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Abstract

This series of research seminars, organized in Colombia, Argentina, and Brazil, focused on Latin American and United States Latino art from 1960 to 1990. It challenges the dominant narrative of modernism that places Latin American and Latino art in the margins. Working together, senior scholars and advanced graduate students analyzed the history of Latin American avant-garde and neo-vanguard art from a comparative perspective, focusing on such topics as transnational exchanges among artists and collectives, and the impact of political and economic change.

KEYWORDS: Latin America, U.S. Latino, historiography, archive, neo-avant-garde, simultaneous avant-garde, historical avant-garde, modernism, comparative frame

Introduction

Twentieth-century Latin American and Latino art has emerged as a widely recognized if variably practiced field of art historical investigation in the last twenty years, especially in the Americas. The project undertaken under the auspices of the Getty Foundation's Connecting Art Histories initiative, "Grounds for Comparison: Neo-Vanguards and Latin American/U.S. Latino Art, 1960–90," challenged the field of Latin American art history to become more comparative in its frames of reference and research, using the neo-avant-gardists of the 1960s through the 1980s, who returned to the historical avant-garde as an archive, as shared material. The neo-avant-gardes were projects of historical reevaluation/revision, experimentation, and anti-institutionalism. This situation was not immune to the revolutionary climate of the period. Many initiatives employed the critique of cultural, political, and economic institutions as devices to fuse art with socialist societies, or to penetrate and subvert the repressive machinery of the state. During the dictatorships, Latin American artists employed conceptual strategies to undermine repressive measures and censorship, with the aim of establishing signs of disagreement that would allow critical structures to persist (underground, coded, indirectly), in spite of the political situation.

The three seminars were hosted in Bogotá in 2013, Buenos Aires in 2014, and São Paulo in 2015. Each was organized thematically—synchronicities; exhibition and narration; the relationship between art and life—and attracted emerging scholars working on individual case studies that are open to comparative analysis, regardless of geopolitical border. Our Connecting Art Histories project was animated by two major goals, which intertwine both emergent and long-held historiographic, methodological, and professional concerns. First, as the field of Latin American and U.S. Latino art increasingly turns its attention to postwar art production, raising questions about how to write rigorous histories of the "contemporary," we propose a critical reevaluation of so-called neo-vanguards operating in Latin America and the Latino U.S. from a comparative perspective. These neo-vanguards have been widely misunderstood, first by critics and then historians, as fruitless derivations of the European historical avant-garde of the early twentieth century, which are taken to be original and universal. Our second goal, which recognizes the inherent politics of comparison in a field traditionally defined by national(ist) and (neo) colonial thinking, is the logical extension of the canonical avant-garde's universalization to allow not only for the inclusion of advanced art scenes in Medellín, Rosario, and East Los Angeles, but ultimately the transformation of "originality"

and “context” into more complex, flexible, and even contradictory categories of art historical analysis.

The dynamic of the seminars encouraged intense discussion of particular artworks, the constitution of a common arena of information, theoretical perspectives and methods (which admit synchronicities), and the production of comparative frames of reference that emerge from these case studies. Several of the ongoing research projects by the seminar participants focus on creating new genealogies or on subverting the notion of genealogy itself, in order to consider the grounds for displacement between one dominant mode of thought and another. A key focus here is the recovery of terms from the period in question and the elaboration of new ones—keywords such as *Arte Destructivo*, *poema proceso*, *arte no objetivo*, *áreas cerradas y áreas abiertas*, *culturas híbridas*, *neoconcretismo*, or *vanguardias simultáneas*—that grant more specificity to our investigations. We are testing models based both on the relationships between European and Latin American metropolises, and on the complication of national histories. The latter is addressed through the use of regional maps that rewrite Latin American art history from social history, cultural studies, and feminist/queer/subaltern perspectives. The seminars also called for immersion in the host city through visits to museums (public and private collections), artists’ studios, and archives.¹ In other words, “Grounds for Comparison” seeks to connect art histories that have been to date circumscribed by geopolitical or intellectual boundaries and chronologies, without assuming that comparison and integration are disinterested processes. As the Connecting Art Histories initiative appreciates, globalizing the practice of art history need not homogenize it.

The Historiographic Turn

In October 2012, the Center for Latin American Visual Studies (CLAVIS) of the University of Texas at Austin hosted its third international forum for emerging scholars, inviting them to consider synchronicity as an art historical method. The call for participants defined the term as the “apparently meaningful coincidence of two or more similar events that are causally unrelated.” From a strictly historicist viewpoint, with its predilection for universal, linear time, this would appear to mean no comparison at all, at least as is conventionally understood. Synchronicity, conversely, draws attention to simultaneity and parallelism regardless of whether there are verifiable historical links or not. Synchronicity also renders visible the scholar’s decisive role in constructing a comparative frame of analysis. This approach should not be taken as an abandonment of historical rigor but rather as an opportunity to scrutinize one of the discipline’s foundational concepts—affecting modernism in particular—which continues to order cultural exchanges according to rubrics of originality and derivation in spite of the rise of models seeking to account

for “multiple” and “alternative” modernisms.² The idea of synchronicity is not only central to the reconceptualization of Latin American art but may also serve to postulate a new mode of analysis of global art after World War II; a model in which Latin American art is no longer inscribed as peripheral but as simultaneous with international neo-avant-gardes.³

