

## Poetics and politics of transport and mobility in the transition to the 21st century

Universitat de Barcelona

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"Poetics and politics of transport and mobility in the transition to the 21st century".

Guest editor: Pablo Santa Olalla

Since the late 20th century, there has been significant theorization of the relationship between art and the media. In the same way, can we also expect to see a rich body of reflections on the relationship between art and transport? This monographic issue of the Revista de Estudios Globales y Arte Contemporáneo (REG|AC) is organized as a prospective on art-transport interactions, taken in a broad sense both with respect to the variety of means of locomotion and artistic tendencies covered, and the approaches and methodologies applied in the research.

Critical theory consistently intertwines the processes of communication and mobility to analyze the contemporary world. It reviews phenomena such as globalization, hyperconnectivity, accelerationism, post- and de-coloniality, cross-border circulations of ideas, objects and people, in-between spaces, flows of power, and diasporic and extractivist inequalities. When these issues are addressed, there is no lack of references to the generalized extension of means of transport, although they are often marginal. These references must be extracted and contextualized to compose a corpus that delves into the socio-political and cultural causes, developments and consequences of this connective framework that moves people, objects and ideas, and operates at various levels between the local sphere and the planetary scale.

The high-tech implementation of transport has a significant impact on our individual and collective lives, serving as a catalyst for connection. The fluidity of the contemporary world has certain advantages, but also disadvantages, such as the imposition of inhuman and warmongering speeds (Paul Virilio); the dulling our experience of the route and the journey (Lewis Mumford); the homogenization of the differences between origin and destination (Guy Debord); the appearance of inhospitable places and, at the same time, the saturation of our bodies and minds due to the multiplication of events and images (Marc Augé); and the feedback into the capitalist consumer economy (Armand Mattelart). In the face of this matrix of intersecting concerns, it is worthwhile to consider the specific role of transport technologies in the contemporary world-system and how

all these processes affect and are affected by contemporary art.

It is important to note the evolution of commercial aviation from the 1950s onwards as a specific case which, although not unique and to be contextualized alongside other advances in land and sea transport, is of particular interest insofar as it illustrates the starting point of what is referred here to as the "poetics and politics of transport and mobility". In contrast to the early critical studies on other technological races in the Cold War, such as the nuclear or space ones, the need to initiate systematic studies on aviation and its sociopolitical and cultural impact was still being pointed out at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall (James R. Hansen). Since then, academic research has expanded this area in small steps, mainly with regard to the genealogy of the different phases of the Jet Age and its links to politics and geopolitics (Ronald E. G. Davies; Jenifer Van Vleck). To a much lesser extent, certain analyses have also been initiated around the cultural consequences of the development of aviation (Vanessa R. Schwartz). However, this pre-existing, albeit limited, collection of literature can be expanded in at least two ways.

Firstly, research in this field comes mainly from American academia, even though other perspectives are possible and necessary. How can we move beyond the current poles of technological and cultural production that hold global hegemony? What references and bibliographies can we use? Furthermore, how can we leverage these decentralized perspectives to contribute to our understanding of the cultural implications of a transport network that has a global reach, resulting in a wide range of effects across diverse contexts?

Secondly, previous studies on the Jet Age have been produced mainly within the disciplinary frameworks of History and the History of Science and Technology. From the perspective of Art History, how can we trace the links between contemporary creativity and the widening sphere of air transport?

The answers to the questions posed above are neither unique, nor easy to obtain. These issues can also be extended to the field of art-transportation relations, beyond the domain of aviation. A first step towards this possible artistic historiography interested in means of locomotion involves trying out interdisciplinary, crossed and horizontal, transnational and relational approaches, open to Cultural and Visual Studies.

Acknowledging the ambitious scope of the thematic, conceptual and methodological frameworks we have outlined, we have structured the core content of this REG|AC volume around two pivotal axes, illustrated by open questions derived from case studies involving art from the late 20th century through to the early 21st century.

