

# New Worlds: Frontiers, Inclusion, Utopias



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# Transdisciplinary, Transcultural, and Transhistorical Challenges of World Art Historiography

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## I. Borders, frontiers, limits, and migration

The contemporary political context of this publication's topic, "New Worlds: Frontiers, Inclusion, Utopias," is the increasing worldwide migration. A 2013 United Nations report estimated that about 232 million refugees—3.2 percent of the world population—are migrating from their politically insecure and economically weak home countries to apparently safer places.<sup>1</sup> National borders, and their related cultural frontiers, mark the migrants' horizon of expectation for better living conditions. But crossing these borders is difficult. Borders are zones of conflict, frictions, and even rejection. Crossing borders is often forbidden or conditioned by restrictions and obligations.

Those who live comfortably behind the borders often regard migrants as intruders and only accept them if they assimilate completely to the host country's social and cultural standards. Thus, migrants have to adapt their abilities and customs to the setting of the homogeneous "gated community" that receives them. This means that the cultural standards behind the frontiers are common to more people, and become centralized models of collective behavior.

This outline of current migration processes reveals similarities to international academic migration in the humanities in particular, which is the focus of my contribution in art history. Since its origins in the mid-nineteenth century, this discipline has been European-centered. Yet since the second half of the twentieth century, some major U.S. universities have questioned this Euro-centric orientation and have claimed worldwide academic leadership. The mapping of art historiographies divides our discipline into center and periphery. The U.S. and some European countries are at the center, and the periphery is the rest of the world. The discursive and political power of the intellectual centers makes them attractive for academic migrants from the peripheral countries. Grants, internships, and job offers at U.S. universities and museums, for instance, promise better living and working conditions for many academics from the so-called Global South, formerly called the "Third World." But like political and economic refugees, these academic migrants have to

1 *UN Report on Migration*, 2013, accessed August 17, 2015. <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/wallchart/index.shtml>.

adapt by reducing their diversity of thinking—at least to some extent—and, in many cases, minimizing the use of their native languages. Some do not pass the borders, and stay with frustrated expectations in their home countries. Those who succeed in crossing the frontiers and integrating themselves in the new context may not wish to return to their home countries.

Like the global political situation, academic migration is characterized by a paradox. On the one hand, many walls and frontiers have been torn down since the fall of the Soviet bloc. In many European countries, save for the United Kingdom, people can travel without passport control.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the utopia of unlimited mobility has partially become reality. But according to the provocative research of urban sociologist Mike Davis, never have there been so many walls and frontiers built worldwide as after 1989. Although the famous Berlin wall was reduced to a fragmented historical artifact, the Mexican–U.S. border is an outstanding example of this tendency to build walls and create gated communities at all levels, from urban to national.

However, no artificial frontier resists the flow of migrants, as the huge and fortified Mexican–U.S. border demonstrates. Globalization finds a way, not only in the exportation of commercial goods, but also in the uncontrolled flows of migrants. And this generates new, hybrid forms of social and cultural confluence. For art historiography—and this is my central hypothesis—that confluence is an advantage, because it changes perspectives, generating new insights beyond any one-dimensional nationalist determinations in the asymmetrical give and take within academic exchanges.<sup>3</sup>

But the conditions of the migratory academic exchange should be revised, because they are still determined by neo-colonial—not “post-colonial”—relations between center and periphery.

The desired “inclusion,” to quote the subtitle of this publication (and colloquium), is a complex and contradictory process with many conceptual traps. Migration and hybrid development of cultural knowledge cannot be limited by borders. Digital devic-

2 The so-called Schengen rule, which as of fall 2015, has been suspended in order to control the mobility of Islamic terrorists.

