CIHA: Motion - Migration (online/São Paulo, 17-21 Jan 22)

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www.ciha2022.mac.usp.br

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CIHA World Congress (Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art) São Paulo 2022
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Since the first manifestations of its genre, art historical texts try to understand the artistic processes of creativity as a process of migration; inventions are understood as mobile processes. The development of the figure of an artist or of a style can be seen as a complex process of migrating individuals or concepts. Migration has also been understood through its historical, political and socio-economic aspects. In addition to this, it has been a fundamental aspect of the human experience since the beginning of the Modern Age, i.e., since the times of the circumnavigation of the world, which provoked displacements of large population groups across all the continents. Even before the creation of art history as a scholarly discipline in the 19th century, art and culture have been construed through the exchange of objects, concepts and practices among a variety of territories and societies around the globe, not only between Europe and their colonies and vice versa, but also between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula or India, or Asia and the Americas. European mass emigration to the Americas, that started in the 19th century and continued throughout the 20th century as a forced migration related to the two World Wars and the many other violent conflicts around the globe, reaches an unprecedented level in the 21st century, when humankind faces new challenges brought about by different forms of transit of peoples, ideas and images.

It is precisely through its establishment as a scholarly practice during the neocolonial era, and after its own self-reflection that art history has started revising its methods and theories in regard to such a phenomenon, while attempting to articulate new ways to describe and analyze its complexity by reaching out into a transdisciplinary practice. Art historical discourses had declared within the formation of post-colonial critique the opening of the discipline towards a global outreach: a World Art History, which is distinctive from a universal art history, where the discipline is redefined in the plural form (world art histories), to encompass the diversity of cultural processes of the visual arts. These processes however are complex, especially when they involve images. As W.J.T. Mitchell points out in his article on Migrating images, it implies not only movement but "contradiction, difficulty, friction and opposition." (Image Science, 2015, p. 65)

The forthcoming CIHA conference aims to describe, to reflect upon and to analyze those different forms of migrations in a concrete, historiographical and theoretical way. Contemporary challenges can help us to define our epistemological questions, as well as historical foundation can deepen and widen the perspectives for our knowledge. Migration can mean a movement of peoples, objects and ideas (or concepts). How travelling artifacts can challenge cultural patterns? Migrated objects could be creative, for example, in establishing different cultural codes in collections – from the Wunderkammer to contemporary artist's networks; or they could be threatening within the cultural encounters – from apotropaic figures to iconoclastic manifestations, since the Byzantine iconoclasm to the recent destructions of the Bamiyan Buddhas or other objects declared as "world heritage". Does it make a difference whether such concepts, peoples and objects are forced to emigrate, or do it by free will? Concerning the object, how should we deal with the question of repatriation? How are art historical practices to deal with migrations across time? How does the latter help us to deal with the notion of anachronism? How productive and/or creative can it be when considering artistic practices and cultural exchanges? How, for instance, were pre-modern artifacts integrated in Renaissance architecture and their related concepts?

Migrations also shaped different cultural and therefore art historical so-called identities. In which way "Italian", "German" art was created? But also, how "American" (meaning here the United States), "Latin American" concepts were built on ideas of migration, or ideas of "Négritude" or "Méditerranée"? How are such national, regional or continental identities, conceived in a very specific historical moment, still used today? If they continue to emerge, what are they being used for, in a world that tends to become more and more globalized? What are the consequences of migrations of images and objects between different institutions, for example private and public, between countries or different cultural zones? How aesthetic concepts of Buddhism or Hinduism transformed the creative processes in other Asian regions? The influence of commercial routes for the migration of people, objects and ideas like the transpacific economy or the silk route?

Especially for the contemporaneity, but not exclusively, migrations between the so called 'real' and the 'virtual' reached such a level of complexity that it requires transdisciplinary approaches not only within the humanities, but also exchanges with other disciplines of the 'exact sciences': How can network theories help us to understand global artistic movements, how social media shape 'reality'; and how digital archives can help to preserve fragile documents and objects, but also how these new types of archives are threatened by other technological and cultural challenges? And what are the theoretical and methodological consequences?

As Mieke Bal has explained in her Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: a Rough guide, art history, within the humanities, belongs to culture, but does not constitute it. Such critique will also be adopted here. The qualifier 'culture' indicates precisely that migrations of objects, persons and concepts should be analyzed in view of their existence in culture. And "They are not seen as isolated jewels, but as things always-already engaged as interlocutors, within the larger culture from which they are emerged" – and for our proposal from where or to where they are migrated.

If the last decade has seen an expansion of art history regarding the range of objects to be encompassed within the field, we still have to expand the discipline in terms of methodological and theoretical discussions. Western art historians – whatever this means, and this is a main issue to discuss - still see art historical theory as their domain, and rarely are open to theoretical and method-

ological debates running outside the mainstream of the discipline. The present Congress aims at changing this situation. The challenge of doing art history outside such an idea of “Western tradition” also places the effort of finding new ways to approach the field, and scholars sitting outside the main stream of art historical tradition are likely to have important contributions to give. What are the differences of art historical practices across the globe? How the discipline builds its practices in such different contexts? In which cases would it be more inclined to borrow new methods from sociology, anthropology and history, or to go to the fields of philosophy, aesthetics, philology and so forth? How do we “animate” objects in different contexts? How do they “react” to the different settings of art historical thinking? In this new perspective, migrations are of utmost importance to consider, for we cannot go on working with objects, concepts and peoples disconnected of their contexts. For us to be able to understand the world, as it has been shaped necessarily by the experience of dislocation and movement, it is vital to deal with these different layers of the making of art. This congress, specifically in its Brazilian counterpart, intentionally wants to avoid a whole range of “post-colonial” approaches, which are generally considered adequate for a conference held outside Europe and the U.S. The idea is to reinforce central discussions that concern the field as a whole to a relatively new but lively center of art historical practice, such as Latin America.

Last but not least, the congress proposes to explore the concept of migration in art historical practice. In the contemporary scenario, the concept of migration acquires new meanings and can be seen as a disturbing element within the social network, in general, and in art in particular. Migrations produce unpredictable movement and resistance, disorganizing special and temporal coordinates. Migrations create what art historian Inge Boer described as “uncertain terrains”, in which frontier lines are transformed in imprecisely defined zones of encounters where multiple special references and multiple temporalities are obliged to coexist. Mieke Bal considers these spaces as offering resistance over the “technical control” that dominates social structures today. In her understanding, it creates a space in which it is possible to experiment the tensions and conflict natural to life in society. In art, these experiences become visible and tangible. In other words, could the concept of Migration, seen as a disturbing element within contemporary society, become operative within the field of art history?

The 35th CIHA World Congress will be held within a collaboration with Italy, which will host the first part of the congress in 2019 in Florence. To migrate between the two continents throughout the extent of this joint conference, in two successive moments in Italy and Brazil, may also help us to grasp some of the metamorphosis that ideas, peoples and concepts suffer throughout their dislocation in space. We are sure that each researcher taking part in the conference will enter the discussion from their particular point of view and experience, so that we can expect a very lively, complex and challenging debate.

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