## 1. AESTHETICS-ETHICS OF LOGISTICS AND INFRASTRUCTURES FOR MOBILITY

In a 1992 interview (published in the artist's catalogue raisonné in 2012), the American art critic Christopher Knight asked John Baldessari, also American, about his vast mobility between the United States and Europe during the early 1970s. The artist replied: "I think it was a very important time for many artists, because air fares were cheap, and dealers had the idea that you bring the artist over, and you do the work there, rather than shipping art. And so what you ship is actually the artist. And that was incredibly valuable for me –and in turn valuable for CalArts because I could share my experiences there". In this passage, Baldessari offers insights into the relationship between the increasing affordability and accessibility of air travel, and notable developments in

the realm of art, such as the rapid international spread of conceptualism, or the emergence of the figure of the global artists, who become a product in themselves and no longer work in a specific territory but are constantly on the move. Decades later, the artist Gustav Metzger, a "stateless person" because as a child he took refuge in England to escape from Nazi Germany, proposed the Reduce Art Flights (2007) project for the Skulptur Projekte in Münster. The proposal involved the distribution of thousands of leaflets bearing that slogan, which called upon people not to fly to attend artistic events or to work in the field of art. Metzger's focus on the overgrowth and commercial drift of the international art system was underscored by the summer of 2007, when thousands of people traveled between Münster, Venice and Kassel due to the coincident hosting of the three major art events in these cities. What cultural, sociopolitical and ideological mutations took place between the 70s and the early 2000s for both the proposals and the attitudes of Baldessari and Metzger to be so different?

## 2. UNVEILING THE TECHNOCRACY THAT SHAPES MIGRATION AND TOURISM

From 1972 to 1982, the Argentine artist Carlos Ginzburg traveled tirelessly, visiting Europe and the United States, while focusing particularly on Latin America, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean region, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. During his travels, he produced photographic series depicting everyday objects placed in exotic contexts, as well as small performative gestures carried out by him, as an artist-tourist, or by local people. For example, he photographed a mask of US President Jimmy Carter in Dhaka, Chiang Mai, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Jakarta and Bali, symbolizing the presence of the superpower in the region; on another occasion, in a very acid manner, he added phrases such as "je fais l'aumône" (I give alms), "je rigole des pauvres" (I laugh at the poor) or "la photo payée" (the paid photo) to images of his interactions with people in Nepal. The project *Les voyages de Ginzburg* was based on these materials, which were exhibited together with quotes and references from anthropologists, geographers and urban planners such as the Frenchmen Claude Lévi-Strauss and Guy Debord, the Canadian Edward Relph and the American Dean MacCanell. Sometimes corrosive in its irony, Ginzburg problematized the phenomenon of mass tourism and its extractivist and exoticizing consequences. If we consider the phenomena of migration and tourism as two sides of the same coin in the framework of neoliberalism, how can we draw the invisible line that links *Les voyages de Ginzburg* with the iconic video *Centro di permanenza temporanea* (2007) by the Albanian artist Adrian Paci, who lives in Italy, in which a group of migrant men climb a boarding ladder, but are held up because it does not connect to any aeroplane? And what is the connection between these works and *Condecoración / Decoration* (2016), by the Peruvian artist Daniela Ortiz, an installation and multimedia piece in which she puts a face to the leaders of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), and even imposes a symbolic punishment on them?

Beyond these two axes, possible topics for this volume of REG|AC include, but are not limited to:

- Cultural studies and critical analyses of the development of means of transport as a relevant context for the production of art from the end of the Cold War to the present day.
- Visual studies and case studies of artistic practices, projects, artists or trends that relate transport to phenomena such as extractivism, migration and diaspora, tourism or others.
- Interdisciplinary research in the Social Sciences, History and the History of Techniques and Technologies that includes specific approaches related to the artistic, creative, cultural or aesthetic

fields.

- Critical analyses of the artistic and cultural consequences of contemporary mobility and transport phenomena, including acceleration of time, shortening of distances, shrinking of the world image, imbalances of power and identity tensions caused by the dialectic between homogenization and multiculturalism.
- Explorations and essays, textual, not only textual and visual, that link contemporary art with concepts associated with mobility and transport, such as "dromology" (Paul Virilio), "kinocene" (Thomas Nail) and others.
- Relevant contributions around references, concepts, theories and authors that approach the field of the arts to observe their interrelation with transport technologies, expanding the bibliography proposed here and the conventional bibliographies centered on Europe and the United States, to form an extensive and varied corpus that deals with the topics raised.

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