3 On the advantages and disadvantages of cultural and academic transfers, see Alexander Kostka, “Transfer,” *Kritische Berichte* 3 (2007): 15–18.



es strengthen the free global exchange of ideas and widen the horizons through which we understand art and visual cultures. But, as Monica Juneja has pointed out, the globalization of art history is not a mere affirmative operation in the digital age. It does not celebrate the naive cult of rapid information exchange, which seemingly deterritorializes academic production.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, global electronic flux easily leads to the “reaffirmation of other kinds of difference” and promotes reterritorialization.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the production and reception of art historical knowledge can strengthen neo-colonial disparities; in the words of Juneja: “Today we encounter a new divide between those who enjoy access to authoritative knowledge about art and share the values of autonomy and transgression ascribed to it, and those who do not.”<sup>6</sup>

An important counterpart to any centralization and monopolization of art historiography in the U.S. and northern Europe is established by the International Committee of Art History (CIHA), which supports the collective, pluralist, and non-colonial redesign of the academic world map in art historiography. During the last decade, CIHA has integrated colleagues from China, South Africa, India, and Brazil, countries that have developed art historical research only rarely perceived through the filters of hegemonic discourse. A significant intermediate step in the process of globally redefining art history was taken at the 2008 CIHA congress in Melbourne dealing with the topic of “crossing cultures.”<sup>7</sup> Scholars from around the world who presented papers there collectively constructed a new network of art historical knowledge, which in some respects revives one developed at the origin of our discipline in the mid-nineteenth century, when Franz Kugler presented his comprehensive world

4 Monica Juneja, “Kunstgeschichte und Kulturelle Differenz. Eine Einleitung,” *Kritische Berichte* 2 (2012): 6–12, especially 11. Juneja here criticizes Arjun Appadurai’s (“Dis-juncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 27–47 [Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996]) notion of “deterritorialization” via worldwide electronic interchange.

5 Monica Juneja, “Global Art History and the ‘Burden of Representation,’” in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 274–297, especially 275.

6 Juneja, “Global Art History,” 276.

7 Jaynie Anderson, ed., *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence. The Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art (CIHA; The University of Melbourne, 13–18 January 2008)* (Victoria: The Miegunyah Press, 2009).

art history.<sup>8</sup> That conceptual heritage was later ignored as art history developed as an academic discipline.

Returning to these roots, expanding the scope of the objects—a topic dealt with at the 2012 CIHA congress in Nürnberg<sup>9</sup>—as well as fostering plural and diverse analytical methods has been the central thread of the 2015 CBHA colloquium on “New Worlds: Frontiers, Inclusion, Utopias.” This academic initiative to revise the contemporary geography of knowledge in our discipline, reviewing in particular the relations between North and South America, helps to decentralize and reorganize art historical discourses.

Before I outline some of the options and challenges of contemporary global art history, I must briefly describe some of the obstacles that must be addressed and resolved.

There is a coincidence of the transnational migration of knowledge production in art history and the migration of images. In a short article titled “Migrating Images: Totemism, Fetishism, Idolatry,”<sup>10</sup> William J.T. Mitchell explained how migrating images across the cultures and epochs must overcome obstacles guarded by a “border police” which sometimes rejects or even destroys them along the diverse paths by which images circulate to new geographical and conceptual destinations; during this process, they may be colonized. Implicitly based on Aby Warburg’s idea of the images’ “hiking trails” (*Wanderwege der Bilder*), Mitchell shows how circulating images and idols redefine cultural territories, and how these gated communities develop mechanisms of imperial control which converts unwelcome objects.

This structural condition also characterizes mainstream art historiography, which, in Juneja’s opinion, is “complicit with practices of inclusion and exclusion,” determined by a globalized “conceptual imperialism.”<sup>11</sup>

8 Franz Kugler, *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte*. (Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubert, 1842).

9 *The Challenge of the Object. Die Herausforderung des Objekts. 33rd Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art. 33. Internationaler Kunsthistoriker-Kongress. Nürnberg, 15-20. Juli 2012 Congress Proceedings. (4 vols.)*, eds. Ulrich G. Grossmann and Petra Krutisch (Nuremberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2014).

10 William J.T. Mitchell, “Migrating Images: Totemism, Fetishism, Idolatry,” in *Migrating Images. Producing ... Reading ... Transporting ... Translating*, eds. Petra Stegman and Peter C. Seel (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2004), 14–24.

