

Dossier

**Art and Music in a
Globalizing Latin America**

**Arte y música en una
América Latina en globalización**

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Introduction

Resumen: Arte y música latinoamericanas tienen formas localizadas transfiguradas de expresión estética. Artistas contemporáneos, muchas veces formados por más de una sola cultura, pueden ser comprendidos de manera adecuada solamente mediante un concepto dinámico de cultura. Con los cambios posmodernos en el concepto de “arte”, los deslindes de la actividad artística se debilitaron. Artistas indígenas y músicos populares indican, sin embargo, que la “cultura latina” se ha globalizado como resultado de la interacción creativa y de la mercantilización de producciones culturales africanas, hispánicas (o luso-brasileñas) e indígenas. Aquí entra la cuestión del poder: ¿Quién define lo “auténtico”? ¿Cuáles son las artes que llegan a ser aceptadas dentro del “arte mundial” (“world art”)? ¿En qué consiste la responsabilidad de la antropología en los debates sobre arte, p.ej., cuando hay que ofrecer orientaciones básicas para las estrategias de adquisiciones de museos? ¿Han cambiado de manera radical los procesos artísticos en América Latina a causa de la permeabilidad de las fronteras nacionales y por la diseminación activa de conocimientos y prácticas artísticas? ¿Hasta qué grado modifican las transformaciones de patrones geométricos en la pintura corporal, la cerámica, la cestería y el arte de tejer indígenas la constitución de las cosmovisiones de las que originan? ¿Representa la difusión de formas musicales latinoamericanas o caribeñas una expansión de las experiencias populares o de la industria cultural? ¿Qué nos revela el proceso de hibridación de estas formas artísticas y musicales sobre las interacciones entre diferentes poblaciones latinoamericanas?

Summary: Latin American art and music have transfigured localized forms of aesthetic expression. Contemporary artists, often formed by more than one culture, can only be understood adequately through a dynamic concept of culture. With the postmodern change of the notion of “art”, boundaries of artistic activity have weakened. Indigenous artists and popular musicians indicate, however, that “Latin culture” has been globalized as a result of the creative interaction and the commodification of African, Hispanic (or Luso-Brazilian) and indigenous cultural productions. Here, the question of power comes up: Who defines the “authentic”? Which arts are accepted in “world art”? What is Anthropology’s responsibility in the art debate e.g. when giving guidelines for museums’ collecting strategies? Have the transcendence of national boundaries and the active dissemination of artistic knowledge and practices radically altered the artistic processes in Latin America? To what extent do transformations of geometrical patterns in indigenous body paint, pottery, basketry, and weaving modify the constitution of cosmologies they originate in? Does the diffusion of Latin and Caribbean musical forms represent an expansion of popular experiences or of the culture industry? What does the process of hybridization of these art and musical forms tell us about the interactions among Latin American populations?

The interest in the work of Latin American artists, including musicians, who have developed distinct approaches to initiate new dialogues and exchange knowledge with a broad global audience, brought a group of scholars together at Santiago de Chile.¹ The authors of the following papers discuss Latin American artists and musicians from different cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and statuses in their respective artistic scenes. The richness and variety of Latin American art/music, make it impossible to provide anything like a comprehensive overview, or even an adequate summary of the field, in a symposium.

The circumstances around the production of art, and the choices artists have made, are explored, as is the nature of their various audiences and their reception of these artistic productions. Talking about global processes in music, performance, and art inevitably involves thinking about local knowledge and examining a “third space” between the global and the local.

Increasing migration and the acceleration of globalizing communication media make it essential to focus not only on Indigenous or “traditional” art forms, but to develop new approaches to understand an emergent hybridity and to revisit “authenticity” and “identity” in the face of globalization. Crossing the boundaries between the many local South American and Western genres, as well as between art and anthropology, the papers in this volume explore the hybrid and interstitial spaces where art forms intermingle and cross-fertilize.

Latin American music, ritual, performance, and visual art are now part of a globalizing world due to the creative interaction among Indigenous, African, European, and North American cultural productions and their commodification. Realizing that academic discussions of music, performance, and art usually produce separate discourses about the varying genres, we find it worthwhile to discuss these art forms together. As a result, the concepts of hybridity and authenticity, among others, acquire different meanings in relation to popular music and visual art. In addition, participants found that the differing backgrounds of the varying audiences inform the public’s acceptance and definition of what constitutes art, music, and performance.

