,” which is the positivistic agenda by definition. This is positivism at its very best. And the idea from that point on [was to] bring European immigrants to implant a new discipline of work that is connected from now on to industrialization, not to agriculture anymore, and then Getúlio Vargas and his dictatorship promoted industrialization through a strict connection to the United States and American capitalism and investment, and from that point on [there was] the military dictatorship, and then from that point on Collor and globalization, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and globalization, and Lula, [who] incorporated more and more people into this modernizing project. This has been the mainstream of Brazilian way of thinking for more than a century. What I think that the New Barbarians brought for us to think is: well, perhaps something was left behind, something very important. Perhaps what we have facing us is not the answer for the questions that the majority of the population have to face in their daily lives, perhaps what you have seen in the streets of Brazil nowadays is people looking for the answer, and perhaps there is a new generation of social scientists, of art and literary critics in Brazil, the New Barbarians, who are thinking: well, let us try another direction, let us try a different course of things, because the way it is going it is always going in the same direction and people are not getting what they want. That is the feeling that I have from this meeting and it was very fulfilling to me.

Sevcenko’s discourse makes reference to the 2013 protests in the streets of the main cities of Brazil demanding free public transportation for the youth. Those protests grew exponentially in a question of months, giving rise to comparisons with the May ’68 events in Paris, and bringing again to the table the discussion of how to deal with the experiences from the former world cultural center, such as the propositions and practices of the Situationist International, within the current context of Latin America. While it was still possible to think of Paris as the cultural center of the West, it would not be unexpected to reach the conclusion that being a vanguardist in Latin America would consist of the capacity to absorb the modern technique through the filters of local particularities. This example can be partially observed in

movements such as *Martín Fierro* or the *Revista de Antropofagia*. For Alejo Carpentier, as an example, art would be responsible to project objects and people in an event of universal character so that the Latin American scene could lose its status of eccentricity. This would be translated in an attempt to overcome exoticism, qualifying this scene as an important issue to a global culture.

With the occupation of Paris in 1940, this scenario started to lose relevance. Even considering that New York undoubtedly was the main destiny of exiled European artists and intellectuals, one has to point out that the US city was not the only place of arrival of that modernist diaspora. Buenos Aires, for example, received such figures as Roger Caillois, José Ortega y Gasset, and Rio de Janeiro had in its streets Georges Bernanos, Roger Bastide, and Stephan Zweig, among others. These and other exiles point out that, after the liberation of Paris in 1944, it was no longer possible to establish a single place as the cultural center of the world. In that same year, the exiled Otto Maria Carpeaux begun to write, in Brazil, his *História da literatura ocidental* [*History of Western Literature*], whose first volume he would finish the following year. In the introduction to that work, the author gives indications of a non-vertical reconfiguration of the world at the same time he casts suspicion over the eclecticism in his own work, which had the intention of being universalist, but it was not such a thing when it put different authors, texts and concepts side by side, many times in an inconclusive way. About this issue, Carpeaux used to admit: “All syntheses are provisional” (CARPEAUX, 1978, p. 35).

The fall of Paris calls into question any attempt to understand Latin America through traditional paths such as exoticism or the binomial particularity-universality. It is not only a question of acknowledging that, since then, the arts would no longer be produced in an autonomous fashion, as would happen in an imperialist world. In *Políticas Canibais* [*Cannibal Politics*], literary critic Raul Antelo questions the ideas of Roberto Schwarz in “Nacional por subtração” [National by subtraction] not in the sense of praising the Latin American avant-garde nationalisms from the twentieth century, which, for him, would be nationalist reductionisms. On the contrary, it is a matter of perceiving that European modern literatures can only be understood within a plural world, as (to give only one example among others) in

the figure of the anthropophagus, who was of interest to Michel de Montaigne long before that figure would become a theme for Oswald de Andrade. Thus, “cannibalism is the most finished translation of what we understand as civilization” (ANTELO, 2001, p. 266). Within this non-autonomist perspective, the fall of Paris is not seen in this dossier as a historical mark, but as a problematization of cultural standards and historical syntheses with the awareness that, ever since Jean de Léry or Pero Vaz de Caminha made contact with the Amerindian peoples in the sixteenth century, it has been possible to think about a world of networks. The true reductionism, then, would possibly lie in the very art critiques or institutions of knowledge.

The loss of an aesthetic or political reference, therefore, gives rise to new forms of self-representation and cultural exchanges. The 1940s were marked by the urgency of elaborating a multicentric world. It was possible to observe, in some very specific cases, certain kinds of fulfillment of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theorizations about cultural dialogism during the 1930s, which, some years later, would be rethought by Julia Kristeva as intertextuality. The papers completed for the seminar *After Paris, What?* bring a very consistent contribution about these examples of cultural exchanges which kept the 1920s avant-garde vision in check, as they saw themselves as co-participants in a process of changes of aesthetic standards on a global scale. They were now in a different world without a defined center, that is to say, an eccentric world.

Within this reasoning, the research endeavors of Geoff Schulenberg (New York University), Leonardo D’Avila (Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina), Larisa Colón-Rodríguez (Oberlin College/ Universidad de Salamanca), and Sean Manning (The University of Texas), problematize literary texts as a starting point to bring the evidentiality of textual networks between Europe, Anglo-Saxon America and Latin America. They point out several modes of referential displacement in the reception of types of knowledge that were in vogue in the Old World. This can be perceived through the reception of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires by Oscar Masotta, the redefinition of Neo-Thomism by catholic intellectuals in Brazil and the United States, the supposedly improbable mark of the French *nouveau roman* on Juan José Saer, and the radicalization of Cubism, which loses any vestige of

abstraction in order to become a physical act in the writings of Lorenzo García Vega.

Some articles in the dossier, by turn, are directly focused on the visual arts in order to give new life to the contacts which took place in the major changes of the 1940s and 1950s. As the critic Jorge Schwartz says: “There is no way to ‘fatigue’ (a Jorge Luis Borges expression) the historical avant-garde movements without going through the sanity test of the visual arts” (SCHWARTZ, 2013, p. 10), and this also applies to the artistic phenomena after World War II. Diego Cervelin (Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina) problematizes the poet Jorge de Lima’s photomontages, in which he uses the collage technique precisely as a skill to *decapitate* a logicist and organic vision of art, opening space so that one can be closer to the maximum of a corporeality. Guilherme Trielli Ribeiro (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais), for his part, begins with an epigraph by Piet Mondrian about non-figurative art so as to rethink the contemporary reappropriations by Paulo Nazareth, which were made during his travels from the south to the north of the American continent, specifically so that he could sell images of eccentricity.

In the closing articles of the dossier, Gisele Román Medina (Haverford College) demonstrates, through the essays and poems by Néstor Perlongher, one among several attempts to redraw the symbolic borders of Buenos Aires as a European city using Caribbean imagery. The urban space was also the theme considered by Ynaê Lopes dos Santos (Fundação Getúlio Vargas), who makes a comparative revision of the studies on slavery in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Havana, which were considered the capitals of slavery in the Americas. She establishes that a proper connection between slavery and urban dynamics has not been done yet. Thiago Nicodemo (Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro) problematizes several public manifestations and works of art made in both Brazil and the United States, in which Cândido Portinari and Gilberto Freyre create clear representations with vainglorious traces and imperialist discourses such as racial harmony or the project of the creation of a new capital for the country. They did that within their own singularities, but bearing a certain analogy to the US context.

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