11 Juneja, “Global Art History,” 278–279. Juneja even speaks of an “epistemological violence” in these processes.



Fortunately, this is not the predominant condition of academic migration from the Global South to the discursive centers. But the free circulation of interpretative ideas in our discipline can be restricted to homogenized standards of thinking. In many cases, the selection of objects and themes of art historical research, teaching, and distribution through books and exhibitions are not obvious acts of censorship. But the decision about what is important to review, publish, and expose is based on implicit neo-colonial mechanisms. To give an example: in some cases, Latin American art still suffers an ideological devaluation as tropical, irrational kitsch. Or it is labeled, integrated, and reduced to a “multicultural commodity fetishism,”<sup>12</sup> where the “other,” non-European or non-U.S. art production is seen as an ethnically authentic expression, but not recognized as a cultural product on the same level as that occurring in the so-called First World.<sup>13</sup>

Another obstacle to an open-minded global art history is the selection of key objects of art history in the global academic centers. To give one example from my field of research, architectural, urban, and landscape history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: for a long time, the work of the outstanding Brazilian landscape architect and artist Roberto Burle Marx was ignored by the U.S.-American and European landscape planning historiography.

This is only one of many examples that show the continuity of traditional and anachronistic centralism in art historical thinking. This alone gives us reason enough to support CIHA's and CBHA's initiatives to decentralize the discourses, producing a more balanced writing of world art history.<sup>14</sup> That undertaking will not be an encyclopedic accumulation of national and nationalist art histories, but a critical, interrelated academic enterprise, without neo-colonial implications.

12 Kobena Mercer, “Ethnicity and Internationality: New British Art and Diaspora-Based Blackness,” *Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art & Culture*, 13, no. 49 (Winter 1999/2000): 51-62, reference of p. 57; Juneja, “Global Art History,” 274.

13 Peter Krieger, “Revolución y Colonialismo en las Artes Visuales—El Paradigma de la *Documenta*,” *Universidad de México*, 617 (November 2002), 89–92.

14 For different views on world art history: Ulrich Pfisterer, “Origins and Principles of World Art History: 1900 (and 2000)” in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, ed. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme, (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 69–89; David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of the Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon, 2003); *Is Art History Global?* James Elkins, ed., (London, New York: Routledge, 2007); see also the critical revision of these titles in the two quoted texts of Monica Juneja.

This enterprise, however, is determined by the negative impact of globalization and its ideological frontiers. They create other obstacles to a comprehensive vision. Commerce impairs the free exchange of ideas and values among the world community of art historians. Analytical thought only attracts the small academic community, while opulently illustrated and affirmative coffee table books on art sell well. We have to face the fact that the so-called “Taschen effect,” i.e. the production of overwhelming, exciting, opulently illustrated, but mostly superficial books on art generate more public interest than specialized art historical research books.<sup>15</sup> Only huge and heavy exhibition catalogues, which reflect the current advances in research, may reach a wider circle of readers. However, even in an increasing number of museums, research seems to be regarded as a dispensable luxury, not really useful, and too complex for the production of blockbuster shows and their related coffee table books.

A globalized art history is not the same as worldwide promotion of trendy visual topics. Art historian Wolfgang Kemp once ironically predicted that what would sell in our discipline, and via its instrument of distribution, the museum (book)shop, would be “underwater archaeology of impressionist gold treasures.” Art historians may sense a problem in legitimizing their work, as it is threatened by evaluations that find the humanities to be commercially inefficient, with a boring marketing of thoughts.

Not only do economic borders limit creative global art history, but the recent tendencies of the discipline also reveal certain obstacles to complex research strategies. The increasing de-historization in the field of “visual studies” leads to some problematic results; interpretations of visual phenomena that are not substantiated by historical research can be characterized as a form of free association.

