

Cold Atlantic. Cultural War, Dissident Artistic Practices, Networks and Contact Zones at the Time of the Iron Curtain

Veranstalter: Museo Reina Sofía; Saint Louis University; Universitat de Barcelona; Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

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The conference took place at the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid. Its organisers, a team of researchers under the aegis of the Barcelona-based research project *Modernidade(s) Descentralizada(s)* [MoDe(s)] and the Centro de Estudios of the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid, wanted to question canonical narratives of artistic modernity by especially focussing on transatlantic artistic networks. Contributing to the current trend in art history of de-centralising the art historic accounts, Cold Atlantic's aim was to renegotiate the dominant influence the Paris-New York axis still has on the interpretation of artistic incarnations after WWII. Analysing a wide range of artistic cultural and aesthetic exchanges produced between the USA, Europe, Africa and Latin America during the Cold War this event aimed to elicit the plurality of the responses to the ideological positioning this war held on a cultural level thereby breaking open the often simplified, bipolar narratives regarding that period.

The conference was structured by four panels that stressed different facets of the sociocultural relations and artistic practices. Its first panel 'Networks, nodes and contact zones for a non-aligned geopolitical order' started with the keynote 'The Bandung's Legacies at Large' by WALTER MIGNOLO (Duke University). This paper about the 1955 conference of Bandung set the argumentative starting point of the conference's time frame and would mark further discussions during that day. Mignolo's argument developed from a de-colonial perspective and put a focus on racial, religious and gender questions. By doing so he highlighted the initial character of Bandung as a de-colonial project, separating the conference from its later politi-

cisation as starting point of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

His keynote was followed by ARMIN MEDOSCH's (University of Sigüenza, Belgrade) paper 'Cold Art Collectives' that focused on the artistic ventures that participated in the New Tendencies movement between the early 1960s and the mid 1970s. Emphasizing the transnational character Medosch showed how New Tendencies and some of their critical ideas regarding modernism would irradiate via alternative, non-official networks, within the Eastern as well as the Western block of the Cold war, defying therewith a simplistic East-West Cold War dichotomy. His intervention was followed by JENNIFER JOSTEN's (University of Pittsburgh) paper 'Non-Aligned Modernisms in Mexico: Mathias Goeritz and the 1968 Olympics'. She talked about Goeritz' project of the Ruta de la Amistad for the year-long 'Cultural Olympiad' that accompanied the Olympic Games. Josten presented this venture that had grouped the works of nineteen artists from all over the world as a non-aligned 'contact zone' outside the official NAM with the ambitious aim to overcome the Cold War dichotomy. The following paper 'Red Atlantic: Artistic Networks of the Cold War Margins. Relations Between Eastern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s' by KATARZYNA CYTLAK (UNSAM/CONICET, Buenos Aires) dealt with an East-South exchange. Her presentation emphasized the attraction of Communist ideologies and showed their reinterpretation by Latin American artists highlighting that they had connected with their peers in networks, which had been developed with the expansion of mail art and conceptual art. The paper 'Solidarity in Arts and Culture. Some Cases From the Non Aligned Movement' by BOJANA PIŠKUR (Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana), emphasised on the Solidarity aspect within cultural and artists' networks in the East-South axis. Taking examples from Chile and former Yugoslavia she showed the importance of art and culture in the cultural politics, exemplifying her argument with transnational solidarity projects, such as for example the Museo de la Solidaridad or The Week of Latin America.

ATREYEE GUPTA (Minneapolis Institute of Art) stressed in her response, which closed the morning panel that the non-aligned perspective offers also a conceptual framework to analyse sociocultural phenomena, which do not necessarily belong to the NAM. This became visible, when looking at some of the examples provided by the talks of for example Cytlak (referencing various exhibition projects) or Medosch, Josten and Piškur focussing on transnational artists' networks within or outside the official non-aligned framework. The parallels between the three latter papers highlighted that these still not well-researched alternative transnational networks developed amongst friends and colleagues. Together with the concept of Solidarity these issues regarding alternative channels of transfer would reappear throughout the conference. This showed, amongst others, that despite an 'official' third way a lot of more contact zones existed that have so far been underestimated in their importance.