We can refer to two ostensibly disparate although synchronous art happenings by the neo-avant-gardes of the 1960s and 1970s in Argentina and the Latino U.S. to introduce our proposition that Euro-American art histories cannot simply be supplemented but must be thoroughly rethought. Kenneth Kemble, together with six other artists, mounted an exhibition in November 1961 at the Galería Lirolay in Buenos Aires. *Arte Destructivo* (Destructive art) displayed objects harvested from the streets near the port and city dump, as well as from the artists’ possessions, including some of their own informalist paintings, which were aggressively cut, crumpled, and burned. Accompanying them was a soundtrack incorporating readings from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, a play written by Pablo Picasso, and a lecture by Argentinean art critic Jorge Romero Brest. This action was not, in the collective view, gratuitous destruction or a belabored reference to nuclear war; rather, it was a process of creation through its obverse. *Arte Destructivo* confronted both natural decomposition and consumer society’s planned obsolescence. It was subversive but also pleasurable and critical, breaking modern art’s illusion of organic unit and sensuous surface into cathartic fragments with unpredictable half-lives. Reviews of the exhibition were less generous. Several specifically compared the project with surrealism and Dada—only forty years too late. Simultaneously, comparable developments in mainstream artistic centers also returned to the continued potential of historical avant-garde strategies. These include, to cite only a few examples, the *Art of Assemblage* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (October 4–November 12, 1961), and the accompanying conference that brought together representatives of historical Dadaism (Richard Huelsenbeck and Marcel Duchamp) with neo-Dadaism (Robert Rauschenberg) at the same table. In London, the *Destruction in Art* symposium (September 9–11, 1966) gathered artists from Europe, the United States, and Latin America, further cementing the simultaneity of the art scenes.⁴ Argentinean critics did not compare parallel developments in destructive art in Europe and the United States.

In December 1972, three members of Asco, a Chicano art collective in Los Angeles active from 1972 to 1987, visited the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) at night and spray-painted their names on its facade: Willie Herrón, Harry Gamboa Jr., and Glugio Nicandro (a.k.a. Gronk; Fig. 1). The next morning, Gamboa returned with Patssi Valdez to document their action, with Valdez posing for photographs as if she were in a French New Wave film, albeit filtered through the noir of East Los Angeles. The tags, which pointedly laid claim to an institution that did not regularly exhibit Latino art, left little mark on the mainstream art scene at the time, and LACMA quickly painted over them. By 1994,

Figure 1

Spray Paint LACMA, © 1972, Harry Gamboa Jr.



however, Gronk was featured in a small exhibition at the museum and the *Los Angeles Times* review noted that Asco “brought Zurich Dada of the late 1910s to 1970s Los Angeles.”⁵ While the critic did not imply direct derivation, the politically charged practice of Asco was explained to an Anglo audience by means of anachronism, Europe’s long-gone historical avant-garde. Throughout the 1970s and ’80s, Gamboa articulated a vocabulary for this tethered invisibility: phantom culture, urban exile, orphans of modernism.⁶

These cases are not simply failures of context—too narrow, too wide—but they also tell of the dangers of comparison and its interpretive potential. If art history is to proceed as a globalized discipline in which various histories of the visual are connected, then questions of comparison, understood broadly, must be addressed. These cases also help us understand the paradoxical situation of art “outside of centers” of art production. Revisions to the historical avant-garde enacted by neo-avant-gardes in the centers of Europe and the United States are considered original contributions, whereas those produced outside these centers are evaluated as anachronistic derivatives. This conclusion was not only the product of the center looking to the periphery—critics within the periphery shared it as well.

The new art history on Latin America, from inside and outside the subcontinent, has constructed new antigenealogical paradigms, grounded in archival analysis. The cases offered here delineate a Latin American art that is not the illegitimate child of modernity but rather the locus of its subversion by simultaneous avant-gardes, which contribute to a reconfiguration of the very concept.

In the last twenty years, the history of Latin American art ceased to be a discipline of connoisseurship and reconstituted itself as a social science. The impact of cultural studies, interdisciplinary research, and the

expansion of the field in the wake of the reestablishment of democracy in Latin America since the 1980s made this radical paradigm change possible. It is essential to remember the repressive climate of the Latin American dictatorships (and other authoritarian and neocolonial regimes) in order to understand the paralysis produced by those years, in which posing questions or pursuing investigations were dangerous activities in themselves. Both art criticism and archives were under government control or influence. Democratic opening enabled the revision of plans of study and resources for research, as well as the creation of multiple new archives throughout the Americas.

Recent research has treated these archives not only as national or universal patrimony but also as critical repositories for the rethinking of dominant historiographic paradigms. Looking to the archive made possible the identification not merely of supporting evidence but also of specific concepts that allowed historians to study the local production at its very site of articulation, rather than route it through metropolitan hubs in Europe and the United States. The well-known and seemingly hegemonic postwar narrative arc of advanced art—pop, minimalism, conceptualism—was critically deconstructed by the revisions made by simultaneous neo-avant-gardists working at different locations around the world, and especially in Latin America.

The historiographic turn in Latin American art history that we map and seek to intervene in considers the global vision of neo-avant-gardes as simultaneous, including those in Latin America. This challenges the genealogical and evolutionary models founded on the idea of the creation and dispersion of visual languages. This in turn acknowledges the simultaneous creation of languages and poetics, and also questions the inscription of artistic processes exclusively in the national frame. Instead, it seeks the specific density of all those zones of friction, fusion, and fluidity that are generated from the contemporary world's multiple estrangements (as much geographic as linguistic and technological),⁷ or from memories of repression and disappearance.

Grounds for Comparison

Comparison operates simultaneously on multiple historiographic registers. On one level, there is a basic question of cross-cultural analysis: How does one constitute a field so that disparate artists, objects, practices, and discourses might be understood to be coeval or commensurable? On another level, method is activated: What points of convergence and divergence, whether material or social, propel this analysis? On yet another level, art history as a discipline with origins in the nineteenth century retains, to a certain extent, a hermeneutic tradition of spatial differentiation and temporal development (school, movement, style), discursively and also pedagogically (that is, Jacob Burckhardt, Heinrich Wölfflin). As such, certain points of origin and modes of development have been privileged

over others. Comparison is then an imaginary, method, history, and politics. This final facet, the politics of comparison, merits further explanation.

