



# The German Century? How a Geopolitical Approach Could Transform The History of Modernism

Catherine Dossin, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel

## ► To cite this version:

Catherine Dossin, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel. The German Century? How a Geopolitical Approach Could Transform The History of Modernism. Circulations in the Global History of Art, Ashgate / Routledge, 2015, 9781472454560. hal-01479061

**HAL Id: hal-01479061**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01479061>**

Submitted on 12 Feb 2018

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Copyright

Warning : this document is proposed at its state before publication. I encourage you to use the version published by Ashgate, which includes definitive maps and graphs, and in a revised version.

***The German Century: How a Geopolitical Approach Could Transform the History of Modernism***  
**Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel**

Writing a global history of art is one of the highest challenges faced by the specialists of modernism, but not their favorite orientation.<sup>1</sup> When writing a global history of modern and contemporary art, the trend seems to be directed towards adding chapters dedicated to non-Western regions.<sup>2</sup> Yet, those added chapters do not fundamentally alter the main narrative. The new stories include peripheral regions and groups, but only to prove that they followed the same avant-garde logics as the centers, be it Paris or New York, and to establish who from the peripheries can enter the modernist canon, thereby preserving the symbolic hierarchies and processes of exclusion that define Western Modernism.<sup>3</sup> Far from resulting in a global, or all-encompassing, history of the period, such an approach ends up merely Westernizing World art history.<sup>4</sup> But how to avoid this pitfall? How to think the history of art in a truly global perspective? The study of circulations and exchanges, i.e. a transnational perspective, provides a point of departure for such a global art history. In our respective researches, distant and close readings of the circulations between regions traditionally described as centers and peripheries have indeed enabled us to recover hidden interactions, strategies, and and conter-influences and to shatter the modernist myths surrounding Paris, New York, and their supposed supremacies.

We say both “distant” and “close” readings of circulations because there are at least two ways to study circulations. The first consists in studying long periods using quantitative methods and continuously shifting the scale of the analysis, while reconstituting the links between the different artistic fields, the

---

<sup>1</sup> On the small number of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c. art historians trying to engage with global art history, see Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, “Ce que l’approche mondiale fait à l’histoire de l’art.”, *Romantisme*, N. 163 (1:2014) : La Mondialisation, 63-78).

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed historiography of World History, see Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann’s contribution to the present volume.

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this study, the term “Modernism” will describe an artistic tradition that begun with 19<sup>th</sup> century Realism and in which artistic innovation was valued for its own sake.

<sup>4</sup> On this risk see James Elkins, “Can We Invent a World Art Studies,” in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, ed. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried Van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008).

trajectories and strategies of its actors and objects.<sup>5</sup> Complementary to the first, thesecond way to study circulation evolves from post-structuralist approaches, including the methods of Cultural Transfers.<sup>6</sup> It is concerned with the discursive, and political genesis of historical narratives, the gaps between different national narratives and their translations, and the influence of commercial, critical, and institutional strategies (be they conscious or not) in the writing of the modernist story. These two methods often overlap and converge in what we call the geopolitical approach.

Geopolitics provides a model for studying power relations within the art world of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries,<sup>7</sup> when the concept of national identities strongly influenced the history of art.<sup>8</sup> The geopolitical approach, as we define it, follows the three levels of analysis Fernand Braudel distinguished in the *Mediterranean*: the *longue durée* of history and geography, the cycle of socio-economical fluxes and transnational circulations, and the finer scale of events, crisis, and artworks.<sup>9</sup> Within those three levels, the geopolitical method understands as object what Pierre Bourdieu would call the international field of arts, that is to say the social, transnational space polarized and regulated by values and institutions accepted or contested within the field,<sup>10</sup> as well as the discourses—in the Foucauldian sense—that populate and define it. In the international field of modern art, people, objects, and ideas from various origins circulate, engage in dialogue, and compete, crossing over many national fields. It is in these intersections between national and international fields that the trajectories of artistic movements and artists' careers fall or flourish. Our current representation of the art

---

<sup>5</sup> In particular Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). For Art history, see Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Géopolitique des avant-gardes. Une histoire transnationale*, 3 vol. (1848-1918, 1918-1945, 1945-1968) (Paris : Gallimard, Folio Histoire, forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, eds., *Transferts: Les relation interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIII et XIXème siècle)* (Paris: Editions recherche sur les civilisations, 1988); Michel Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Yves Lacoste, *La géographie ça sert d'abord à faire la guerre* (Paris: La Découverte, 1988); Yves Lacoste, *De la géopolitique aux paysages: Dictionnaire de la Géographie* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2003); Yves Lacoste, *Géopolitique: La longue histoire d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Larousse, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See among others Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006); Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales: Europe, XVIIIe-XXe siècle*, L'univers historique (Paris: Seuil, 1999); Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1987); Michela Passini, Andreas Beyer, et Roland Recht, "La fabrique de l'art national: le nationalisme et les origines de l'histoire de l'art en France et en Allemagne, 1870-1933" (Paris: Édition de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*.

<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*.

world (hierarchical and centralized) and of the history of modern art (evolutionist and diffusionist) results from this very system.

To study those trajectories in the context of *longue durée* of cycles and events, we rely on different methodological tools ranging from cartography and statistics to prosopography and close readings of texts. Such a comprehensive approach provides the foundations for a global history of modern art that is circulatory and inclusive, instead of hierarchical and exclusive. By throwing a new light on the very objects of modernist stories, artworks, artists, avant-garde or not, and innovation, a geopolitical study of the modern/modernist field finally challenges and enriches our understanding and knowledge of artists' oeuvres and individual artworks.

## 1. Studying the History of Modern Art with Maps and Charts

In order to escape the hierarchization and exclusion that underlies the narrative of modern art, we ought to adopt tools that allow us to study (at the same level and over a long period) the different actors and events of the international art field, without consideration for their relative position within the current narrative of Modernism.