Hybrid popular music, characterized by performance and the joining in ensembles of musicians with various individual and cultural backgrounds, develops its styles and rhythms to a great extent through improvisation. The mostly young and urban audiences of Latin American popular music appreciate the musicalization of life events with either radical new sounds, or re-interpretations of older pieces. This is facilitated by the broad distribution of music through television, radio, internet, videos, and CD.

1 Unfortunately many participants willing to present their papers had to withdraw their participation because of financial reasons and many interesting papers on Mexico, Afro-Brazil, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico therefore were not presented.

Latin American fine art is as much an open space for diversity as is popular music. Indigenous art is created in dynamic communicative contexts and is aimed at either a national society or a foreign public. Local artists experiment with Western styles and techniques, and their works prove their engagement in refashioning the world through artistic action. Reflecting and communicating mythical events or interpreting political conflicts through visual art helps educate the public about the artists' and their communities' perspectives and current aspirations. But as radical as visual art might be, its publication takes place in a more institutionalized space than does popular music. Much of the audience for fine art clings to the idea of the "original" work as displayed in museums and galleries.

Authenticity cannot be understood as a value per se, as if the authentic referred to the traditional – i.e. immune to change or foreign influence, as opposed to the modern or eclectic. Rather, it is the audience and the artist who define the authentic. Hybrid popular music from Latin America is readily accepted by a young urban public that establishes the authenticity of hybrid musical productions, and which therefore quite easily make their way into radio, internet, and CD players. Indigenous drawings on paper influenced by western art styles, on the other hand, continue to be viewed as more appropriate for anthropological research than for art museums and galleries. In the case of many contemporary local visual arts, when judged by a global, more conservative museum-oriented audience, hybridity seems to be more of an obstacle than a starting point for its reception as art. Authenticity is still attributed only to such art works encompassing "traditional" materials and techniques. The non-indigenous audience's interest still focuses on old "masterpieces" of indigenous artwork: mostly feather art, but also carvings, pottery, basketry, and textiles. It will take some time before the poetics of contemporary local art receive the attention they deserve in museums and galleries. Nevertheless, we learn from the often young indigenous artists that for them, drawing on paper opens up new possibilities of introducing the knowledge and practices of their communities into statements on religion, politics, and the environment.

Most papers discussing fine art are about Brazilian indigenous art, indigenous ritual, and performance, some are about contemporary arts in Ecuador and Argentina. Two more discuss hybrid music: one as performed by a New York, "prosthetic" Cuban pop group, and the other concerned with the history and function of Salsa in the Colombian town of Cali. Another paper examines the importance of Galician music for Spanish migrants in Argentina.

The papers on music show the importance of an interactive exchange between artists and audience in the development of new orientations. Qirko suggests that judgments of cultural authenticity in art can be an important part of the process of forming and maintaining social identity: precisely in the face of globalization and postmodernism, authenticating (and thus categorizing) art in social terms remains an important

concern. The “authentic” may be a mirage, but the need to authenticate appears to be very real indeed. While the process is explored in the context of a group intentionally blurring genre lines, the discussion has implications for even the most “traditional” of artistic contexts.

Ochse shows how a musical phenomenon manifests itself in a specific locale, and how it functions as a component of discourses on identity. Whereas in essentialist discourses Salsa is considered to be aesthetically trivial, the author defines music as “third space” (with a term of Bhabha). With a spatial conception of music it is possible to simultaneously consider style, cultural practices, and other discourses related to identity. Salsa proves to be open for difference.

The third paper on music, by Pablo Cirio, examines the communication of migrants from the province of Lugo in the hills of Os Ancares (Galice/Spain) to Argentina by tracing their “sonic epistolaries” as collected in seven tapes recorded between 1975 and 1985. Listening to the micro-history of two married couples Cirio suggests that the Galician people, having used the recorded tapes as a medium of contact *sui generis*, gave their vernacular music a central place as a vehicle to express their feelings of nostalgia. Cirio asserts that the value of the “sonic epistolaries” by its immediate access, goes beyond that of the paper. The messages being audible, their recipient is directly connected to the voice of relatives, friends, as well as to the music they sing and play.