Lately, overviews have shown that in many art historical institutes around the world, students focus mainly on contemporary art. Recent statistics of the Graduate Program at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), for example, indicate that about 80 percent of the master’s and doctoral theses deal with twentieth-century topics, and more than 50 percent with contemporary art production (including architecture, de-

sign, film, photography, etc.). They reduce their scope to simple criticism, primarily about current cultural conditions and trends. Even worse, some only re-narrate the autistic myths and self-constructions of contemporary artists, who claim attention by creating their personae as trademarks.<sup>16</sup>

It seems as if the notion of history is getting lost in our discipline. Conceptual frontiers are reducing the epistemological potential of our discipline. Many students are no longer able to define long-term developments of iconography and style. But innovative art historical concepts such as political iconography are impoverished without deep knowledge of visual history, such that one of the central functions of our discipline, to create and preserve memory, no longer seems to be a key value.

One more of many other possible obstacles to a multilateral art historiography is the international academic exchange effected through a centralized use of language. A global revision of our discipline is based on English, the *lingua franca* that serves the world community of art historians as a platform for free and interesting exchanges of ideas. Of course, this is not an obstacle, but an option for communication. However, we face the problem that non-English publications are increasingly marginalized in international discourses. Even the research presented in German, French, Italian, and Spanish—the old European standard languages of art history—is less received in the English-speaking world community of art historians. Many current students of art history in the U.S., UK, and Commonwealth countries (except bilingual Canada) lack the multilingual experiences of the older generations of academics in these countries. Thus, the variety and complexity of our discipline is being reduced.

Also, as we have shown previously in a colloquium on the differences in art historical terminologies between Mexico and Europe,<sup>17</sup> specific cultural phenomena such as the hybrid Mexican baroque, with its pre-Hispanic ornamental and iconographic influences, sometimes do not match the established art historical terminology in English, German, or French. These philological matters of art history contain the danger of intellectual impoverishment.

16 Peter Krieger, "Words Don't Come Easy - Comentarios a la Crítica y Exposición de las Artes Plásticas Actuales," *Universidad de México* 597598 (Octubre/Noviembre 2000): 25–29.

17 Patricia Diaz, Montserrat Gali, and Peter Krieger, eds. *Nombrar y Explicar*. (Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 2011).

Switching among several languages sharpens one's epistemological sensibility. A basic neural operation is the transformation of visual stimuli into words. Exposing oneself to linguistic differences allows a scholar to enhance the complexity of precise descriptions and convincing interpretation of images. Neurologists confirm the advantages of multilingual learning, which sensitizes the scholar to terminological differences, thus stimulating non-linear brain operations.<sup>18</sup>

This, of course, is not a criticism of the *lingua franca*, which offers the practicality of promoting global academic communication. I simply want to reverse the current reduction in learning languages other than English.

There are productive proposals for doing just that. One of them is Iain Bond Whyte's initiative at the University of Edinburgh to run the program and online journal called "Art in Translation" (AIT), hosted by the Getty Foundation.<sup>19</sup> This is "the first journal publishing English-language translations of seminal works now available only in their source languages." Other initiatives and programs also help realize what philosopher Ortega y Gasset once called in Latin "*traducere navem*," bringing the ship charged with academic content from one continent to the other, translating texts and transferring ideas. I shall mention here three important initiatives and projects.

First, the 2016 CIHA congress was dedicated to the problem of finding (and translating) adequate terms for art historical writing. The main tool of our discipline is the description and interpretation of visual phenomena. But an enormous variety of linguistic modes in different languages, including the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean construction of signs, generates a complex and sometimes contradictory communication of ideas. As an international organization, CIHA fosters ongoing reflection on the interaction of words, images, and meanings.

Second, the recent exhibition and book project *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arc-*

18 Wolf Singer, *Der Beobachter im Gehirn. Essays zur Hirnforschung* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2002).

19 AIT, accessed November 26, 2015. [http://www.getty.edu/foundation/initiatives/current/cah/art\\_in\\_translation.html](http://www.getty.edu/foundation/initiatives/current/cah/art_in_translation.html). Since March 2009, AIT has been published by Bloomsbury Publishing with the support of the Getty Foundation.

*tic*, curated and edited by Peter John Brownlee, Valéria Piccoli, and Georgiana Uhlyarik, adds to this discourse.<sup>20</sup> This catalogue, which covers nineteenth- and twentieth-century landscape painting all over the Americas, is published in its three major languages: English, Spanish, and Portuguese. It is a model for future Pan-American art historical collaboration, one that is grounded in a reorganized academic geography of this continent.