Several disciplines in the humanities and social sciences—including comparative literature, anthropology, and postcolonial studies—have already begun to question the neutrality and stability of the comparative frame.⁸ Globalization, widely understood through tropes of continual dislocation and relocation, and fluctuating identities, has dislodged the a priori status of the nation-state to a degree, while at the same time has made comparison appear inevitable, as an unconscious habit of thought. Instead of bringing about wide homogenization, however, globalization has paradoxically produced even more complex structures of integration, differentiation, and hierarchy—some visible and others obscured. These structures, as the reception of Asco and *Arte Destructivo* indicated, continue to give dysmorphic shape to the history of postwar art.

The so-called “global” turn in art history, as in other academic disciplines, has so far largely reinscribed rather than exploded its Euro-American-centric foundations.⁹ The field of modern and contemporary Latin American art is (at least) doubly problematic, as several scholars have suggested. The Havana-based curator and critic Gerardo Mosquera has explained this very astutely. In a series of articles over the last decade, he has argued that the field of Latin American art is unstable because of the wavering idea of Latin America itself, which is heterogeneous within the region, and because aesthetic and critical strategies created both inside and outside, whether to satisfy fantasies of difference or combat claims of derivation, are congealing into inescapable cliché.¹⁰ Art history, as well as the art market, has failed to account for the “horizontal” exchanges that bypass Euro-American metropolises; in addition, it has not been able to accept contributions from Latin American artists as essential rather than peripheral. Writing for the ARCOmadrid International Fair catalogue in 1996, Mosquera described a “trap” that “consists of the prejudicial consideration of Latin American art as derivative of the West, without keeping in mind its intricate participation in the West.”¹¹ More recently, Daniel Quiles has underlined this double bind of the field. Looking at two major exhibitions since 2000, he sees in their strategies a “paradoxical rejection and reinforcement of Latin American art’s peripheral status, rendering the region simultaneously a bounded locality where new ideas emerge and a set of nodes in a global art ecology.”¹² This ecology is by no means horizontal or economically or politically disinterested. At the same time, artists, curators, and historians are increasingly willing to leave the Latin American concept to the side, favoring instead the ostensibly deracinated “contemporary.”¹³ An important retort to this tendency has been offered by Mari Carmen Ramírez, who has produced a curatorial model driven by specific case studies, based on primary research, and proposing theoretical models and practices for the critical display, narration, and documentation of Latin American art.

The historicist response to Latin American and Latino neo-vanguards is not without precedent. Since the 1930s, cosmopolitan intellectuals in Latin America published narratives explaining the logic of historical vanguards linked to an evolutionary model of modernity, echoing their counterparts in Europe and the United States. The paradigmatic example is Jorge Romero Brest's *La pintura europea contemporánea* (1952).¹⁴ Written by the Argentinean critic and distributed in mass paperback, the book linked European modernism with developments in Latin America, suggesting, for example, that Mexican muralism was part of the same cultural trajectory as the European historical avant-gardes. They assumed that successive art movements posited answers to or raised further questions about formal and intellectual problems left unresolved by their predecessors. This discourse disseminated, naturalized, and internalized a metanarrative of modern art as explicitly universal. At the same time, it largely omitted or marginalized artistic production from what it perceived to be peripheral zones. When it was taken as a finished product (rather than raw, unattributed material), then this art either came too "late" in the evolutionary schema or its modification of the "original" was deemed insignificant. In similar fashion, multiculturalism in the United States near the end of the twentieth century presumed total yet differential (and hierarchical) integration of Latino art. Mainstream narratives neatly categorized, homogenized, and commodified this production—and then put it aside, yet to fully connect it to "American" art.¹⁵

Theory of the Avant-Garde

European modernism's universality claim, as well as the United States' multiculturalism's integration claim in the case of Latino art, may be taken to their logical end in order to problematize a comprehensive theory of the avant-garde. Hal Foster's thinking in *The Return of the Real* (1996), which revised Peter Bürger's theory of the avant-garde, is useful here.¹⁶ Foster argues that instead of closing off the historical avant-garde's repertory, the neo-vanguard caused it to resume productively through repetition. Informed by psychoanalysis, Foster maintains that the force of irruption by the historical avant-gardes was not fully absorbed in its own historical moment, and that repetition (and resistance) permitted the actualization and elaboration of its critical reserves. Indeed, the neo-vanguards cast doubt on the complete, hermetic, and self-sufficient work of art (history) from their various sites around the world (New York, Los Angeles, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Lima, and so on), where all the consequences of the historical avant-garde are rendered visible. Thinking of the neo-avant-gardes in terms of simultaneity (as well as synchronicity) permits a problematization of the evolutionary and teleological structuring the history of (Eurocentric) modern art.

Counterintuitively, and taking the universalistic and democratic claims of the historical avant-garde and Eurocentric modernity seriously, we argue that the circulation of these historicist narratives, with their rhetorical devices of renewal and internationalist agendas, make it possible to understand the historical avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s as patrimony available for appropriation and reactivation from anywhere in the world, without an expiration date. These artists, in fact, saw themselves propelling the utopian telos of modernity even as they poked holes in the stories told about it. This corrective challenges long-held relationships between cause/effect, center/periphery, and original/copy from which to reassess art production in Latin America and the Latino U.S. in the postwar period. Artists also translated avant-garde strategies to their particular situation—as Sean Nesselrode demonstrated at the Bogotá seminar with a paper on the radical Venezuelan collective *El Techo de la Ballena*, active 1961–68, and composed of artists, poets, and writers.¹⁷ The group translated Dada practices, through publications such as *Sardio*, appropriated for a specifically Venezuelan discourse of capitalistic development and oil-bust disillusion.