We can do this, for instance, by charting the development of modern art through a systematic and cartographic study of exhibitions that featured modern paintings. The resulting maps show that a process of internationalization started, for modern art, as early as the 1860s.<sup>11</sup> The increase of modernist activities concerned not only Paris, but other cities, especially London, Brussels, Berlin, Vienna, and reached as far as St. Petersburg and Moscow. Maps do more than merely visualize how avant-gardist groups and modern structures of exhibitions appeared successively in different European capitals; it also demonstrates the importance of peripheral cities in the process of internationalization of Modernism.

Thus even if London has never had a central place in the history of the avant-gardes, it played a fundamental role in the development and affirmation of the realist networks as early as the 1860s. Likewise,

---

<sup>11</sup> These maps are published in Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "*Nul n'est prophète en son pays?*" *L'internationalisation de la peinture avant-gardiste parisienne (1855-1914)* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay / Nicolas Chaudun, 2009).and id., *Géopolitique des avant-gardes*, Vol. 1 (annex).

Brussels became a major center of exhibitions in the 1880s, hence a major actor in the circulation of modern painting. Berlin also gained a growing importance in the international modern art market and was soon followed by Vienna.<sup>12</sup> The dynamism of these so-called peripheries was important not only for Parisian art but more generally for all innovative European art. An international elite of art collectors progressively recognized that modern art was not necessarily a Parisian production. The Groupe des Vingt, for instance, founded in Brussels in 1884, was an essential platform for the internationalization of Postimpressionism, Symbolism and decorative arts coming from France, as well as those coming from England, Austria, or Germany. The foundation of the Secessions in Europe further contributed to the internationalization of modern art and its polycentric structuration: Berlin in 1892 and 1899, Munich in 1893, the Libre Esthétique in Brussels in 1893, the Venice Biennale in 1895, the Wiener Sezession in 1897, the World of Art in St. Petersburg in 1902, etc. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a Secession belonged to the “kit” of any modern cultural capital. In France this led to the realization that the central position of the French capital within Modernism was threatened. In response, the Salon d’Automne was created in 1903 as a way to keep Paris at the center of attention as much in the fall as in the spring, when the main Salons took place. By 1908, the circulation of international exhibitions and press reviews materialized the polycentric reality of the modernist field in the context of growing nationalism. In every country, foreign modernist exhibitions triggered national polemics, and encouraged modernist milieus to propose national versions of modernity. Yet Modernism was displayed, marketed, and encouraged in an international system.<sup>13</sup>

Besides cartography, other forms of distant reading shed new light on the history of modern art. Prosopography, that is to say the study of data pertaining to a group over a long period, shows that the international field of modern art came to be dominated by cosmopolitan artists of higher and higher social statuses. Around 1905, we see, in reaction to this domination, the emergence throughout Europe of new

---

<sup>12</sup> Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-siècle Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1996); Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, “Nul n’est prophète en son pays?” *L’internationalisation de la peinture avant-gardiste parisienne (1855-1914)* (Paris: Musée d’Orsay / Nicolas Chaudun, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, “Jouer sur l’espace pour maîtriser le temps. La Géopolitique des Avant-gardes européennes (1900-1914),” *EspacesTemps.net* (Decembre 2006): <http://www.espacestems.net/document2118.html>; Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, “L’art mobilier. La circulation de la peinture avant-gardiste et son rôle dans la géopolitique culturelle de l’Europe,” in *Le temps des capitales culturelles XVIIIe-XXe siècles*, ed. Christophe Charle (Seyssel Champ Vallon, 2009); Joyeux-Prunel, “Nul n’est prophète en son pays?”.

avant-garde movements, whose members came from popular milieus and positioned themselves against the established modernist circles in which they had no entrance. From Fauvism in France to *Die Brücke* in Dresden, expressionism in Belgium, and Primitivism in Russia, these young artists used pure color, painted popular subjects, and referred to Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Paul Cézanne, and Edvard Munch, the then marginal figures of Modernism, in reaction to the mundane tonal portraits *à la Sargent*,<sup>14</sup> and the social practices of the international modernist elite.<sup>15</sup> These different movements must be recognized as the shared response of younger and lower class artists to the structures of the international art establishment. Prosopography moves art historical discussion beyond rehashed questions of influence, like between Fauvism and *Die Brücke* for instance.

Historical-spatial analysis, from comparative chronology to network analysis, also provides an efficient tool for examining a circulatory history of Modernism. Mapping the creation of modernist magazines, and analyzing the artists' contributions and the reproduction of their works in those publications, for instance, results in a very different view of the modernist geopolitics of the interwar period. Between 1914 and 1940, about 350 modernist magazines appeared in Europe from Spain to Poland, in the Americas and in Japan. If we consider that those magazines were created by local groups, who wished to be recognized as an avant-garde at the international level, it would seem that the so-called peripheries were rather dynamic. In Paris, in contrast, vanguardist activities slowed down after 1918, with the exception of the Purist magazine *Esprit nouveau* that folded in 1925. A network analysis of the commonly reproduced artists and of the contributors writing in those modernist magazines shows that in 1925-26 Paris was not the main center of interest and polemics. Whereas the official story of Modernism claims that Parisian Surrealism imposed itself as the new avant-garde of the time, it was in fact isolated and quite at odds with a mostly constructivist *Europe des avant-gardes*. Until the end of the 1920s, European artists stopped going to Paris, instead preferring Berlin, Weimar, or the United States. With the rise of European fascisms and the consequent emigration of German

---

<sup>14</sup> In reference to the work of the American painter John Singer Sargent (1856 –1925).

