



Transatlantic conversation : 'Americanization', Modernization and Cultural Transfers

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Transatlantic Conversations: 'Americanization', Modernization, and Cultural Transfers

Returning to France, French exiles in the United States during the Second World War became the voluntary and sometimes involuntary peddlers of an America that they had known only unevenly.¹ Were they, as their critics would sometimes have it, an American Trojan Horse in post-war France? To what degree can we bring the experience of the return from exile to bear on the process of Americanization underway in the Europe of the Marshall Plan?

The micro-historical study of exile enables the displacement of notions like 'Americanization', denounced by many intellectuals, then as now, in stridently ideological terms. It was regularly condemned as the imposition of a model in the context of a relation of force favorable to the United States after the Second World War.

However, upon closer examination, nothing justifies this interpretation. An examination of 'cultural transfers', such as have been theorized by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner,² allows for a reconsideration of the role of exile³ in underlining three aspects. First, in what was exported to Europe after 1945,⁴ there was much that was not wholly American. The exiles had already alloyed 'made in USA' and 'made in Europe'. Second, the example of the Social Sciences, as well as that of political modernization, refutes the notion of a unilateral superimposition. A 'cultural transfer' was effected only if the reception found its uses, users, and mediators. The exiles were particularly well-suited to

¹ For further reference and extensive bibliography see Emmanuelle Loyer, *Paris à New York. Intellectuels et artistes français en exil (1940–1947)*, Paris 2005.

² See M. Espagne, *Les Transferts culturels franco-allemands*, Paris 1999.

³ See C. Collomp/M. Menendez (ed.), *Exilés et réfugiés politiques aux Etats-Unis, 1789–2000*, Paris 2003.

⁴ For transfer processes during the interwar period especially in the arts see among others S. Barron (ed.), *Exiles+Emigrés. The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, County Museum of Art, Los Angeles 1997; E. Panofsky, *Three decades of Art History in United States: impressions of a transplanted European*, in: *Meaning in the visual arts*, New York 1955; C. Eisler, *Kunstgeschichte, American style: a study in migration*, in: D. Fleming/B. Bailyn (ed.), *The Intellectual migration, Europe and America, 1930–1960*, Cambridge 1969.

become effective 'go-betweens' between France and American actors. Third, exile calls for an historical recontextualization of the Cold War. The itineraries of certain exiles – Boris Souvarine, Paul Vignaux, and Denis de Rougemont, among others – demonstrate the extent to which the American ideological offensive at the end of the 1940's entailed a remobilization of networks forged during wartime exile.⁵

Revisiting 'Americanization'

'Americanization' often entailed the re-exportation to post-war Europe of a culture mixed with European references that, in their first trans-Atlantic crossing, had not been formulated in national terms.⁶

Denationalizing the terms of analysis

The history of abstract expressionism, which conquered Europe in the 1950s, confirms these intuitions: presented as an American modernism, its inexorable rise was sometimes seen by the French as an aggression, 'made in USA'. In fact, it is futile to formulate the problem in strictly national terms if the national rivalry – between France and the United States – had produced an eminent artistic burst (Pollock against Picasso, the New York School against the Paris School).

For example, surrealism was and remained an internationalist movement, in its postulates and its representatives, as was the Paris School (Picasso, Juan Gris, etc.). 'Degenerate', modern culture born of European modernities became, by the actions of Hitler and his persecutions, a beacon of democratic culture. In moving to the United States, this culture changed continents as much as nations. In New York, the artists of Paris find another great cosmopolitan city more than an American city.⁷

Finally, Abstract Expressionism itself, even if it constructed itself ideologically as representing Americanness, was far from being a purely indigenous movement. Integrating the contributions of a rich exile culture, it is possible to establish on the same level in artistic modernity thanks to surrealism exiled in New York during the war years.

⁵ For networks during wartime see J. Mehlman, *Emigrés à New York. Les intellectuels français à Manhattan (1940–1944)*, Paris 2005 (engl.: Baltimore 2000).

⁶ See Ph. Roger, *L'ennemi américain. Généalogie de l'anti-américanisme français*, Paris 2002.

⁷ See M. Pleynet, *De la culture moderne*, in: *Paris-New York, 1908–1968*, Beau-bourg, 1977, rev. 1991.