That avant-garde problems and practices from Europe could be taken up in these new locales should not be surprising given that cosmopolitan displacement fueled many of its experiments during and after the World Wars. Latin American and Latino artists—as well as migrants and exiles from Europe who landed in places like New York and Mexico City or Buenos Aires (for example, Grete Stern traveling from Berlin to Buenos Aires)—insisted on their connectedness, based in lived experience or flights of imagination, regardless of whether European art capitals recognized them or not. World War II, in particular, presented an interruption to the established, European geography of modernist art. It also interrupted the usual circulation of objects, and of small magazines and artists themselves, closing certain circuits while opening others. This created chaos but also new parameters, while it contributed to the process of reading various sources that occur in a specific situation. Yet modern art continued to be produced in other parts of the world as a function of its reproduction and virtual circulation, and the participation of artists and critics who saw themselves as part of a global network even before the arrival of the Jet Age or advanced communications technology. While New York appeared to be the capital of the second half of the twentieth century, advances in communications, both mass media and transport, ensured that it was a hub in a wider and denser global (although not horizontal) network.¹⁸

At the same time, other histories and trajectories should be considered as important as, or even more important than World War II. The Cuban Revolution (1953–59) was highly significant for Latin America (and other regions) not only because it renewed notions of utopia but also because it redefined notions of international culture in the 1960s, with the revolutionary Cuban project of self-representation implemented both politically and aesthetically, in direct contradistinction to the Cold War. In

the confrontation between the Soviet Bloc and the West, between a socialist aesthetic controlled by the state and an abstraction linked with a capitalist notion of liberty, the Cuban Revolution, at least in its early years, declared the abandonment of state control of culture. In his speech entitled “Palabras a los Intelectuales” (Words to Intellectuals) from 1961, Fidel Castro distanced culture, at least for a time, from the mandate of politics (as, of course, culture did not attempt to undermine the revolution). Perhaps more relevant than the cultural model offered by Cuba was its political model, which suggested that other revolutions in other countries were possible. Urban and rural guerilla warfare found an emblematic moment in the assassination of Che Guevara, news of which spread throughout the continent. In the unextinguished heat of Guevara’s ideals, artists conceived their art in relation to these revolutions in the making. In the 1960s and 1970s, *art* and *revolution* were terms that worked together. In particular, 1968 is an important marker for neo-avant-gardes globally. While Argentina-born Julio Le Parc created engravings for the Paris general strike that year, art students in Mexico City repurposed revolutionary, as well as Olympic and capitalist iconography, as part of a democratization movement that ended with the state-sponsored Tlatelolco massacre. At the same time, the group that created *Tucumán Arde* (Tucumán Is Burning), an exhibition in northeastern Argentina, proposed a revolutionary art based on an alliance among workers, intellectuals, and artists. Latin American artists played a historical role in such simultaneous actions, which were by no means “peripheral,” yet they remain opaque or hidden in conventional narratives of modern and contemporary art.¹⁹ In a text written for an exhibition originating in Santiago de Chile for the Fifth Sydney Biennial (1984), Nelly Richard describes a complex and vexed landscape:

Peripheral cultures have great difficulty reversing the process that mutilates their ability to engage in dialog; so they are doomed to being merely the recipients of impositions, just approving the messages of others . . . a delayed signal of something that has already happened, and whose value as an event has been cancelled through repetition. The art world excludes us as actors and even as witnesses, always presenting us after the fact—in a moment that is no longer there—and through several sorts of translations through which we become dubbed cultures.²⁰

This colonization, as she calls it, is equaled by the mythmaking associated with “Latin American-ness” (often primitivism). Richard also indicates, obliquely, to dictatorships in South America, pointedly comparing the censure of Euro-American cultural imperialism but also repressive regimes at home, a “double silencing.” Resistance in this “zone of emergency” requires an archaeology of aesthetic (and critical) languages. In contrast to perspectives that considered postwar neo-vanguards closing off the critical and renewing potential of the historical avant-gardes, à la Peter Bürger,

1974 (see Foster, note 16), we seek to recuperate their experimental and radical character. In the last two decades, theories of the avant-garde have shifted. Latin American and Latino neo-vanguards subverted and updated the cultural capital of a universal modern, multiplying postwar art scenes with simultaneous happenings in Buenos Aires, Berlin, London, Lima, Mexico City, Montevideo, Paris, and New York. This was a matter not of dependency but of agency, participating in a conversation that they had been part of all along, confident in making an intervention.

Zones of Exchange

Centers of artistic production in 1960s and 1970s Latin America were not limited, however, to metropolises or postcolonial capitals. As Katia González Martínez demonstrated with her presentation at the Bogotá Connecting Art Histories seminar in Colombia, conceptual strategies emerged in the capital city, but also in Cali and Medellín.²¹ At the Buenos Aires seminar, Isabel Cristina Ramírez Botero expanded this map to the Caribbean coast of Colombia, pointing to an exhibition circuit in 1960s of the works of Cartagena and Barranquilla that, through the intervention of José Gómez Sicre, director of the Organization of American States, mediated U.S. diplomatic interests via culture throughout the Americas.²² Ramírez Botero's study shows that even the so-called "periphery of the periphery" participates in the simultaneous avant-garde.²³ A previously unknown zone of experimentation rooted in 1960s and 1970s printmaking emerges out of the seminar presentations of Silvia Dolinko, Tatiana Reinoza, and Mari Tere Rodríguez, whose research centers on the graphic art scenes of Buenos Aires, Puerto Rico (and the Latino U.S.), and São Paulo, respectively.²⁴

Rodríguez's research shows how neo-avant-garde artists such as León Ferrari, Carmela Gros, Hudinilson Jr., and Julio Plaza used photocopying and heliography as effective mechanism that united experimentation with new media to produce works that were reproduced in different cities in Latin America. Such technologies were analogous but anticipatory of the digital explosion. Photocopier art, as well as printmaking, drawing, and rubber-stamping, quickly overlapped with the history of mail art.