<sup>15</sup> Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Géopolitique des avant-gardes. Une histoire socioculturelle des avant-gardes picturales, 1848-1968*, Collection Folio Histoire (Paris: Gallimard, 2014). [forthcoming]

and Central European artists to Paris, the French capital recovered its centrality and Surrealism finally gained international recognition.<sup>16</sup> **reference aux cartes?**

After 1945, Paris remained as the place towards which everyone's attention was turned for innovative art. However, despite the success of its artists, the Parisian position was fragile, hindered by a high dependence on foreign museums and collectors.<sup>17</sup> Quantitative analysis of Parisian galleries' clientele show that in the 1950s foreign patrons represented between 80 and 95 percent of the purchases in galleries representing advanced art. In terms of repartition, the best clients were first the Americans, followed by the West Germans, the Swiss, the Belgians, the Dutch, and the Scandinavians.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the prewar period, the Americans had simply replaced the Germans as the main collectors of Parisian art. Throughout the 1950s, 40 to 50 percent of the art sold in France that was exported went to the United States.<sup>19</sup>

Once American and European collectors and museums withdrew their support from the School of Paris and turned to New York for innovative art, the Parisian domination collapsed. But then from its outset, the dominance of American art subsequently depended on Western Europe. American art was great because Europeans believed it was and so they wrote about it, exhibited it, and collected it. Far from being the passive object of American art's domination, Europeans were actively participating in it, continuing the introductory work of American galleries, and even taking in charge the cultural acceptance and adaptation of American art in Western Europe. While in the 1950s most exhibitions of American art had been sent from the United States, in the 1960s and 1970s they were the result of European initiatives. The first museum exhibitions which introduced American Pop art in Europe were organized in 1964 by European curators who had discovered the new American art at the Parisian gallery of Ileana Sonnabend.<sup>20</sup> In the case of American

---

<sup>16</sup> See Géopolitique, Volume 2.

<sup>17</sup> Raymonde Moulin, *Le Marché de la peinture en France* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967), 451-525.

<sup>18</sup> Julie Verlaine, "La tradition de l'avant-garde. Les galeries d'art contemporain à Paris, de la Libération à la fin des années 1960" (Doctorat d'histoire, Université Paris I, 2008), 123, 25. **citer le livre plus que la thèse** See also the comments of the Parisian dealers Moulin interviewed: Moulin, *Le Marché de la peinture en France*, 451-52.

<sup>19</sup> Verlaine, "La tradition de l'avant-garde," 652.

<sup>20</sup> In Spring 1964, Pontus Hulten, the director of the Moderna Museet of Stockholm, organized *Amerikanske Pop Kunst*, and Wim Beeren organized *Nieuwe Realisten* for the Haags Gemeentemuseum. On those events, see Catherine Dossin, "Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme, etc. Comment Paris perdit le pouvoir de nommer les nouvelles tendances," in *Le nom de l'art*, ed. Vanessa Theodoropoulou and Katia Schneller (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013), 49-62; Catherine Dossin, "We Rose Up Slowly: Roy Lichtenstein's Not-So-Slow European Rise," in *POP? A Survey on Pop Art in Belgium and Europe*, ed. Carl Jacobs (Brussels: Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, 2013). [forthcoming]

Postminimal and Conceptual art the involvement of Europeans was even greater since the movement was, for the most part, introduced in Europe by Europeans, mostly Germans, who like Kasper Koenig, Paul Maenz and Piero Gilardi, had been to the United States and discovered artists whom they brought to the attention of European dealers, curators, and collectors.<sup>21</sup> As a result, the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam and the Kunsthalle of Bern could present the first international museum exhibitions of Conceptual art in 1969—a year before the Museum of Modern Art in New York.<sup>22</sup> A combination of distant and close reading of American art exhibitions in Europe between 1945 and 1975 shows that the American art which came to dominate the European art scene after 1963 was not American, but rather the reflection of a European take on American art.<sup>23</sup> By the late 1960s, Europeans were bypassing the American system of promotion and using their own, independent transatlantic networks, at the center of which were West German dealers, collectors and mediators.<sup>24</sup> It was those networks that permitted and supported the comeback of European (mostly German) artists at the forefront of the international art scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Maps, charts, and chronologies tell a different story of modern art—a story that highlights the importance of the so-called peripheries and in particular the importance of German artists, writers, dealers, and collectors, hence the title of this essay. The phrase “the German Century” is provocative on purpose and should not be taken literally. “The German century” stands against the traditional focus on Paris and New York to assert the necessity to adopt a more inclusive and balanced approach towards global art history. The international field in which modern art thrived was always polycentric, as was Germany. To speak of a German century signals a rethinking of the modernist narrative through the methodological lens of circulation.

## 2. Writing a Circulatory and Inclusive History of Modern Art

<sup>21</sup> For more information, see Catherine Dossin, *Geopolitics of the Western Art World, 1940s-1980s: From the Fall of Paris to the Invasion of New York* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014). [forthcoming]

<sup>22</sup> *Op Losse Schroeven*, curated by Beeren then curator of the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, opened in March followed in September by Harald Szeemann’s *When Attitudes Become Form*. Kynaston McShine’s *Informatism* took place in New York City in the summer of 1970.

<sup>23</sup> Catherine Dossin, “Mapping the Reception of American Art in Postwar Western Europe,” *ARTL@S Bulletin: For a Spatial History of Art and Literature* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 33-39.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Dossin, “*Pop begeistert*: American Pop art and the German People,” *American Art* 25, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 100-11.



Writing a history of modern art through a study of circulation allows for an escape from the dead-end of hierarchization and exclusion on which the modernist story is traditionally built. It creates a new story through a lens of a global, here in the sense of inclusive, history based on the study of trajectories of individuals, exhibitions, artworks, and information within the international art field.

In regard to the geopolitics of the avant-gardes in the Twenties, we said that quantitative and cartographic analysis highlights the dynamism of the peripheries in the 1920s. We could dismiss this peripheral activity by contending that those remote centers were merely importing models from Paris. Or we could take it seriously and notice that many foreign artists who had been attracted by Paris before 1914, left in the early 1920s. Such is the case of the Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg who had founded the magazine *De Stijl* in Holland in 1917. Van Doesburg was convinced that Paris was the center where one ought to be in order to play a significant role in the international avant-garde. By 1923, however, he had changed his mind: “In Paris everything is completely dead [...]. For me it is certain that the new cultural zone is the North.”<sup>25</sup> After joining a Berliner constructivist group in 1922, Van Doesburg based himself in Weimar because he had found in the Bauhaus an interesting adversary, with which he could engage in lively debates. After 1924, Van Doesburg’s international activities drove him to Berlin, Hannover and other Central European cities.