Third, the Getty Foundation's "Connecting Art Histories" program "aims to increase opportunities for sustained intellectual exchange across national and regional borders.... It springs from the recognition that all forms of art historical study will be stronger when scholars from around the world inform each other's ideas and methodologies." This program, which currently focuses on Latin America, is an essential contribution to an open-minded, heterogeneous world art history.<sup>21</sup>

## II. Transdisciplinary, Transcultural, and Transhistorical Challenges

The challenges and options of contemporary global art history lead to the ideal of overcoming any borders of homogeneous cultural territory and allow free migration of ideas and subjects. This type of imagined mutual learning implies three major challenges, which I'll briefly explain with some examples of current art historical research.

First, the **transdisciplinary challenge**: Even beyond the Pan-American context, Alexander von Humboldt's early nineteenth-century concept of *trans*- and not *interdisciplinary* research deserves reconsideration. Art history, gradually extended into a historical "science of the image" (*Bildwissenschaft*), and not reduced to dehistoricized "visual studies," or, recently, even "visual sociology," can revise the catalytic function of the image in political, economic, cultural, and also environmental processes throughout the history of civilization, from rock drawings up to today's digital image constructions.

20 Peter John Brownlee, Valéria Piccoli, and Georgiana Uhlyarik, eds. *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra Del Fuego to the Arctic*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

21 Getty Foundation, accessed November 26, 2015. <http://www.getty.edu/foundation/initiatives/current/cah/>.

Martin Warnke's innovative studies on political iconography are based on the intelligent—rather than simplified or commercialized—recovery of Aby Warburg's intellectual heritage.<sup>22</sup> Horst Bredekamp's fascinating explorations of the images' epistemological functions in scientific discoveries prove that art historical research serves as a platform for *interdisciplinary* research, starting from one point of view, in this case the visual constructions.<sup>23</sup> But this type of research stimulates the next step of *transdisciplinary* dialogue, which aims to create networks of knowledge beyond the established frontiers of C.P. Snow's two cultures, the humanities and the natural sciences. In this sense, global art history invites different participants of the universities' universe to develop hybrid forms of knowledge without one discipline acting as a leader. We are still far from this academic utopia, but the creative multidimensional revitalization of Humboldt's legacy enables us to tear down the extant disciplinary borders, crossing thematic, territorial, and conceptual limits.

My own contribution to this process of disciplinary revision is related to the aesthetics of current environmental self-destruction on this planet, revolving around growing megacities, exploited landscapes, and polluted skylines. Focused on the paradigmatic case of Mexico City, I studied how the image of water in urban settings has created an impact on collective memory of the city's inhabitants;<sup>24</sup> how the threatening air pollution has generated ephemeral, fascinating, and terrifying visual configurations;<sup>25</sup> and how specific geological conditions alter our narrow temporal concept of cultural history, leading to the much larger framing of Earth's archaic geo-history.<sup>26</sup> The aesthetics of geological formations in particular—I am not talking about Land Art—reveal varied insights into Earth's growth and structure. Some have later been transformed into such cultural,

22 Uwe Fleckner, Martin Warnke, and Hendrik Ziegler, eds., *Handbuch Politische Ikonographie*, (München: Beck, 2011).

23 Horst Bredekamp, *Darwins Korallen. Die frühen Evolutionsdiagramme und die Tradition der Naturgeschichte* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2006); Horst Bredekamp, *Galileis denkende Hand. Form und Forschung um 1600. (Galileo's O, Band IV)* (Berlin, München, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015).

24 Peter Krieger, ed., *Acuápolis* (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 2007).

25 Peter Krieger, "Pollution, Aesthetics of" in *Manifesta 9. The Deep of the Modern. A Subcyclopedia*, Cuauhtémoc Medina and Christopher Fraga, eds. (Cinisello Balsamo, Milano: Silvana Editoriale), 227–229.