Among the papers on contemporary indigenous drawings, Mariana Ferreira’s focuses on the simultaneity of oral storytelling and drawing as political statements about a violent conflict in the Xavante Territory of Central Brazil. She interprets the discourse and graphic representations of Xavante youth who make such eloquent use of words and colour to convey, in pencil and crayon drawings, their theory of environmental justice. The youths’ narrative and graphic work also express and help communicate Xavante perceptions of the systematic violation of indigenous peoples’ Rights in Brazil.

Ulrike Prinz questions the homogenization-concept of art production among the Mehinako people of the Xingu indigenous reservation of Central Brazil. At first glance it appears that Mehinako Indians simply reproduce ideas and images of schoolbooks recently introduced. A closer look at the process of art production, however, reveals that the idea of an active appropriation helps explain contemporary Mehinako art. Prinz traces the different and creative ways of appropriation Mehinako artists make use of, transforming schoolbook images and signs and adapting them to local and personal taste. In views of a new reading, Mehinako artists combine and interrelate elements to create new forms of tradition.

From a museum’s perspective, Mona Suhrbier analyzes how Indigenous artists in the Amazon and Southern Brazil, transform objects of daily and ritual use into symbols or signs by drawing them on paper. Expressing manifold meanings rather than the

functions of objects, many of these drawings can be seen as statements on the importance of objects for the performance of indigenous religion and culture, and therefore for the production of identity and meaning. In the global communication process about art, religion, and culture, such drawings can be interpreted as attempts of the indigenous artists to “repatriate” important parts of their cultures.

Arnd Schneider intends a first step towards a comparative framework for analysing artistic appropriations of indigenous cultures in the light of *mestizaje* and *crisol de razas* ideologies. Discussing art from Ecuador, he shows the challenges artists face working with and against the notion of *mestizaje*. In Argentina, seemingly at the opposite of the perceived spectrum of more or less ‘indigenous’ societies, Schneider analyses artistic reactions to a totalizing ideology of homogeneity (*crisol de razas*).

The paper on ritual performance by Vanessa Lea deals with ceremonial wailing and self-flagellation, practices that are typical of Mëbengokre women in Central Brazil. Ritualized wailing is a highly stylized and emotive female counterpart to male oratory. Wailing is traditionally accompanied by self-flagellation, a practice that is presently being censored by the Mëtyktire subgroup, among with which fieldwork was carried out. The main issue Lea addresses is the extent to which such performances provide emotional catharsis, or whether women are compelled by the weight of traditional to express themselves the way they do.

In her paper on dance and performance Regina Polo Müller analyzes dance as an esthetic form and as a discourse constructed in the actual historical situations of two indigenous groups in Central Brazil. She describes the Asurini shamanistic *Maraká* ritual and the cosmogonic ritual dance cycle of the *Turé* flutes, as well as the sung and danced performance of the Xavante initiation ritual *da-nõ're*. She identifies myths (Asurini) and individual dreams (Xavante) as main sources of inspiration for music and dance and shows how participants, audience, space, objects, food, and body ornaments are organized by *scripts* and choreographies, in order to make transformation processes possible and open up and establish cosmic and social relationship with spirits, ancestors, neighbours and white people as well as relations between individuals and a group and between the generations.

Global art business, characterized by hierarchies and dominance, systematically excludes great parts of hybrid local Latin American art. The papers of this *dossier* have chosen to focus precisely on the excluded, that is, on art forms that originate amidst indigenous peoples, national minorities, migrating populations, as well as the artistic developments stemming from multi-cultural urban youth. Questions of hybridity and authenticity capture and synthesize long-standing concerns of Latin American artists and audiences with regard to the production and consumption of art and music in a globalizing world. Latin American adoptions and uses of African, Caribbean and Anglo-American elements have indeed created particularly interesting circumstances and art forms. Most interestingly, the varied artistic and musical dialects presented in

this collection of essays involve purposeful hybridisations, as well as regionalist retentions of the traditional - which appear to be always reinvented. Without pretence to any complete coverage, the studies here presented illuminate how the sources, repercussions, local manifestations, and worldwide meanings of globalization are crucial to a comprehensive approach to contemporary art and music in Latin America.²

2 We thank the authors for the suggestions they made for the introduction text, and we thank Hector Qirko for his help with the English version.