The trajectories of exhibitions are equally telling. Following the careers of the French Postimpressionists shows that exhibiting outside of France was necessary in order to be recognized in France.<sup>26</sup> When Daniel Henry Kahnweiler, a young German dealer based in Paris, started representing Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in 1908, he quickly stopped exhibiting them in the French capital. He instead sent them abroad, convinced of the effectiveness of the *détour par l'étranger*. As a result, foreign publics were better informed about Kahnweiler’s painters than the Parisians, hence the numerous rumors that circulated in Paris about their works. Kahnweiler constructed the reputation of his artists on hearsays about their foreign reception, which in turn increased their foreign reputation. The *détour*, revealed by the study of the circulation

---

<sup>25</sup> “À Paris tout est totalement mort, [...] C’est pour moi un fait certain que la nouvelle zone de culture est le Nord.” Théo Van Doesburg, letter to Michel Seuphor, quoted in *Piet Mondrian* (Paris: Séguier, 1987), 127.

<sup>26</sup> Note that the *détour* could be multiform: a distant field (Literary field), or a distant culture (e. g. the case of Gauguin), or estrangement (with Van Gogh and his madness).

of exhibitions, gave Cubism a foreign legitimization, such that Guillaume Apollinaire, a friend of the Cubists, would conclude that “no one is a prophet in his own country.”<sup>27</sup> The famous “mimetic desire” René Girard highlighted, operated fully, and on a large scale.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, a distant reading of exhibition catalogues allows scholars to study the trajectories of artworks and to establish what the public could actually see and in which context. To understand the European reception of Jackson Pollock, for instance, it is important to consider if the works on display were early figurative works, surrealist paintings, drip compositions, or late figurations. It is also essential to take into account if they hung as part of a retrospective of American art since the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century, as an exhibition of international vanguard art, or at a show of contemporary American art. Until 1958 and 1959 when MoMA sent the retrospective *Jackson Pollock, 1912–1956* and the exhibition *The New American Painting* to Europe, Pollock’s representation in Western Europe was limited in scope. From 1945 to 1954, Pollock was featured in only eight commercial shows, almost all of them in Paris, and nineteen museum exhibitions, most of which as part Peggy Guggenheim’s Surrealist and Abstract Collection. By 1958, 176 Pollock paintings had been shown in Western Europe: only 79 were drip paintings. In contrast, between 1958 and 1960, 265 Pollock paintings were shown in Europe—almost a third more than the previous ten years combined. 115 of those were drip paintings, which represented a similar percentage than before (about 43 or 44 percent). Such data is important since, contrarily to what is commonly believed, the drip compositions were not much bigger than the other paintings. As a matter of fact, *Reflection of the Big Dipper* (111 x 91.5 cm; 1947) that Guggenheim offered to the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam in 1951, long before any other works by the artist entered European collections, is smaller than *She-Wolf* (106.4 x 170.2 cm; 1943), which was actually the most widely exhibited Pollock during that period with thirteen showings between 1948 and 1957 and twenty between 1948 and 1960.<sup>29</sup> Among the other widely exhibited Pollocks was *Moon-Woman* (1942), which also belongs to

---

<sup>27</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire, “Peinture espagnole moderne (*Les Arts*, July 6, 1914),” in *Oeuvres en prose complètes* ed. Pierre Caizergues and Michel Décaudin, *Pléiade* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 809-10.

<sup>28</sup> René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

<sup>29</sup> If we consider the works that belonged to Peggy Guggenheim and were often presented in the early 1950s, we can see that a surrealist work such as *Circumcision* (142.3 x 168 cm; 1946) was bigger than the drip *Full Fathom Five* (129.2 x 76.5 cm; 1947). To take another example, *Bird of Paradise: Number 30* (1949) which was presented in Paris in 1951 as part of

the artist's pre-abstraction period.<sup>30</sup> To the Western European audience of the early 1950s, Pollock would have appeared as an artist oscillating between surrealism and abstraction, and that was strongly connected to—not to say influenced by—Pablo Picasso and André Masson. The fact that Pollock's work was then mostly presented in the context of the Peggy Guggenheim's Collection, in which he figured as the youngster of the prewar Abstract and Surrealist movements, could only reinforce this impression.<sup>31</sup> A statistical analysis of Pollock's showings in Western Europe challenges received ideas about the triumph of American art, while explaining European critics' reservations towards Pollock and other American artists, who appeared to them in a fragmented and disjointed manner. Writing in 1952, Pierre Descargues could only conclude that: "this painter's evolution is most curious."<sup>32</sup>

For art historians like ourselves, trained in the tradition of Western art history, distant and quantitative readings provide the means to move beyond the canonical narratives and hierarchical discourses that even the sources make difficult to escape. The study of the trajectories of artworks, ideas, and information further contributes to this liberation. To remain in the realm of American art and its European reception, distant reading of American art exhibitions shows that the American art presented in Paris in the 1940s and 1950s had little to do with what is regarded today as the canon of postwar American art. Among the most visible and well-liked artists were Mark Tobey and Sam Francis who came from the West Coast of the United States and whose works were rooted in Asian art and culture. In Paris, they were regarded as the leading figures of the School of the Pacific and, as such, were opposed and often preferred to those of the New York School, who seemed too European.<sup>33</sup> All the more since the most influential promoter of American art in the early 1950s in France was the art critic Michel Tapié who presented the works of Pollock and De Kooning as part of an *Informel* adventure that was very different from Clement Greenberg's ideas.<sup>34</sup>

---

the exhibition *Vébémenes confrontées* was rather small: 78.1 x 57.1 cm. The other work presented at this exhibition, *Number 8* (1950) was even smaller: 56 x 39 cm.

<sup>30</sup> *Moon-Woman* had already been shown eight times before 1956

<sup>31</sup> Between 1948 and 1957, 52 percent of the Pollocks shown in Europe came indeed from her collections.

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Descargues, "Paris Pollock," *Lettres Françaises*, March 20, 1952.