Cultural exchanges were not necessarily routed south–north. Alejandro Jodorowsky transited between Chile, Mexico, and France in the 1960s through the 1980s. The Argentinean León Ferrari lived in exile in São Paulo from 1976 to 1991. Mexican and Chicano artists like Louis Carlos Bernal, Adolfo Patiño, Felipe Ehrenberg, Roberto Gil de Montes, Ricardo Valverde, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña were in contact with one another.²⁵ Adding more cities and routes to the established circuit, and fleshing out standard chronologies or "alternate" modernisms without problematizing the hermeneutic structure itself, is not the goal. We must be willing to abandon gestures of inclusion that reproduce the usual dichotomy between "center" and "periphery," and instead investigate the visual as

charged fragments that may crystallize and produce their own circuits. A no less rigorous but certainly more generous map of art history comes into view. Furthermore, a critical mode of comparison may also counter official amnesia in dictatorial and other repressive regimes that structured the period in question.

Parallelisms and synchronicities are verified in the aesthetic and practical contacts connecting different artists and also the developments that occur simultaneously without any real contact, as demonstrated at the Bogotá seminar by Irene Small's comparison of the use of raw pigment by Yves Klein and Hélio Oiticica in monochrome painting.²⁶

Archive Writ Large

A key point of reference for these critical methods is the archive, understood as both a practical and epistemological point of reference. Archival research and actively situating that research within historiographic currents (in Spanish, Portuguese, and English) is now *de rigueur* in the field. One of the challenges that both curators and scholars have encountered is access to documents relating to the production and reception of works of art that they study, due to negligence or outright censure, especially under repressive regimes. For Latin America and the Latino U.S., the archive is at once central and precarious. "Grounds for Comparison" seeks to build on these developments by rethinking modernity as an archive, as the neo-avant-gardes did, putting to work recent theorizations of the archive not simply as a physical storehouse of documents that in and of themselves provide factual verification but as a narrative process as well.

The archive is not just a source to be mined; it is also an object of inquiry. Various writers have allowed us to rethink the archive historiographically—and politically. As Jacques Derrida writes, "There is no political power without control of the archive"—an argument with particular resonance in Latin America and the Latino U.S., where knowledge has been actively repressed or marginalized by dominant forces. The archive as an institution in the Americas is closely related to colonial administration and, later, state bureaucracy, both of which made claims of inclusion and access (with tutelage), but proceeded unevenly and often violently in practice. Furthermore, what of the lost archive, the decrepit state archive, the archive held ransom by heirs or lawyers? It should be underlined that the archive is not only a physical storehouse of documents but also an interpretive process, built from our physical and discursive maneuvers. Such an orientation avoids the fetishization of the archive and allows us to work imaginatively around gaps in existing documents and broader epistemological lacunae. It also points to the stakes in questioning frameworks of what can be said (a system of "enunciabilities" as per Michael Foucault).

Several archives, both traditional and digital, are under construction, and in the process face the politics of acquisition and access. There is less

agreement on how archives might be constituted, however, as evidenced by the rise of—and knotty politics of—private/public archives, elaboration of existing archives, activation of new public archives, and digital initiatives. Archives of Latin American and U.S. Latino art are in some ways emblematic of the field's recent shift: public and private, incomplete or disappeared, difficult to access and freely available on the web. As such, they require a certain creative yet rigorous imagination—and with that come fruitful debate and disagreement.

There is a long tradition of public archives in Argentinean art institutions such as the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, and the archive of art critic Jorge Romero Brest at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. Among private archives, the Fundación Espigas is notable. Started in 1993, it houses documents and secondary material relating to twentieth-century Argentinean, Latin American, and international art. Its holdings have served as the basis for exhibitions at the private Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA). Espigas is in the process of partnering with a public academic institution, Universidad de San Martín, in order to secure space for its expanding collections (Fig. 2). The Universidad Torcuato Di Tella holds the archives of the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (ITDT), created in 1958 jointly with the Fundación Torcuato Di Tella (Fig. 3). The Centro de Artes Visuales of ITDT, directed by Jorge Romero Brest, was a central scene for the Argentinean vanguard. The archive also possesses documentation relating to centers of experimentation in music, theater, graphic design, and audiovisuals. The Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo possesses an archive central to the study of conceptualism in Latin America, as well as mail art and the papers of its influential former director, Walter Zanini. Cristina Freire, one of our partners in the seminar series, has pioneered studies on conceptualism in Latin America, and has curated exhibitions with these archives. Another archive fundamental to the analysis of postwar Latin American art, allowing a transnational perspective, is the archive of the São Paulo Biennale, which we visited as part of our seminar in 2015 (Fig. 4). The archive increasingly supplies the source material for exhibitions of Latin American art and also hosts the exhibition, pressing at the traditional boundaries of the concept. El Centro de Documentación Arkheia at the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City, part of Mexico's Universidad Nacional, is actively collecting in the postwar period and employing the archive as an object of curation by contemporary artists, as with *Visita al Archivo Olivier Debroyse: Entre la ficción y el documento* (Look at the Olivier Debroyse Archive: Between Fiction and Document), 2011, curated by Mónica Mayer; and Magali Lara and Martha Hellion's *Circuito abierto: Dos experiencias editoriales en el Fondo Felipe Ehrenberg* (Open Circuit: Two Editorial Experiences in the Archive of Felipe Ehrenberg), 2012.