26 This is the topic of my forthcoming book.

visual schemas as the early twentieth-century volcano paintings of the Mexican painter Dr. Atl.<sup>27</sup>

This transdisciplinary challenge negates the existing borders and limitations of academic dialogue. It requires, as Ottmar Ette put it, the Humboldtian capability of thinking about different aspects together, in order to understand the complexity of our habitat on Earth.<sup>28</sup>

Second, we explore the **transcultural options** of global art history and science of the image without borders: the notion of seemingly homogeneous territories, marked by definitive cultural characteristics, fostered one-dimensional, normative, and chauvinistic fixations of national identity. These normative constructions of visual identity are protected by borders, which are symbolically encoded as a cultural complex. This prevents people from understanding the dominating hybrid cultures all over the world.

Against this conceptual limitation, we may again quote Alexander von Humboldt's cosmopolitan science. It promoted ethical, political, and environmental responsibility, oriented toward "the interests of all humankind."<sup>29</sup> The virtual crossing of the world's territories in transdisciplinary and transcultural research is one of the main ideas of the studies of the neo-baroque in the twenty-first century.<sup>30</sup> Based on a complex understanding of the historic Roman baroque and that of seventeenth-century Madrid involving what I call "impression management" in times of crisis, we may detect neo-baroque indicators all over the world right now.<sup>31</sup>

27 Peter Krieger, "Las Geo-Graffias del Dr. Atl: Transformaciones Estéticas de la Energía Telúrica y Atmosférica" (English translation: "Dr. Atl's Geo-Graphies: Aesthetic Transformations of Telluric and Atmospheric Energy") in *Dr. Atl, Rotación Cómica. A cincuenta años de su muerte* (Guadalajara: Instituto Cultural Cabañas, 2015), 12–47; Peter Krieger, "Gerardo Murillo ("Dr. Atl"), *La sombra del Popo*" in Peter John Brownlee, Valéria Piccoli, and Georgiana Uhlyarik, eds., *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra Del Fuego to the Arctic*. (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2015), 256–257.

28 Ottmar Ette, *Alexander von Humboldt und die Globalisierung. Das Mobile des Wissens* (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 2009), 31, 32, and 35.

29 Ette, *Alexander von Humboldt und die Globalisierung*, 18.

30 Walter Moser, Angela Ndaliansis, and Peter Krieger, eds., *Neo-Baroques: Politics, Spectacle and Entertainment from Latin America to the Hollywood Blockbuster* (forthcoming: Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2016); this publication is the result of the collective research on the *Transcultural and Transhistoric Efficiencies of the Baroque Paradigm*, part of the project *The Hispanic Baroque. Complexity in the First Atlantic Culture*, directed by Juan Luis Suárez, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, financed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

31 Peter Krieger, "Form Follows Effect: Principles of Baroque Impression Management in



Beyond the traditional art historical, primarily Eurocentric understanding of the neo-baroque as stylistic eclecticism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, current debates on that cultural phenomenon focus on the continuing methods of producing illusion that can be put to use by religious and political ideologies.<sup>32</sup> Today, they are mainly related to the visual values of consumer society. The seventeenth-century Counter Reformation and today's consumer ideology have common values and techniques, such as the synesthetic conquest of the senses, present in the Roman Jesuit churches as well in the artificial environments of shopping malls. This is now a global phenomenon; one of the most influential transmissions of that aesthetic idea is that of Las Vegas's spectacular architecture.<sup>33</sup>

But the globalized neo-baroque has also a specific and contradictory, almost anarchic source in Latin American tradition.<sup>34</sup> The historical Latin American baroque was characterized by style modifications by local craftsmen, who included their pre-Columbian visual heritage in the imported Spanish monarchic and Catholic iconographies. This cultural questioning of enforced colonial designs is still vivid in the lowrider culture of Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles, as Monika Kaup has shown.<sup>35</sup> Young men convert a standardized capitalist product, a car, into an individual piece of popular, neo-baroque art. Research on the Latin American neobaroque reveals how the borders of transcultural impacts can be ironically deconstructed.