The same thing can be demonstrated regarding cinema.⁸ Hollywood flooded the European market after 1945 with films by many great European exiles (Billy Wilder, Fritz Lang, Michael Curtiz, Otto Preminger, etc.). What was experienced as a yankee cultural landing by the world of French cinema was in reality more complex than merely the exportation of American values. Upon closer examination, old Europe was well represented: its patrimony, its values, its techniques had been welcomed, reworked, reformulated, and redeployed by the Hollywood system, before returning to post-war Europe as a melange typical of exiles and production *sui generis*.⁹

From the Imperialism of the Universal to the Transfer of Hegemony

For so many, if Americanization must be understood in a more general dynamic of Westernization and as a circulation, it no less remains that the relation of forces which framed these exchanges evolved after 1945. France and the United States, from then on very different nations in terms of power, nonetheless found themselves sharing the conviction, traditional for France and more recent for the United States, of exercising a cultural monopoly. The two universalist imperialisms, deployed by the two countries since their respective revolutions, were channeled in a privileged way into the cultural and artistic rivalry. Paris wanted to safeguard a universality attacked on all sides and Washington combined an artistic offensive from then on resting on a veritable cultural diplomacy.

In the post-war period, Americanization assembled different phenomena that it is important to keep separate: it was another name for the modernization of Western democratic societies; it was also the aggressive exportation of a model in the specific context of the Cold War.

Americanization / Modernization: the role of the exile

Exiles played an important role in launching a modernization process that, inspired by their American experience despite the boisterous anti-Americanism of the period, favored the rise of France in the 1950s and 1960s. If the launching in question is identified with a much condemned

⁸ See M. Ciment, *Les conquérants d'un nouveau monde. Essais sur le cinéma américain*, Paris 1981.

⁹ See P. Ory, *L'américanisation. Modernisme et culture de masse*, in: A. Compagnon/J. Seebacher, *L'Esprit de l'Europe*, vol. III, Paris 1993, p. 256.

'Americanization', it also corresponds to the second wave of the latter, which, after 1945, took on a specific coloration.

Highbrow/Lowbrow¹⁰

Indeed, in the 1930s, a first wave of Americanization had exported to Europe many references and models issued from the more dynamic fields of American popular culture (comic books, jazz, film, etc.).¹¹ Following the Second World War, the opposition between high culture and popular culture was blurred in the transatlantic exchange. Certainly, Europe, France, and especially Paris retained more than ever the function of cultural consecration. America continued to export the forms of its popular culture while France conferred on it an unsuspected cultural dignity, as with cinephilia for example.¹²

However, this new cultural economy did not break fundamentally with the responsibilities traditionally devolved to each continent. On the other hand, after 1945, a radically new situation began to emerge: the United States began to export a model of high culture (painting) and expert culture (social science). The rise of the social sciences and the new organization of the world of research was one of the forms of post-war intellectual modernization. Academic exiles, returning from the Ecole Libre des Hautes Etudes (in New York) and American campuses played a strategic role.

Transfer of expert knowledge: cross-fertilization in the social sciences

Already in 1870, defeat caused French intellectuals to call their culture into question, leading to a haughty reaffirmation of French literary excellence, by writers, and to a reformist discourse on the part of academics, which resulted in the adoption of the practices of the victorious country.¹³ The same dynamic was reproduced in 1945 with the Ameri-

¹⁰ Cf. L. W. Levine: *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, Cambridge Mass. 1988.

¹¹ See E. Furlough: *Selling the American Way in interwar France*, in: *Journal of Social History* 26 (1993), 491-520.

¹² See A. de Baecque, *La cinéphilie. Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture*, Paris 2003.

¹³ See H. Lebovics: *True France: The wars over cultural identity in France, 1900-1945*, Ithaca/N.Y. 1992.

cans as the victors.¹⁴ Academic exiles were, indeed, the privileged mediators of the American model of social science research, from both an intellectual and an institutional perspective.

Exile had mobilized their organizational capacities. At the ELHE, different research institutes and centers were created *ex nihilo* by those personalities who discovered in themselves, on this occasion, a founding spirit. Their intellectual survival was at stake: it was only due to a certain visibility in the networks of American research that the Rockefeller Foundation approved a continuation of their funding. This experience comprised part of the scientific resources that they carried back to and redeveloped in France, just as was the practice of interdisciplinarity in the social sciences on the intellectual level. The American model valued a close articulation between Anthropology, Sociology, Law, and Economics and pushed research in the direction of a unified social scientific knowledge.

The return to France, therefore, enabled this intellectual and institutional transfer in the world of the social sciences from the moment that the exiles acquired a certain organizational competence that could be easily applied in France. Indeed, some of them had acquired strategic professional positions. For example, Pierre Auger became Director of Advanced Teaching at the National Education Ministry from 1945 to 1948. A physician of international renown excluded from his chair in 1940, with close links to the Ecole Libre (Hadamard, Perrin), as well as having taught at the University of Chicago from 1941 to 1944, upon return to Paris Auger succeeded in implementing, in constant dialogue with the Rockefeller Foundation, a research strategy aimed to organize the human sciences around a new structure: the 6th Section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes founded in 1948. He was also at the bottom of a long-term training framework for the hard and the human sciences, introducing upper-level degrees on the American model. The friendship networks forged between exiles and the officers of the Rockefeller Foundation made for an easier financing of institutes created after the war, often headed by former fellows of the foundation, exiles or not.