The Centro de Documentación Artes Visuales (CEDOC), part of the Palacio de la Moneda in Santiago de Chile, opened its doors in 2006,

Figure 2

Library of the Fundación Espigas in Buenos Aires during the "Grounds for Compassion" seminar, 2014.



constituting an archive that seeks to account for a will to remember that characterized Chilean democracy in the postdictatorial era. CEDOC holds a collection of experimental video realized during the years of military rule, which has great historical value. Sebastián Vidal, a participant at our Bogotá seminar, traced the back and forth of *Satelitenis*, a collaboration among Chilean video artists Juan Downey, Eugenio Dittborn, and Carlos Flores in the 1980s, while Downey was in exile in New York, dwelling on geographic displacement not in terms of closure or censorship but as an informal satellite network and a competitive exploration of this relatively new medium.²⁷ CEDOC has also served as the site of exhibitions that sought to supplement its collections: the exhibit *Espacio Insumiso, Letra e Imagen en el Chile de los 70* (Rebel Space: Word and Image in Seventies Chile), 2009, for example, linked oral history sources to documents held.

The decade-long and still ongoing digital database entitled *Documents of Twentieth-Century Latin American and Latino Art* was created by the

Figure 3

Dora García, *Exilio* (2012–present),
Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos
Aires, 2014.



International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, headed by Mari Carmen Ramírez with María Gaztambide. The project scans and annotates (but does not acquire) key primary and secondary documents identified by teams of researchers working in twenty countries. Again Ramírez's project includes Latino sources, in this case first culled from regions of the United States that have historically received less attention from scholars, such as the northern and central Midwest. The ICAA is also publishing anthologies of documents in translation (one volume so far), which should aid in the teaching of Latin American art history in English-speaking countries at the undergraduate level, long circumscribed by lack of translation/Spanish and Portuguese language ability by beginning students. The Documents Project is much admired and debated, and is closely connected to Ramírez's curatorial project. At our Buenos Aires seminar, Abigail Winograd and Camila Maroja

Figure 4

“Grounds for Comparison” seminar visit to the archive of the São Paulo Biennale, 2015.



considered some limitations in Ramírez’s curatorial project that might also apply to the digital archive (Fig. 5).

The Inverted Utopias exhibition echoed in many ways the existing Modernist canon—in its reliance on European theory (Adorno), the artistic genius (Joaquín Torres-García), the prominence of abstraction (Constructivism), and the ever-diminishing importance of the object (*conceptualismo*). In such a scenario, Inverted Utopias utopic and dehistoricized version of a fragmentary avant-garde is advantageous, as it allows an easier assimilation of new names into the existing canon.²⁸

It will be up to scholars who use the archive, and the ways in which they move through it intellectually, to both reveal its depths and to fill in its blind spots.

Figure 5

Installation view of “Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America,” exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2004.



Latino Art/History

The historical exclusion of Latino art from institutions in the United States, especially museums, as well as the strategic rejection of mainstream circuits by some Latino artists, have produced internal borders (as well as opportunities for connection) that merit further investigation. Furthermore, only recently have links between U.S. Latino artists and those in Latin America been recognized. For this reason, we included Latino topics within the scope of our Connecting Art Histories project. There are striking thematic correspondences, for example, between Asco and No Grupo, a Mexico City-based collective working at the same time.²⁹ Earlier in the decade, Arnulfo Aquino, Rebeca Hidalgo, and Melecio Galván, who would later form Grupo Mira, another Mexican collective, traveled to San Francisco and worked with Latino arts groups there. Part of the “Grounds for Comparison” project has been to create a space for working through the continuities as well as discontinuities between Latin American and Latino art, which has so far remained narrow in spite of this historiographic turn, with the exception of some very recent scholarship noted above. We see a bridge between the two fields based not only on travels and contacts across the Americas but also shared interventions.

Our work in the “Grounds for Comparison” initiative has shown, however, that while case studies of intersection and shared interests between the two fields are increasingly coming to light, we do not share a mutual critical language. Synchronous and comparative analysis of the neo-avant-garde offers one such space for developing a shared discourse, although certainly not the only one.

Since there were productive encounters between U.S. Latino artists and Mexican artists, and north–south dialogues facilitated by Fluxus and mail art, we can also say that this historiographic turn includes an emergent revision about links between Latin America and Latino art. In his paper for Bogotá, Ondine Chavoya looked at mail networks among artists, including Chicano artists, such as the Asco collective, Ray Johnson, Jerry Deva, the No Grupo collective, and others.³⁰ *Correspondence*, as a key term for Chavoya, denotes communication from a distance yet also recognition of similarity; the creation of artistic hubs from extensive networks of contacts, and moving between bureaucracy and informality, chance and risk. Chavoya’s research corresponded with Tatiana Reinoza’s paper for Buenos Aires, which deals with the colonized space of Puerto Rico and the politics of opening of the island’s Graphic Triennial to U.S. Latino artists. Reinoza points to the graphic as a tool for both policing national identity but also as a tool for imagining Latin Americanism among its various constituents.³¹ This is not to say that the conditions for producing art or art history were equivalent, but given the paucity of comparative investigation to date, we feel that it is worthwhile emphasizing continuities over discontinuities, at least initially, in order to develop a shared field of reference and exchange. Decolonial interventions within American society, which is frequently exempted from such consideration, is one possible meeting point. We might call this move a “strategic correspondence.”³²

Conclusion

By referring to a historiographic turn, we plot a critical map of the field of postwar Latin American art over the last twenty years, which has grown much more connected than ever before with scholars from Latin America, Europe, and the United States working side by side and increasingly collaboratively, rendering visible a complex terrain of shared and competing research programs, methodologies, and politics. The transformation we hope to make visible can only be understood by comparing the current state of field, academic and curatorial, with what preceded it. We also seek to register what preceded it.

