

## COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSNATIONAL FIELDS OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

*Workshop, CESSP, March 11, 2025*

Vera Guseynova and Eunyoung Won

While transnational approaches of different fields of cultural production have been developed with increasing frequency over the last two decades, no comparison of these fields has yet been made. A recent workshop held at the Site Pouchet of the *Centre européen de sociologie et de science politique* (CESSP) in Paris on March 11 brought together specialists from diverse research areas and geographical spaces to discuss how to operate transnational approaches by addressing the theoretical and methodological questions and challenges encountered in existing and ongoing empirical investigations. Organized in a manner that reflects the CESSP's research axis "Production et diffusion des savoirs et biens culturels," this workshop consisted of four panels with each focusing on distinct mediums of expression, from visual arts and cinema to

literature and performing arts, and was followed by a final discussion.

Gisèle Sapiro began the workshop by highlighting the historical emergence of a transnational approach and juxtaposed this approach with comparativism among nation-states. Once the traditional way of transcending national borders, comparativism has been criticized due to its tendency towards methodological nationalism. Although national histories have neglected transnational exchanges and shared legacies, the national dimension cannot simply be abandoned, given that national fields developed along partly separate histories. Therefore, Gisèle Sapiro emphasized that a transnational approach must be combined with international comparison, considering the unequal power relations among national cultures and the circulation of goods, people, and models in each field. Another key point in Sapiro's introduction focused on the conditions of comparing fields of cultural production, which proved central to the workshop's debate. The workshop's first two panels, chaired by Antoine Vauchez, explored these issues through the lens of the visual arts and cinema.

Larissa Buchholz advanced key theoretical tools for analyzing the global contemporary art field, situating it within a set of relations that are invariably historically and geographically specific. She argued for shifting the focus from competitive relations between

national-level macro entities to the conditions that enable them, highlighting the key role played by proliferating transnational institutions in fostering global competition and contributing to the emergence of the transnational artistic field. Buchholz expanded upon the distinction between centrality at the level of artistic production and geographic centers and peripheries at the level of institutional mediation and concentration in the presentations that followed. In her study of the transnational exposure of “unofficial” Russian art during the Cold War, Vera Guseynova examined the heteronomous pole of artistic production resulting from external economic and political constraints, including the Soviet state-regulated patronage system, and the aesthetic impositions of the socialist realism canon. This research offered an illustration of how one might integrate historical and political transformations into the analysis of the progressive autonomization of a local artistic space. Anton Olive-Alvarez concluded the panel with his analysis on transnational dynamics in the careers of French street artists. Supported by numerous case studies, this research underscored artists’ subfield strategies, which are structured by access to symbolic and institutional positions between the national and the global art fields, at the different poles of this subfield: market-based, independent, commercial, and the autonomous pole.

The second panel focused on cinema and examined, in one respect, the issue of how to articulate the transnational field model with the study of the circulation of cultural goods and people, and in another respect, addressing the question of hierarchies and struggles within the field by combining a transnational approach to the field with other theoretical frameworks. Addressing the former, Julien Duval drew on his study on the statistical construction of a transnational film space and his exploratory work on the mobility of actors to investigate how this theoretical model of transnational space could account for observable phenomena, such as the circulation of professionals. In turn, Jérôme Pacouret demonstrated how both his framework combining field theory with the center-periphery model and Abbott’s theory of professions shed light on authorship battles and professional hierarchies in the transnational field, and compared American, French, and several peripheral film spaces. Also combining the articulation of the transnational field model with circulation studies, Eunyoung Won suggested that approaching international film festivals as a subfield of the transnational film field will help to understand the circulation of films occupying peripheral positions in the global market, such as South Korean cinema during the 2000s.

The afternoon panels chaired by Alireza Ghafouri focused on literature and the

performing arts. Gisèle Sapiro provided a point of departure by outlining the key elements that help to grasp the specificity of the transnational literary field, its structural logic, and how it functions. Following her analysis of isomorphic elements in the literary field within global cultural production, Sapiro focused on the agents of (inter)mediation and the global consecrating authorities that contribute to authors' transnational recognition. Concealing the social conditions of access to transnational recognition, these authorities tended to render invisible existing inequalities in the transnational literary field. However, since 1990, a progressive feminization and an ethnic, linguistic and geographic diversification can be observed in the recognition from these authorities. Álvaro Santana-Acuña then examined how the characteristics of the circulation of literature derived from its mode of expression and production, followed by his illustration of diverse kinds of transnational literary circulation through a case study of the exhibition of literary works, objects, and related artifacts in museums situated in different locations of the Latin America. Finally, in his presentation on circulations and adaptations within international linguistic areas Tristan Leperlier highlighted the importance of language and nationalization in the comprehension of a transnational literary field when compared to other cultural forms. He argued that such linguistic transnational literary

fields are structured by the opposition between national and international poles; however, within monolingual literary spaces, the relationships between local spaces are shaped by a tension between unification and independence.

The final panel tackled the question of how one might construct a transnational field in the performing arts, such as music and theater. Quentin Fondu investigated the cross-border circulation of performance models, with the internationalization of theatre as a primary example. He examined the role of transnational institutions, such as the International Theatre Institute (ITI), which was established as part of UNESCO's cultural policies in 1948. ITI played a pivotal role in broadening the global presence of theatre by promoting the exchange of artists and performances, most notably through figures like Bertolt Brecht. This movement, in turn, contributed to the transformation and standardization of national theatre practices, and particularly in France. Reflecting on the specificities of music as a medium, Myrtille Picaud examined the key issues and difficulties in constructing a transnational music field given the diversity of music genres, their differing forms of cultural legitimation, the heterogeneity of markets, the characteristics of music's circulation, and the degree of its nationalization.

During the final discussion, after exchanges among the participants and

feedback from the audience further directions for exploring the transnational approach were suggested. These can be summarized by the following topics: the comparison of the structure of these transnational fields in terms of their specific authorities and their distinct history; a comparison of fields that considers gender and ethnicity inclusivity; the interest of cultural authorities in the combination of artistic genres. This workshop is expected to continue in a new format, which will provide an opportunity for further exchange to broaden the topics discussed.