This type of research disrupts traditional Eurocentric, conservative art historiography. Beyond any fixation on style, however, baroque visual formulas can be culturally transformed into neo-baroque constructions of alternative, diverse Latin American identities. Heinrich Wölfflin, the father of the art history of

Contemporary Mexican Catholic Church Architecture. (An implicit homage to Wölfflin.)" in *The Invention of Baroque: Visualized Paradoxes of a Corporate Identity*, Jens Baumgarten, ed. (Sao Paulo, 2016).

32 Angela Ndaljian, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2005).

33 Peter Krieger, *El Neobarroco de Las Vegas en la Ciudad de México* (México: Escotto Editores, 2016).

34 Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup, eds., *Baroque New Worlds. Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*. (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press 2010).

35 Monika Kaup, *Neobaroque in the Americas. Alternative Modernities in Literature, Visual Art, and Film* (Charlottesville, VA; London: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 244, 248, and 272–289.

the baroque, would never have imagined these cultural developments; but in reality, his influential book on the *Basic Principles*, published a hundred years ago, contains abstract *topoi* of visual analysis that describe the phenomena of the contemporary neo-baroque.<sup>36</sup>

To sum up, I quote again Monica Juneja's conceptual work on the "transcultural history of art," which is not meant just to add multiple national historiographies. Instead, she looks at the "transformational processes that constitute art practice through cultural encounters and relationships." Her purpose is to create collective consciousness about the "non-linear and non-homogeneous" logic of art production, distribution, and reception.<sup>37</sup> What's more, "Such a view has the potential to destabilize many of the values that underpin the discipline of art history and [that] have remained unquestioned for too long."<sup>38</sup> In other words, global, transcultural research strategies clearly tear down the implicit conceptual and territorial borders of our discipline.

Third, **transhistorical research** can uncover long-term cultural effects of current settings. An example is the research on current neo-baroque: switching from the seventeenth-century historical settings of Rome and Madrid to the cultural conditions in twenty-first-century Las Vegas or Mexico City—as I do in my forthcoming book on *The Las Vegas Neobaroque in Mexico City*—may cause conceptual problems in strict historiographical terms. Many phenomena of these two different spheres of time and space are not comparable. However, transhistorical themes, such as the urban aesthetic motive of covering decay with spectacle, do exist. Contemporary neo-baroque scenography, both in the image of megacities as well as in its virtual representations in television and online, has clear roots in the baroque theater, with its sophisticated machines for producing illusions.

36 Peter Krieger, "Baroque and Neo-Baroque: Long-Term Effects of the Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe in Mexico" in *The Global Reception of Heinrich Wölfflin's Principles of Art History (1915–2015)*, Evonne Levy and Tristan Weddingen, eds. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art/Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, 2016).

37 Juneja, "Global Art History," 281; and Juneja, "Kunstgeschichte und kulturelle Differenz," 7, referring to the conceptual definition of Juneja's chair "Asia and Europe in a Global Context" at the art history department at Heidelberg University, Germany.

38 Juneja, "Global Art History," 282.

Staging social and cultural contrasts, focusing on spectacular visual impacts, has also become an established strategy of contemporary art in megacities. A *memento mori* of neo-baroque cultures has historical roots in the European seventeenth century. Even the environmental aesthetics of self-destruction through air pollution finds one of its conceptual origins in the English baroque thinker Robert Burton, who in 1621 already regarded atmospheric contamination as a cause of melancholy.<sup>39</sup>

I just have sketched the debates on the neo-baroque, which ignore the historiographical borders of epochs, centuries, and decades. The example explains my belief that art historians should recognize the many obvious transhistorical phenomena, and step over frontiers of thinking and interpreting. In this sense, trespassing will *not* be prosecuted, but rather encouraged. And in this process of transgression, history is not excluded, but recognized as an essential way to understand contemporary cultural phenomena.

### III. Potential of Art History/Science of the Image

One major innovation in recent art historiography is that the so-called science of the image (*Bildwissenschaft*)<sup>40</sup> has torn down the borders of a self-referential, sometimes boring discipline. Of course, *Bildwissenschaft* maintains its foundation in established art historical methods. But it widens the frame of research in visual cultures. By doing so, it produces inspiring knowledge for our contemporary societies, in which growing image flows determine worldviews and collective memory, perhaps more than words do.

