

the ‘convoluted’ (p. 3) nature of these transitions during which, at almost any moment, the political will of particular actors has the potential to accelerate or derail the process entirely.

Fragile Memory, Shifting Impunity is therefore an important, engaging and original contribution to the interdisciplinary literature on memory and transitional justice in Latin America. Levey’s work demonstrates the critical value of embarking upon comparative studies, and her reading of commemorative projects through shifting contexts of justice and impunity is a creative approach. Perhaps most importantly, however, this book argues that post-conflict memory projects remain fragile and vulnerable. Human rights activists, therefore, must be willing to defend them, to continue struggling against impunity, and to adapt to shifting political and social challenges.

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Richard Cándida Smith, *Improvised Continent: Pan-Americanism and Cultural Exchange* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), pp. viii + 342, \$45.00; £37.00, hb

The promise and peril of Pan-Americanism can perhaps be captured together in Disney’s 1944 film *The Three Caballeros*. Donald Duck, representing the United States, travels through Latin American scenes, both animated and live-action, with José Carioca, the Brazilian parrot, and Mexican rooster Panchito Pistoles. ‘We’re happy amigos, no matter where he goes, the one, two, and three goes, we’re always together’, Panchito sings, expressing a Pan-American vision of wartime unity. Yet Donald offers little but bug-eyed lust after singers, dancers, and, at one point, an entire beachfront of women in Acapulco. There especially, Donald combines desire with incomprehension and indifference to the consequences of his actions. His friends are only partially successful in their efforts to restrain him. In trying to show a vision of continental unity, the film actually puts on full display the inequality of power inherent in the relationship between the United States and the rest of the countries of the Americas.

The Pan American Union, Argentine socialist Manuel Ugarte once wrote, was nothing more than gatherings of ‘mice chaired by a cat’ (p. 15). But if this story, however true, seems overly familiar, then Richard Cándida Smith’s *Improvised Continent* is frequently surprising. In the *Pan-Americanism and Cultural Exchange* of the subtitle, it is the latter that gets the focus. It is not a history of the institutions of Pan-Americanism: it is an exploration of what Pan-Americanism meant for the artists and writers who became part of the circulation of works in a space that was construed as ‘Pan-American’. The institutions are present, often in the background, operating, as Cándida Smith argues, as the ‘practical conditions shaping what any cultural worker can say or do ... Writing and art are meaningful when they can be scheduled into the practices that institutions foster to assure the continuity of their activities’ (p. 7). This perspective informs the book’s treatment of ‘cultural exchange’. What was sold? What was published? What structured the market for interest in Latin America in the United States, and vice versa?

In *Improvised Continent* Cándida Smith joins Greg Grandin (*Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (Metropolitan Books, 2006)) and other historians who have emphasised that Latin America served as

a kind of laboratory for the United States to work out institutional arrangements that would later be used elsewhere in the world. In some ways the Pan American Union became the blueprint for the exercise of global US power: rather than formal colonisation, the United States offered commercial relations on the US model, with diplomacy working to support private initiative, and cultural work to build a common imaginary. The Pan American Union's building was funded by Andrew Carnegie, who also appointed Elihu Root to head the Carnegie Endowment. Root probably did as much as anyone to build institutions through which the US federal government could exercise its particular form of imperial relations, and cultural relations were important to that project. Carnegie launched pilot cultural exchange programmes and helped make Spanish the most studied foreign language in the United States by 1925.

Yet exchange did not necessarily mean comprehension. What attracted the attention of editors and reviewers in the decades up to World War II were stories of fundamental civilisational difference: reaffirming ideas of US 'mechanical progress' compared with Latin America's 'virgin nature'. The early chapters of the book cover diverse figures, from Gabriela Mistral, who benefited from early translation, to painters like Diego Rivera and Candido Portinari, whose work excited audiences in the United States in the 1930s, to writers like William Carlos Williams and Waldo Frank, who wanted to rethink the United States in a transnational context in the first case, and who promoted an idea of Latin America as a source of spiritual redemption, in the latter.