The creation of the 6th Section of the EPHE was inscribed in this institutional wave, financed in part by American foundations – notably Rockefeller, and then, at the end of the 1950, the Ford Foundation.¹⁵ It rested on a new administrative integration of research and documenta-

¹⁴ See also T. Judt: *Past imperfect: French intellectuals 1944–1956*, Berkeley 1993.

¹⁵ See G. Gemelli, *The Ford Foundation and Europe, 1950's–1970's. Cross-fertilization of Learning in Social Science and Management*, Brussels 1991.

tion like that with which the centers of the ELHE had experimented in New York. At the same time emerged a profile, later familiar but then still exotic, of the expert as a research manager, as a specialist in fund-raising, an entrepreneur orienting the work of his center toward a constant concern for teamwork, the networking of researchers and a new culture of results. This new American intellectual idiosyncrasy was to be found in part with Braudel who, although he had not known exile, made the typical study trip to the United States in October-December 1955 and discovered 'area studies', which he attempted, with others, to implant in French research.¹⁶

Bearer of institutional innovation, the exiles were also carriers of a properly intellectual innovation. Indeed, just as they had been mediators when going into exile, they were likewise upon return. Here, also, the process of cultural mediation is understood in the double sense. When they came back to France, these exiles tried to graft their American experience onto a French tradition. In the work of the sociologist George Gurvitch, for example. In the work of Levi-Strauss as well, the cross-fertilization operated through the interdisciplinary work of the ELHE. The precise understanding of the milieu and production of American anthropology from which he admitted to having benefited a great deal. In an admiring portrait that Levi-Strauss later drew of Franz Boas, the titan of American anthropology who undertook a diverse and rich field of research, he also marked a distinction between the mass of material and documents accumulated by American researchers and the analytical operation and intellectual structure that he retained in New York, considering himself "a man of the office rather than of the field."¹⁷

The 6th Section of the EPHE directed by Lucien Febvre, flanked by his two lieutenants Charles Morazé and Fernand Braudel, was frequently seen as having 'sold out' to the Americans. The aggressive and denunciatory rhetoric reflected as much the professional rivalry as the tension of an ideologically polarized academic world. Nevertheless, Febvre and Braudel knew to poise on the narrow path between America and the USSR. As proof of their autonomy, they did not hesitate to appoint communist scholars such as Jean Chesneaux for example.¹⁸

¹⁶ See G. Gemelli, Fernand Braudel (1990), Paris 1995; D. Lindenberg, in: J.-M. Goulemot/D. Lindenberg/P. Ory/Ch. Prochasson, *Dernières questions aux intellectuels*, Paris 1990, esp. p. 169-171.

¹⁷ C. Lévi-Strauss/D. Eribon, *De près et de loin*, Paris, p. 66.

¹⁸ See B. Mazon, *Aux origines de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales: Le rôle du mécénat américain (1920-1960)*, Paris 1988, and the preface of Pierre

American influence was also felt in a second type of more properly political modernization. Exiles came back to France bearing a different democratic culture informed by their American experience.

Political modernization and democratic culture

In Postwar France, exiles felt themselves out of place in the anti-liberal political and intellectual atmosphere.¹⁹ The notion of democracy, however much the Resistance tried to further it, was dominated by the imperative of revolution. Socialists and Communists reactivated the myth of revolution.²⁰ For his part, de Gaulle, influenced by the English experience and also by his own convictions in constitutional matters, wanted to strengthen the executive power which, according to him, was lacking in the Third Republic.²¹ There were different perspectives on democratization between the Resistance in France and the Resistance in exile. Interpreting the defeat as a failure or even a treason of the elites, the Resistance in France considered itself as a new elite with a legitimate mandate to wield power and affect revolutionary change in the country. Abroad exiles saw themselves as the bearers of national legitimacy which was under attack inside France and not as a new elite. On the political level, exiles had experienced a model of democracy without the Republic – in the French sense. American democracy had been relatively consensual and stable compared to the troubled history of the French Republic, even though it was also founded on a revolutionary tradition, competing with the French one. However American history had not produced a messianic left. The experience of another revolutionary universal profoundly modified the political culture of the exiles.

In the trajectories of someone like Boris Souvarine or Denis de Rougemont, it is clear the extent to which the Cold war American policy of containment rested on a remobilization of the networks forged during WW II between American actors (government, agencies, foundations...) and European exiles.

Bourdieu. See also the letters of Jean Gottmann to Joseph H. Willits, Director of Social Sciences of the Rockefeller Fondation, Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, R.G 1.1, Series 500, Box 48.