Art historical and visual, aesthetic research has many objectives, but one of the most important for me is the education of visual illiterates. I use this term to describe people affected by visual impacts but who lack the instruments of critical analysis. In times of image mass production by television, internet, and digital photography, it may be useful to consult art historical

39 Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York: New York Review Books, 2001; reprint of the 6th edition of 1621).

40 Some titles on *Bildwissenschaft* ("science of the image") include: Klaus Sachs-Hombach, ed., *Bildtheorien. Anthropologische und kulturelle Grundlagen des Visualistic Turn* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2009); Jörg Probst and Jost Philipp Klenner, eds., *Ideengeschichte der Bildwissenschaft* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2009); Lambert Wiesing, *Artifizielle Präsenz. Studien zur Philosophie des Bildes* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).

research on the production, distribution, and reception of images in specific political, social, and cultural contexts.

In this article I have tried to frame the current condition of our discipline using a metaphorical understanding of the conceptual boundaries of free development and migration of ideas. Fortified frontiers, as well as intellectual borders, are temporary obstacles that may disappear or reappear in different configurations. In the humanities, they are virtual but powerful constructions that direct flows of intellectual energy. Part of that energy is carried by migrants, whose territorial and mental mobility helps to reorganize the world's map of knowledge.

However, the current political situation, especially in Europe with its massive migratory flows from African and Arabic countries, shows us that migration challenges everyone to change their mental habits—the migrants as well as the established settlers. This change sometimes generates more problems than advantages. Due to the complexity of hybrid, multi-ethnic processes, the established populations often seek refuge in nationalist, even xenophobic practices and many migrants retire to homogeneous ghettos in the new place. But perhaps the long-term perspective reveals the potential of cosmopolitan citizenship,<sup>41</sup> beyond nationalist, ethnic, or religious borders.

Transferred to the academic situation, especially in art history, this comparison makes us think about the complexity of cultural expression in the art works that we analyze, and about our own contemporary cultural setting in which we act. Hybrid modes of research in art history may strengthen the collective mental capacity to accept complexity, tolerate contradictions, and negotiate conflicts. All these problems arise when frontiers are open. There is no limit to circulating ideas and subjects in a globalized academic context.

A lesson from biology supports this plea for unrestricted academic interchange: symbiosis is one of the most successful modes of coexistence.<sup>42</sup> Most organisms on Earth live in symbiotic relationships. These alliances are the most important driving forces of evolution. Although symbiotic relations can also

41 Karl Schlögel, *Planet der Nomaden* (Berlin: wjs-Verlag 2006): 116.

42 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 21, 2015, 38–39.

generate disadvantages for some related elements, contemporary life sciences emphasize that cooperation is more important and effective than (Darwin's notion of) competition. Although I do not intend to biologize the humanities, these concepts show how creative and inspiring a transdisciplinary, transcultural, and transhistorical science of the image can be. With this inspiration, we can hope for an art history without borders.

We may ask: how much migration of ideas and initiatives do we want and can we bear? Do we need virtual frontiers that promise orientation, security, and identity? In spite of intellectual border controls and their existing restrictions, I advocate a mental disposition of openness and discovery, one without limits, according to philosopher Ernst Bloch's utopian principle: "thinking means transcending" (in German: *Denken heisst überschreiten*).

At the very least—and this is one of the main objectives of this publication, initiated by the Brazilian Committee of Art History (CBHA)—investigating and criticizing the exclusionary frontiers of our globalized discipline is a step toward mutual respectful inclusion. In this sense, my intervention is meant as a productive provocation that aims at the decentralization and decolonization of art historiography beyond any conceptual limits, ideological frontiers, and disciplinary borders.

Frontiers are not only enclosures, but also spaces of transition and connection<sup>43</sup> in a reorganized, complex, heterogeneous, and truly post-colonial world map of art historical knowledge production.

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