<sup>33</sup> On the School of the Pacific and its importance in France, see Julien Alvard, Michel Tapié, and Fitz Simmons, "L'Ecole du Pacifique," *Cimaise*, June 1954, 6-9; Kenneth Sawyer, "L'expressionisme abstrait: la phase Pacifique," *Cimaise*, June 1954, 3-5; Paul Wescher, "Ecole du Pacifique," *Cimaise*, April 1955, 3-5.

<sup>34</sup> Tapié was able to organize *Vébémenes Confrontées* in March 1951 at the Parisian gallery of Paul Facchetti, followed in March 1952 by a solo-show of Pollock at the same gallery. The Pollocks were lent by the artist Alfonso Ossorio who lent

Whereas Greenberg championed abstract art and adopted a formal evolutionist approach, Tapié rejected both abstraction and formalism. He wrapped the works of the American artists in an existentialist discourse, describing their informal materiality as manifestations of the artists' rebellion and *prise de conscience*.<sup>35</sup> American Abstract Expressionism was thus presented as a sub-tendency of a Parisian trend, and served to demonstrate the international orientation of Tapié and his group.

When studying the trajectories of individuals, exhibitions, artworks and information, the motivations of the agents of those circulations often reveal very different viewpoints that question the idea of any fixed hierarchy and dominations in modern art. The vanguardism of the German elite in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, was motivated by what they regarded as their backwardness vis-à-vis Paris. The Secessions in Berlin and Munich reflected less an aesthetical agenda than a rejection of cultural provincialism and conservatism of the local salons.<sup>36</sup> Inviting foreign (mostly Parisian) artists was a way to foster artistic quality among their members, as painter Max Liebermann stressed in the press of the time.<sup>37</sup> This was equally the conviction of the Viennese Secessionists. Gustav Klimt, one of the founders, described the project as “the necessity to push the Viennese artistic life towards a more lively relationship to the most progressive developments of art abroad.”<sup>38</sup> The desire expressed in the peripheries to be confronted with the artistic production of the major centers allowed in turn Parisian dealers and artists to adopt the strategy of the *détour par l'étranger*.<sup>39</sup>

In this case, the motivations of those who imported the works and those who exported them were complementary, but it was not always the case. There is much to say about the motivations behind *Introduction à la Peinture moderne américaine*, an exhibition often presented as the first step of American Art's conquest of the Parisian scene that the New York dealer Samuel Kootz organized in Paris at the Galerie Maeght in April

---

three paintings from de Kooning's *Woman* series, Pollock's *Lavender Mist* (1950), *Number 30* (1949), and *Number 8* (1950.) See Michael David Plante, “The 'second occupation': American expatriate painters and the reception of American art in Paris, 1946-1958” (Ph.D., Brown University, 1992), 305.

<sup>35</sup> Although Jean-Paul Sartre never wrote on those artists, his ideas were ultimately more influential than Clement Greenberg's on the French original reception of American art.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Paret, *Berlin Secession: Modernism and Its Enemies in Imperial Germany*. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ Press, 1989); Maria Martha Makela, *The Munich Secession: art and artists in turn-of-the-century Munich* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> See for instance Liebermann's introduction to the *Katalog der zweiten Ausstellung der Berliner Sezession* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1900), 13.

<sup>38</sup> Translated from Gottfried Fliedl and Gustav Klimt, *Gustav Klimt: 1862-1918: die Welt in weiblicher Gestalt* (Köln: Taschen, 1997), 62.

<sup>39</sup> Joyeux-Prunel, “Jouer sur l'espace pour maîtriser le temps.”

1947. The Parisian gallery was counting on the French curiosity towards the United States in bringing what was presented as the first exhibition of American contemporary art since 1938 and the resuming of the artistic relationships between the two countries after the War. But for the American dealer, the purpose of this exhibition was less to win over the French public than to give his artists a Parisian cachet. So while he advertised that his artists had a show in Paris in the American press, he showed little concern for the actual exhibition and its consequent commercial and critical failure. Moreover, while in the United States he had made his mission to promote American art through his writing and was keen on creating a polemic in the press, Kootz let someone else write the essay for the French catalogue and did not bother to defend his artists when they were attacked in the French press. Kootz was clearly less interested in promoting his artists in France, than in the potential of this *détour par l'étranger* on the American market.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. Challenging and Furthering our Understanding of Modern Art

The geopolitical approach not only provides the foundation for a circulatory and inclusive, not to say global, history of modern art, but it also throws a new light on the very objects of the modernist stories, namely the avant-gardes, the artists, their artworks, and innovations.

In regard to the works of art, a geopolitical approach invites us to consider them first and foremost as polysemous messages that different audiences understood differently. Such a mechanism is particularly obvious in the international reception of Post-Impressionism. As soon as 1886, Divisionist painting began to gain recognition in Belgium, then in Germany, before being joined by Nabi painting after 1890, thanks to an efficient network of European critics, dealers, and collectors. Relying on this support-system, the Post-Impressionists (i.e. Divisionists, Symbolists, and Nabis) were able to forge alliances with various avant-gardes outside France. To this end, they had to substantially modify the message of their works, or to let those who introduced them abroad operate this adaptation. Paul Signac, for instance, changed the titles of his paintings: the musical titles he chose for the Salon of the XX in Brussels in 1892 adapted his paintings to the expectations of Belgian Symbolists keen on new music, whereas two months later, for the Salon des

---

<sup>40</sup> For more information on Kootz, see Dossin, *Geopolitics of the Western Art World, 1940s-1980s*. [forthcoming]

Indépendants in Paris, he chose titles that set his paintings within the French landscape tradition. After 1900, the cultural transfer of Post-Impressionism took place on a larger scale. In Germany, under the leadership of Count Harry Kessler and the critic and art dealer Julius Meier-Graefe, the Divisionists and the Nabis were presented as the united heirs of Impressionism, a unity which they in fact fiercely rejected. In Germany, the presentation of the catchall “Neo-Impressionism” as the culmination of painting’s evolution towards a material reality wiped away the scientific and political dimension Divisionism had in France, as well as the religious orientation of the Nabis. The paintings of Maurice Denis, for whom art was to be put at the service of Christ, enjoyed great success among German atheistic and Nietzschean circles, who regarded art as a new religion. The disparity was equally striking between Signac’s anarchist ideas and the German “revolutionaries in pumps” who acquired his paintings at the turn of the century.<sup>41</sup>