The historiographic project undertaken in recent years is inscribed with the historicization of emancipatory processes running from the 1960s to the present.³³ Analyses of the constitution of taste, critical analysis of the debates that share and are shaped by objects, the deconstruction of normative discourses (styles, canons), the study of the ways in which such discourses distanced themselves from other sensitivities (feminist, gay, lesbian, queer), and the analysis of emotions as political practices have resulted in a scenario of extremely complex ideas. For example, Buenos Aires seminar participant Natalia Pineau presented on an exhibition of gay art in Argentina in the 1990s, during the wake of the sexual repression of the dictatorship there.³⁴ Censored by civic authorities, Pineau’s analysis

brings to light the emergence of lesser-known sensibilities that are at once an extension of previous forms of dissidence and, at the same time, refuse easy categorization or translation.

Our seminars, however, have not sufficiently explored questions of gender, sexuality, patriarchy, and affect. In the last two decades the study of Chicano art has been invigorated by interventions from queer and feminist studies, while in Latin America this type of scholarship has only recently been inaugurated.

Our aim is not to inventory these trends or imbalances as an end goal but to map them in order to better formulate future proposals. “Grounds for Comparison” builds on the networks of colleagues and institutional spaces that have recently become more extended. The seminars are based on expectations of generosity, collaboration, and intellectual honesty. Access to knowledge is not disputed; it is shared in the ongoing debate of ideas. The field of Latin American art is no longer defined by its traditional historiographic limitations.

Notes

1. In Buenos Aires, for example, we visited the Costantini Collection at the Museum of Latin American Art Buenos Aires (MALBA), a significant comprehensive collection of twentieth-century art from Latin America; the collection of the National Museum of Fine Arts of Argentina with an important collection of Latin American and nineteenth-century European art; Raúl Naón’s private collection of paintings and related documents of concrete art in Argentina and Brazil; an exhibition of the work of Joseph Beuys from 1955 to 1985 at the Fundación Proa, a major contemporary art foundation; permanent collections and temporary installations at the Museum of Modern Art Buenos Aires (MAMBA) and the Museum of Contemporary Art Buenos Aires (MACBA); Parque de la Memoria, which commemorates victims of the 1976–83 military regime and human rights violations in Argentina; *Losing the Human Form*, a large-scale exhibition of Latin American art and politics from the 1980s at the Hotel de los Inmigrantes (originated by the Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid); the Espigas Foundation, which houses an extensive collection of primary and secondary documents relating to twentieth-century Argentine, Latin American, and international art; and Museo del Bicentenario with a documented history of Argentina and the permanent exhibition of the mural created by David Alfaro Siqueiros during his stay in Argentina in 1933.
2. A good recent example is the exhibition *Modernities plurielles de 1905 a 1970* (Plural Modernities, 1905–1970) at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, 2013–15.

3. This model, along with the notion of simultaneous vanguards, was proposed by Andrea Giunta at the conference “Repensar los modernismos latinoamericanos: Flujos y desbordamientos” (Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain, March 2012) and published as “Farewell to the Periphery: Avant-Gardes and Neo-Avant-Gardes in the Art of Latin America,” in Gabriel Perez-Barreir, ed., *Concrete Invention: Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros—Reflections on Geometric Abstraction from Latin America and Its Legacy* (Turner: Madrid, 2013); and revised in Andrea Giunta, *When Does Contemporary Art Begin?* (Buenos Aires: ArteBA-Petrobras, 2014).
4. On *Arte Destructivo*, see Andrea Giunta, *Avant-garde, Internationalism and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 135–51.
5. Christopher Knight, “The Two Lives of Gronk,” *Los Angeles Times* (March 19, 1994), http://articles.latimes.com/1994-03-19/entertainment/ca-35980_1_painting-style.
6. Chon Noriega, ed., *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa Jr.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
7. See, for example, the exhibition catalogue by Néstor García Canclini and Andrea Giunta, *Extranjerías* (Buenos Aires: Espacio Fundación Telefónica, 2009).
8. See, for example, Phen Cheah, “Grounds of Comparison,” *diacritics* 29, no. 4 (1999): 1–18; Micol Seigel, “Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn,” *Radical History Review* 91 (2005): 62–90; José Rabasa, “The Comparative Frame in Subaltern Studies,” *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no. 4 (2005): 365–80; and Rey Chow, “The Old/New Question of Comparison in Literary Studies: A Post-European Perspective,” *ELH* 72, no. 2 (2004): 291–311.
9. See Jill H. Casid and Aruna D’Souza, eds., *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2014).
10. See Gerardo Mosquera, “Del arte latinoamericano al arte desde América Latina,” *Art Nexus* 48 (April 2003): n.p.; and Gerardo Mosquera, “Good-bye Identity, Welcome Difference: From Latin American Art to Art from Latin America,” *Third Text* 15, no. 56 (2001): 25–32.
11. Mosquera continues: “The new attraction of the centre for the extremes has allowed for greater circulation and legitimization of art from the periphery. But too often value is only assigned to those works that explicitly reveal the difference or that satisfy the expectations of neo-exotic postmodernism.” Gerardo Mosquera, translated and reprinted as “Latin American Art Ceases to Be Latin American Art,” *arara* 10 (2011), https://www.essex.ac.uk/arhistory/research/pdfs/arara_issue_10/mosquera.pdf.
12. Daniel Quiles, “Exhibition as Network, Network as Curator: Canonizing Art from ‘Latin America,’” *Artlas Bulletin* 3, no. 1 (spring 2014): 62, <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol3/iss1/7/>.