The middle chapters of the book take up a major shift in direction for the Pan-American circulation of ideas and culture. In 1938 the US State Department created the Division of Cultural Relations; in 1940 the White House created the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, headed by Nelson Rockefeller. (It was this latter office that subsidised Disney's wartime work.) Despite tension between these two, the political needs of World War II required that US citizens think in terms of commonality between the United States and Latin American countries, not fundamental differences. The emblematic figure of this shift – and the central figure of the book – is Brazilian writer Érico Veríssimo. Veríssimo did a major tour of the United States in 1941, and while there met with the publisher Macmillan about possible translation of his works. Historian Lewis Hanke recommended against, arguing that his work wasn't 'Latin American' enough, in the sense of being distinguishable from work of writers from more developed countries. But Veríssimo's friends Thornton Wilder and John Dos Passos urged the company to reconsider, and Veríssimo became the best-read writer from Latin America in the United States for 20 years.

But new priorities in the Cold War created new tensions. In 1948 the Pan American Union became the Organization of American States. 'Cultural exchange' was displaced in favour of 'public information', whose primary goal was explaining the United States to other countries, to be achieved by policies of 'open exchange' and 'freedom of information' that provided advantages to already powerful US institutions. Political tensions split communities of writers along generally liberal and Communist lines. The anti-Communist Veríssimo was seen by many in Brazil as an agent of US imperialism. But he grew increasingly disillusioned with the United States. He was openly critical of the military government in Brazil after 1964 and US support for it. In 1967 he published a novel critical of the Vietnam War. His last novel, 1971's *Incidente em Antares*, spoke against torture and dictatorship and became the biggest-selling book in Brazil's history but was never translated into

English. The US market had moved on to the writers of the 'boom', supported by the Rockefeller-funded Center for Inter-American Relations, which for its own Cold War reasons championed the autonomy of writing and works of imaginative invention. The politically liberal Veríssimo had, ironically, published a book that was too socially committed. Pan-Americanism, as an ideal, was, to all intents and purposes, dead.

Improvised Continent is, above all else, a deft history of publishing. In following the changing reception and enthusiasm for works of the visual arts and writing, Cándida Smith has written a keen and sensitive history of how institutions created shifts in public consciousness and perception. There is not much archival research here (Veríssimo's papers are one exception, and part of what makes his story richly rendered.) But what the book does do extraordinarily well is to follow both the commercial logic of major publishing concerns in the United States and Latin America, and the way that their work intersected with the legitimization strategies of government institutions. In so doing, *Improvised Continent* becomes a valuable intellectual history of the Americas that reveals a deeper foundation of inter-American exchange than is usually assumed. This material history of art and ideas is executed in exemplary fashion, never reductive, making *Improvised Continent* a book that should be read not just by scholars of Pan-Americanism or inter-American relations, but by anyone interested in how institutions shape the diffusion of culture across national lines.

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Morgan James Luker, *The Tango Machine: Musical Culture in the Age of Expediency* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. xiv + 218, £30.00; £21.00, pb

This may be yet another book about Argentina's most popular topic, but it is far from a trite review of tango from the usual historical, aesthetic or national identity perspective. Morgan James Luker's *The Tango Machine: Musical Culture in the Age of Expediency* examines how contemporary tango music is used and, arguably, abused as a resource for cultural, social and economic development in Buenos Aires. Luker, building on George Yúdice's *The Expediency of Culture* (Duke University Press, 2003), and through diverse ethnographic examples, addresses the value and meaning of musical culture in the era of commercial convenience. He provides not only rich theoretical analysis, but also robust ethnographic accounts and deep social, economic and musical analysis in his five superbly written chapters.

Luker opens with a critique of ethnomusicology for not paying enough attention to state cultural policies, cultural industries and the non-profit arts sector (pp. 15–16), which he terms the 'managerial regimes', influential mediators of cultural practice. He also highlights how Argentina's neoliberal turn and the 2001 economic crisis reshaped tango values and meanings. Tango cultural production is now in constant dialogue with managerial regimes that have a fundamental impact on how musical culture is nurtured, expressed and animated (pp. 31–2). This discussion is a key contribution to ethnomusicological study, particularly Latin American music research, which is beginning to consider, albeit disjointedly, topics like nation-branding and the link between citizenship and cultural policies.

This book exemplifies scholarly clarity with its articulate, balanced and in-depth analysis of contemporary artistic production as a mode of politics, linking music,