As far as the artist is concerned, the geopolitical, circulatory approach challenges the image of the isolated genius, engrossed in a world of painting, or in supposedly formal and esthetical considerations. Instead of being “stupid as a painter” as the saying goes, the artists emerge as political individuals who reflect on the artistic, social and geopolitical situation of their times not only to meet the expectations of their different audiences, but also to comment on those situations in their works, and deconstruct them. What a geopolitical reading does to one of the key works in the modernist narrative, namely Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*, is particularly interesting. In April 1917, Duchamp sent a urinal, turned upside down, signed and dated, to the first Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York. The work was refused, whereas the rules stated the acceptance of any kind of artwork. Duchamp had signed the urinal “R. Mutt” and dated it from 1917. As Thierry de Duve convincingly showed, the artist was challenging so-called independence of the new Society.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the readymade caused an unprecedented esthetical revolution: *Fountain* asserts that a work is an artwork not because it is *made*, but because it respects all exterior, or formal,

---

<sup>41</sup> Karl Scheffler, *Henry Van de Velde* (Leipzig: Inseln-Verlag, 1913), 45-46.

<sup>42</sup> Thierry De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism on Marcel Duchamp’s Passage from Painting to the Readymade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

criteria of any work of art: signature, dates, and exhibition. Duchamp was thereby concluding a long process of deconstruction of the prestige linked to the artist's *métier*.<sup>43</sup>

Traditional interpretations draw a link between “Mutt” and Mott Iron Works, an important American brand of bathroom appliances. *Fountain* is thus regarded as the death certificate of stylistic innovation condemned by the modernity and anonymity of industrial forms. The use of an American brand further encourages a reading of the urinal as ridiculing the European traditions. Another interpretation considers that “R. Mutt,” read aloud with a German accent, sounds like the German “Armut,” that is to say “poverty,” whereby *Fountain* would signify the economy of means of the readymade. While all this might be true, Duchamp might also have been addressing American contemporary culture and its hidden geopolitics. During the polemics that followed *Fountain*'s rejection from the exhibition, Duchamp asked Alfred Stieglitz to photograph the work, which was then titled “the artwork refused by the Independents, ‘Madonna of the Bathroom’.” The photograph and religious title integrated the artwork to both the history of Modernism, and the history of Western art. But this pun needs also to be replaced in the context of the First World War. In February 1<sup>st</sup>, President Wilson broke diplomatic relationships with Germany, which had declared “unrestricted submarine warfare.” When a German U-boat sunk the *Viligentia* on March 19, 1917, the United States declared war to Germany. In this context, a cultural return to order was expected. *Fountain*, we contend, was a response to this historical situation, as well as a comment on the rampant nationalism of the international modernist field, and its progressive academicization.

“R. Mutt” pronounced with a French accent (Duchamp's accent), immediately calls to mind the German phrase “Ehre und Mut” (Honor and Courage).<sup>44</sup> Duchamp thus inscribed on a urinal, a virile motto of Pan-Germanism, not to say racial imperialism. The artist turned the “war heroes,” who in 1914 perpetrated terrible crimes in Belgium into ludicrous pissing figures. *Fountain* was also an ironical comment on the

---

<sup>43</sup> See William Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* : Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917”, in *Dada/Surrealism* n° 16 (1987), 64-94; Clark S. Marlor, *The Society of Independent Artists, The Exhibition Record 1917-1944* (Park Ridge: Noyes Press, 1984); and Thierry De Duve, *Résonances du readymade Duchamp entre avant-garde et tradition* (Nîmes: J. Chambon, 1998), chap. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Duchamp spoke German, which he learnt as a second language, as a majority of French pupils. He spent several months in Germany where he had a correspondent. Consequently he could have known that “Ehre und Mut” had the same importance for the German elite as the formula “Blut und Boden” (“Blood and Land”). For more information on this phrase, see Otfried Ehrismann, *Ehre und Mut, Abenteuer und Minne: höfische Wortgeschichten aus dem Mittelalter* (München, Beck, 1995).

American modernists' neutrality, and most particularly against Stieglitz, who was favorable to the German cause, and his friend Marsden Hartley, who was fascinated by Prussian militarism.<sup>45</sup> After the death of his lover, a German *Uhlans* Officer, Hartley had made paintings that glorified the German cavalry and which Stieglitz had exhibited in New York in 1915. Duchamp asked Stieglitz to photograph *Fountain* in front of Hartley's *Warriors* (1913), which shows the Emperor on horseback leading his army from the top of a mountain. The cavaliers, wearing Prussian helmets, personified the ideals of *Ehre und Mut* and the belief in the superiority of the Germanic race. Stieglitz may not have understood what Duchamp meant, but the form of Hartley's mountain recalls, strangely, the shape of the upside-down urinal. Alternatively, if *Fountain* was returned to its position of urinal and Hartley's canvas turned upside down, what would happen? Duchamp would be pissing on the great German Emperor, as well as on the modern art Stieglitz promoted in New York. Here it is important to remember that Duchamp was not only French but also that his two brothers were fighting against the German army. He also had a personal score to settle with the Germans regarding their promotion of Parisian Cubism. After having been excluded from the Cubist group at the 1912 Salon des Indépendants, where his *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912) had been condemned as Futurist, Duchamp had gone to Munich. There, he had faced a similar, if not worse, narrow-mindedness and witnessed the market domination, via the German networks, of his competitors, in particular Robert Delaunay. His decision to withdraw from the Parisian art scene and to stop painting in 1913 was a direct consequence of his disgust, and the ready-made, its manifestation.<sup>46</sup>

Neither innocent nor cut from the geopolitical reality of the world that surrounded them, the successful artists often benefited from the support of individuals who understood the international art field and its geopolitical stakes, and could thus position their works in an international art scene that was not necessarily open to them. Consequently, the transnational activities and strategies of dealers, curators, and other middlemen deserve to be studied at the same level as those artists. The importance of figures such as

---

<sup>45</sup> See James Timothy Voorhies, ed. *Dear Stieglitz: Letters Between Marsden Hartley and Alfred Stieglitz, 1912-1915* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002). See also Patricia McDonnell, ed. "Marsden Hartley's Letters to Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky 1913-1914," *Archives of American Art Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 1/2 (1989), 35-44.