13. See Joaquín Barriendos, "Geopolitics of Global Art: The Reinvention of Latin American as a Geoaesthetic Region," in Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg, eds., *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, Museums* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009), 98–115.
14. Jorge Romero Brest, *La pintura europea contemporánea, 1900–1950* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952).
15. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991). On the continued challenges of teaching Chicano and Latino art in the United States academe, see the recently published dossier in *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 40, no. 1 (spring 2015): 115–216.
16. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).
17. Sean Nesselrode, "Defining the Aesthetic(s) of Negation in El Techo de la Ballena," *Synchronicities* (June 5, 2013).
18. Although in general ambivalent, if not skeptical, toward the revolutionary potential of the historical avant-garde, Raymond Williams argues in *Politics of Modernism* for its international (although still metropolitan) character: "There was rapid transfer and interaction between different countries and different capitals, and the deep mode of the whole movement, as in Modernism, was precisely this mobility across frontiers: frontiers which were among the most obvious elements of the old order which had to be rejected, even when native folk sources were being included as elements or as inspiration of the new art." For Williams, this emergent international order begins to look a lot like late transnational capitalism (it is a two-way street: at the same time, avant-gardes introduced difference and distance into the metropole). Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989), 59, 84. Andreas Huyssen's skepticism toward the avant-garde is also a function of what he sees as its link to the development of capitalism. Andreas Huyssen, "The Search for Tradition: Avant-garde and Postmodernism in the 1970s," in Thomas Docherty, ed., *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 231.
19. Books like those of Terry Smith, which include chapters on the art of various geographies (Asia, Africa, Latin America) but are not entirely successful in discarding the established model of dispersion and evolution. The first chapter of his *What Is Contemporary Art?* lays the foundations for other developments. Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
20. Nelly Richard, "Culturas latinoamericanas: culturas de la repetición o culturas de la diferencia?" *arte y textos* 11 (December 1983): 1–5.
21. Katia González Martínez, "El inconformismo de la vanguardia, Cali años sesenta," *Synchronicities*, Bogotá (June 7, 2013).

22. Isabel Cristina Ramírez Botero, “Los Salones Interamericanos de Arte Moderno de Cartagena (1959) y Barranquilla (1960 y 1963) y sus relaciones con procesos regionales y nacionales,” *Exhibiting and Narrating*, Buenos Aires (June 5, 2014). Also relevant is Charles Quevedo, “La Misión Cultural Brasileña y el grupo Arte Nuevo. Disputas regionales por la hegemonía cultural e inscripción de la modernidad artística paraguaya,” *Synchronicities* (June 3, 2013).
23. Ivonne Pini and María Clara Bernal looked to Gómez Sicre in their presentation at the Bogotá seminar, “El rol del Departamento de Artes Visuales de la OEA y de José Gómez Sicre, en la construcción de un modelo de arte latinoamericano,” *Synchronicities*, Bogotá (June 6, 2013).
24. Silvia Dolinko, “Giros y retorno: Experimentación gráfica en los años sesenta, entre las revisiones modernistas y la cultura de masas,” *Synchronicities* (June 3, 2013).
25. Rubén Ortiz Torres, *MEX/L.A.: “Mexican” Modernism(s) in Los Angeles, 1930–1985* (Ostfildern: Hantje Cantz Verlag, 2011).
26. Irene Small, “Pigmentos Purs and the Corpo da Cor: Post-Painterly Practice and Transmodernity,” *Synchronicities* (June 4, 2014).
27. Sebastián Vidal, “Entre Santiago y Nueva York: Colaboraciones y diálogos transnacionales en la obra de Juan Downey,” *Synchronicities*, Bogotá (June 6, 2013).
28. Abigail Winograd and Camila Maroja, “Vectors or Constellations? Frederico Morais’s and Mari Carmen Ramírez’s Curatorial Narratives of Latin American Art,” *Artlas Bulletin* 3, no. 2 (fall 2014): 83–96. Presented at *Exhibiting and Narrating*, Buenos Aires (June 6, 2014).
29. Maris Bustamante, “Synchronies between Asco and No Grupo,” in Ondine Chavoya et al., eds., *Asco: Elite of the Obscure* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 308–17.
30. Ondine Chavoya, “Chicano Correspondence: Conceptual Practices,” *Synchronicities*, Bogotá (June 4, 2013).
31. Tatiana Reinoza, “The Island as a Bridge: The Trienal Poli/gráfica de San Juan,” *Exhibiting and Narrating*, Buenos Aires (June 6, 2014).
32. This approach stems from Gayatri Spivak’s “strategic essentialism.” Spivak writes: “Essentialism is like dynamite, or a powerful drug: judiciously applied, it can be effective in dismantling unwanted structures or alleviating suffering; uncritically employed, however, it is destructive and addictive.” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak with Sara Danus and Stefan Jonsson, “An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,” *Boundary* 220, no. 2 (1993): 24–50.
33. Jacques Ranciere, *The Emancipated Spectator* (New York: Verso, 2009); and Jacques Ranciere, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (New York: Verso, 2013).
34. Natalia Pineau, “Maricas en Buenos Aires: Tensiones entre el campo artístico y el camp sociocultural,” *Exhibiting and Narrating*, Buenos Aires (June 5, 2014).