¹⁹ See W. I. Hitchcock, *France Restored. Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe 1944–1954*, Chapel Hill, London 1998; J.-P. Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944–1958*, Cambridge 1987.

²⁰ See J. Verdès-Leroux: *Au service du parti. Le parti communiste, les intellectuels et la culture (1944–1956)*, Paris 1983.

²¹ See A. Shennan, *De Gaulle*, London 1993.

Americanization and the Cold War: a remobilization of the networks of wartime exiles

Anti-fascism and Anti-Communism

From an ideological perspective the Cold War moved over several years from a policy of containment to a veritable crusade 'for liberty', at the beginning of the 1950s, marked by a much more combative character. In many respects, the ideological war that became the Cold War was inscribed in a continuity of combat from the Second World War. Anti-communism followed rapidly on the heels of militant anti-fascism. Indeed, this development was visible even while the world war continued. Certain aid associations – like the Emergency Rescue Committee (ERC) – moved seamlessly from aiding antifascist refugees to providing assistance to anti-communist refugees. In a rhetoric of human rights, the United States placed itself in a continuity of combat against European tyranny (of the 19th century), fascism, and, after 1945, communism.²²

The continuation of an alliance: Euro-Atlantic 'networking' from the OSS to the CIA

The alliance between culture and the American government in Washington's new propaganda and intelligence agencies (OWI and OSS) was one of the legacies of WW II which was immediately redeployed in the Cold War.²³ The State Department mobilized significant resources to export its ideas, to convince European societies to fight Communism using the pen, the brush, the film.

The European Congress for Cultural Freedom created in June 1950 in Berlin was one of the principal elements of this policy.²⁴ This meeting assembled European anti-communist intellectuals both social-democrat and conservative alike. The story of this Congress is associated with the story of exile. The fundamental political axis of the Congress, the left liberal anti-communism, could rally many exiles: Jules Romains, Denis de Rougemont, Jacques Maritain played a role in the Congress because, in spite of their political differences, they were united around a resis-

²² See I. M. Wall, *L'influence américaine sur la politique française, 1945–1954*, Paris 1989.

²³ See F. S. Saunders: *Who paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, London 1999.

²⁴ See P. Grémion, *Intelligence de l'anticommunisme, Le Congrès pour la liberté de la culture à Paris, 1950–1975*, Paris 1995.

tance to the soviet influence. Boris Souvarine was a major intellectual reference for the Congress and contributed to *Preuves*. He was a creature of this Euro-American milieu which was forged during his exile in the United States. *Le Contrat social*, the journal founded by Souvarine in 1957 in Paris constituted a significant intellectual mediation in so far as its liberal anti-communism was founded on a unique knowledge in Paris at this time of the Anglo-American scholarship on the Soviet system.

The Congress had the intention to function as an intellectual network. The Americans found the exiles to be European figures whom they knew and who knew them. Some of them had even been working in the propaganda and intelligence services during the war. The functioning of the Congress demanded a reactivation of the links built during the war between certain exiled intellectuals and the American agencies.

The survival of the networks from the Second World War in the Cold war was based on the continuity of a certain milieu in spite of the institutional break between the OSS and CIA. When OSS personnel dispersed after the closure of the agency, some went back to their universities, some to their law firms, others were reemployed by the CIA but they all maintained links which enabled the preservation of a particular milieu augmented by the arrival of the first exiles from the communist countries. Thus, the OSS was the matrix and the breeding ground of the CIA. This is why the political-intellectual networks built around the OSS could easily function again around the CIA and the Congress. The European interlocutors with whom they wanted to engage were, for both agencies, the non-communist social-democratic left. The OSS and the CIA wanted to integrate American trade-unions into the ideological action.

If one can speak of the exportation of a model, this must be understood in a longer history of transatlantic relations. This model often presented as the essence of the American supremacy was in fact a mélange of European references brought to the United States (by the exiles) and reexported to Europe after the war.

The concept of "cross-fertilization" enables to grasp interactive processes in an asymmetrical situation, which was the case after 1945. For the exiles, Americanization appeared as a transatlantic conversation pursued during the war and the post-War dominated by a triumphant but not omnipotent America.

For example, the movement for the internationalization of scientific culture came from the USA – and was exported through the experience of exiles – but only in so far as certain sectors of French science were

interested in this model. From this perspective, the career of Fernand Braudel and the international success of the Annales School was a product of this transatlantic conversation through its institutions and its figures.

In a France becoming a second-rank power, politically divided, the prestige of the Annales School was that much more important. The example of Braudel but also that of Levi-Strauss demonstrate that within a transatlantic relation of inequality of power, it was possible to seize the intellectual initiative.