<sup>46</sup> *Marcel Duchamp in München 1912* (München: Schirmer/Mosel Verlag, 2012). See also Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, « Géopolitique des premiers ready-mades », *Revue de l'Art*, 2014, forthcoming.



Harry Kessler, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Alfred Stieglitz, Pierre Restany, or Leo Castelli is well-known, but not sufficiently studied in a geopolitical perspective. One little known figure is the Swiss museum director Johannes Gachnang, whose activities made the comeback of European artists in the early 1980s possible, at a time when artistic developments outside the American modernist canon were dismissed as provincial and retrograde. Among those “provincial” approaches were a group of painters from Berlin including Georg Baselitz and Markus Lüpertz, whose models were Parisian *Informel* artists such as Wols, Jean Dubuffet, Henri Michaux, and Antonin Artaud – i.e. an anticultural and *décalé* approach to art. These artists, who grew up during the war and witnessed the division of Germany, used art as the *Informels* had: as a way to negotiate not only between personal and historic events, but also navigate between their position in the Parisian market and their refusal of the system. Their works were consequently at odd with the then triumphant American pop and minimal art. Throughout the 1970s, museum director Gachnang elaborated a theory that would legitimize their work vis-à-vis the rest of contemporary art.<sup>47</sup> Using a terminology that appealed to the Germans and Swiss, he explained that the modernist tradition that claimed a progressive reduction of form was only one *dialect* of modern art. In his mind, Baselitz and Lüpertz were speaking a dialect that was as legitimate as that spoken by American minimalists Donald Judd or Carl Andre.<sup>48</sup> As the director of the Kunsthalle in Bern, Gachnang convinced many of his European colleagues that provincialism provided a conceptual framework under which the works of the German artists could be considered as pertinent to the discourse as mainstream American art.<sup>49</sup>

A geopolitical, circulatory approach also deconstructs the notions of progress and innovation that are at the core of the modernist narrative. When it comes to the beginning of abstraction, traditionally the main question is to decide who, between Wassily Kandinsky, František Kupka, and Robert Delaunay, invented abstraction. Yet, once we start studying the circulations of artworks, the question appears in a very different light. In 1911, Delaunay participated in the first exhibition of *Der Blaue Reiter* in Munich, and contributed to

---

<sup>47</sup> On this topic, see Wener’s comments in Eve Mercier, “Daniel Templon, Michael Werner, l’art et la manière,” *Le Journal des Arts*, October 1994, 46; Michael Werner, “Ich bin Kunsthändler und nicht Galerist,” *Art*, May 1999, 66-71.

<sup>48</sup> Michel Compton told Irving Sandler that during the selection of the Biennale de Paris in 1976, Gachnang had defended such theory of provincialism. Irving Sandler, “Irving Sandler Papers,” (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 2000.M.43), 31, 22.

<sup>49</sup> See for instance: Rudolf Herman Fuchs, *Markus Lüpertz Painting* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1997).

its *Almanach*. At the second exhibition of the Blaue Reiter in February 1912, he presented paintings with abstract titles. Delaunay began to paint completely abstract works in the summer of 1912. Yet he did not exhibit them in Paris, where he knew they would be poorly received. The Blaue Reiter, in contrast, welcomed such abstract experiments. In Paris, he exhibited figurative and political compositions, such as *La Ville de Paris* (Salon des Indépendants 1912) or *L'Équipe de Cardiff* (Salon des Indépendants 1913). In this painting, the Eiffel Tower, Louis Blériot's airplane, and the inscription "New York Paris" symbolized the prestige of French culture. For the 1914 Salon des Indépendants, Delaunay presented *Hommage à Blériot*, which commemorated the successes of the French aviator crossing the Channel in 1909. Only outside of France, particularly in Munich and Berlin, did Delaunay present his formal research and underline their philosophical and abstract dimensions. Only outside of France were those works discussed, understood, and bought. The Berliner gallerist and critic Herwarth Walden was particularly useful in that regard. His gallery and his review, *Der Sturm*, offered an ideal platform for the presentation of new aesthetics. Thus, when Delaunay exhibited at Walden's, he sent abstract artworks accompanied with theoretical texts he did not publish in Paris. In Germany, and more generally in the international avant-gardes field, Delaunay wanted to be recognized as equal or even superior to Kandinsky and Picasso, whereas in France, he was trying to appeal to the nationalist dispositions of the local press and collectors, hence the oscillation between his production and discourse on universalist abstraction and patriotic figuration.<sup>50</sup>

Finally the method we propose obliges us to reconsider the idea of the avant-gardes' autonomy. Working on the circulation of Surrealist artworks, for instance, questions the traditional narrative of Surrealism by highlighting its market and transnational support-system, something that has not been the object of any scholarly research. As early as 1925, Surrealists were introduced to a wealthy, cosmopolitan elite whose prominent figures (including Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles and the network of the Ballets Russes) began to support them. In 1926, Serge Diaghilev commissioned Max Ernst and Joan Miró for the decoration of his ballet *Romeo and Juliet*. By 1927, Surrealist paintings were regularly included in fashion magazines, from the catalogue of the Maison Dorine from Brussels in 1927 to that of the Maison Schiaparelli

---

<sup>50</sup> More generally, see Joyeux-Prunel, "*Nul n'est prophète en son pays?*".

in 1936. The mundane and cosmopolitan success of Surrealist painting transformed Surrealism from an isolated, literary group into an international, artistic movement. The support of dealers interested in merchandising Surrealism, and the attraction that the Parisian Surrealist label represented for foreign artists in quest of recognition in their home country accelerated this internationalization. After 1934 a second period of internationalization started and was dominated by the international success of Dalí. Realizing the power of the international fashion networks, the Surrealists, in particular André Breton, organized international tours—something which would have been dismissed as a proof of heteronomy before 1930s. Those tours were prepared according to the latest marketing strategies. Examining the social and transnational circulation within Surrealism illuminates the inextricability between a movement, its theories, and the adoption of new practices of consumption and distinction in wealthy, cosmopolitan networks.

## **Conclusion: Towards a Geopolitics of Modernism**

The geopolitical method is global in the sense that it offers all-encompassing approach (“globalisante” in French) to the history of art, in contrast to more compartmentalized approaches which offer one-dimensional views of the art world and, despite their alleged geographical extension, cannot take into account the phenomenon of artistic globalization. The geopolitical approach goes back and forth between different levels of analysis, between the local, the national, and the transnational, between the individual and the structural, between distant and close reading, etc. It is thus global in the sense of the Annales School legacy, especially in the ambitious project of a “total history” outlined by the French historian Fernand Braudel. We count, map, compare, and continuously shift the level of our analysis in order to escape local perspective and understand the process of internationalization, its agents, and the process of translation or even transformation that art underwent in different cultural contexts and traditions.

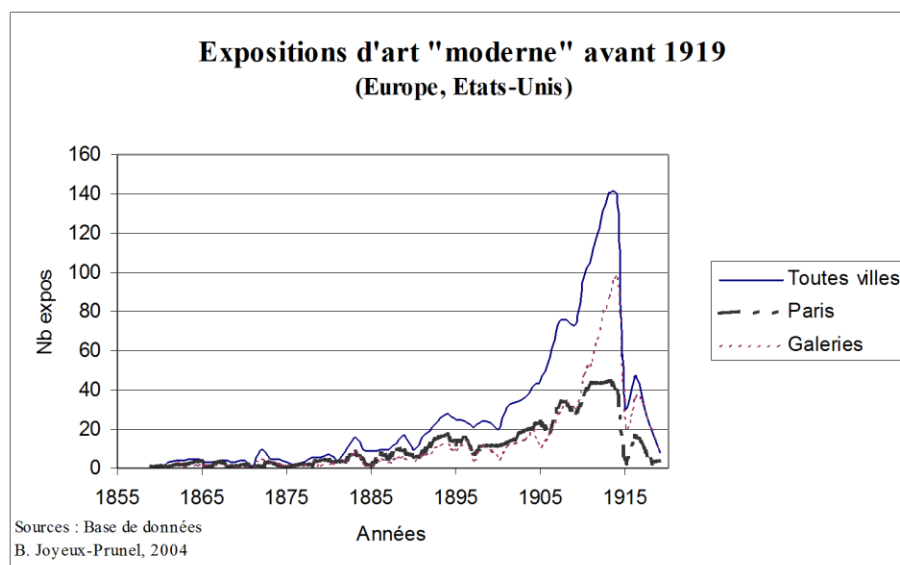
This approach might be specific to a given period and culture, namely the time in Western Europe when the Enlightenment and Romanticism reinvented the Judeo-Christian heritage to value the individual and its intrinsic worth; a time also when technological innovations permitted the development of faster means of transportation and communication which led to always greater international exchanges; but also at a time

when the concept of national identities crystallized, resulting in two world wars and countless local conflicts.

In other words, our method might be specific to the modern Western period and so may not become a model for World Studies of Art. But it offers a model to think of the dynamics at work in the modern art world and to write a different art history which takes into account every actor, place, and dimension of the art world. Such a story, we firmly believe, can lead to writing a global history of a globalized art world.

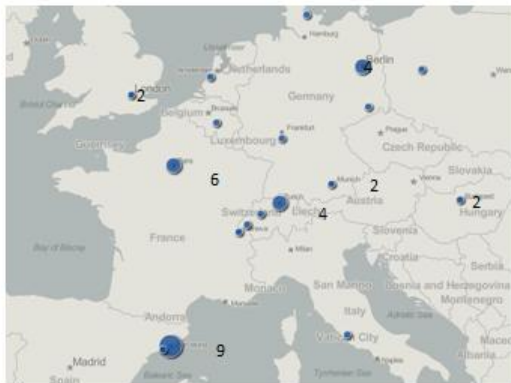
However, this project of a global, total history of modernism needs to be a collective project. That is why we created ARTL@S, a collective project that gives scholars the means to apply a geopolitical approach through distant reading of serial data and cartographic techniques, and to study circulations collectively. ARTL@S is the outcome of an ambition to open art history to a more multidisciplinary approach, because a truly global history of modernism needs to expand the field of its investigation to other disciplines. Finally, it is result of the desire to see art historians collaborate, share and exchange resources. Because global art history should not just be about a global object of study; it should also be about a global way of working.<sup>51</sup>

## Figures:



<sup>51</sup> For more information on the ARTL@S project see Catherine Dossin, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, and Sorin A. Matei, "Spatial (Digital) History: A Total History? The ARTL@S Project," *Visual Resources: Digital Art History Special Issue* (Spring 2013): 47-58. As well as the website of the project: [www.artlas.ens.fr](http://www.artlas.ens.fr)

### New Modernist magazines in Europe, 1914-1917



### New Modernist magazines in Europe, 1918-1920



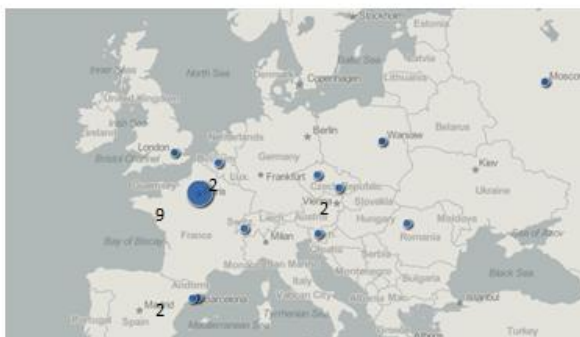
### New Modernist magazines in Europe, 1920-1923



### New Modernist magazines in Europe, 1924-1926



### New Modernist magazines in Europe, 1926-1929



## Exhibitions in Paris, 1945-1962