The afternoon panel 'Competing Hegemonies' put an emphasis on the opposition of the two political blocks during the Cold War and the negotiation processes between, for example, different notions of modernities, terms and conditions of various local contexts and a wide range of often contradictory aesthetic discourses and artistic practices, regarding the official narrative(s). The panel opened with a keynote by SARAH WILSON (Courtauld Institute of Art, London). In her lecture 'Picasso in China: Writing the Opera, 2014' she presented an opera project 'Picasso in China' that she had proposed for the First Asian Biennial/Fifth Guangzhou Triennial in December 2015. Wilson explained in this very entertaining contribution her idea of a fictional Cold War Story based on historical facts that meant to bridge the gap between western and eastern view on (art-)history, reuniting, for example, Picasso and Zhan Daqian on the stage curtain (the intention was to have Bi Jianxun's work 'Hand in Hand' from 2012 represented on the stage curtain as a parody of Picasso's stage curtain for *Le Train bleu* from 1924). It seems that especially the libretto's burlesque character had led, in the end, not just to censorship but also to a halt of the entire project, which still remains in search

of a composer.

VARDAN AZATYAN (Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts) discussed in the first paper of the afternoon panel 'Art History, the Age of the Cold War: the Case of H. W. Janson' the historiographical approach of Horst Woldemar Janson, against the backdrop of the rising totalitarianism of the 1930s and the subsequent Cold War. The paper showed how Janson considered the example of the painting ape Betsy, which brought the Baltimore Zoo during the 1950s in the headlines, as an allegory on the debate regarding the aesthetic dilemma of mimesis at that time of the Cold War. Azatyan connected this idea to the defence of Abstract Expressionism, visible in Janson's book *History of Art* that did become a classic in the US and argued that this work could also be interpreted as a means of ideological fight in America's Cold War against the Soviet Union. The following paper 'Andean Abstraction as Displayed at the OAS' by MICHELE GRETT (George Mason University, Fairfax) analysed the exhibition practice of José Gómez Sicre, who had worked as Chief of the Visual Arts Unit of the Organisation of American States and been responsible for pushing the importance of distinct artists that had been working in aesthetics fostered by US' Cold War politics. Greet's paper showed how Gómez Sicre's actions clearly helped favouring abstract tendencies during the heating-up of the Cold War and how the non-presence of socially engaged, narrative and 'folk' art practices in Sicre's personal collection of abstract painting from the Andes (of the 1950s and 1960s) were obscuring the artists' relationship with Indigenism and Social Realism that had predominated before WWII. FABIOLA MARTÍNEZ RODRÍGUEZ (Saint Louis University, Madrid) focused in her paper 'The Inter-American Biennials in Mexico 1958-1960' on the struggle of the Mexican government to reconcile political contradictions via its cultural politics in the 1950s and 1960. The two Inter-American Biennials in Mexico (1958 and 1960) were, as Martínez Rodríguez argued, an attempt of the 'revolutionary' government to save the face, as it was confronted with the dilemma that Mexico's path of industrialization and

modernization, following the US model, could not keep up with the political leadership's (presumably) socialist agenda of the revolution. The last paper of this table by IRENE HERNER (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) dealt with the Mexican painter 'Siqueiros and the Cold War'. Herner showed that Siqueiros' realism was clearly conceived to 'serve a cause' and in opposition to the 'art pour l'art' conception, favoured by American Abstract Expressionism. A screening of the first part of her documentary series 'Who was David Alfaro Siqueiros', during the conference complemented her contribution.

JULIA BAILEY (Tate Modern, London) stressed in her paper - that served as response to the panel 'Competing Hegemonies' - the complexity of Abstract Expressionism as a cultural tool in the Cold War. Highlighting the negotiation processes she talked about the role of cultural diplomacy, taking the example of the Art Exhibition of the United States in Soviet Union in 1959. All in all the panel gave a good insight in the wide array of artistic practices and aesthetic discourses, often contradictory, stemming from the negotiations between different notions of modernity, and circumstances and conditions in diverse local contexts. The whole session centered on a debate regarding the exchanges and confrontations that were entrenched in the struggle for cultural hegemony, under circumstances demarcated by the emergence of new geopolitical powers in the growing global context of the Cold War.

The third conference-panel 'Resistance, Dissidence and Utopia(s)' in the morning of the second day of Cold Atlantic was opened with a keynote by ANDREA GIUNTA (University of Buenos Aires / University of Texas, Austin). This panel grouped contributions that exemplified resistance and dissidence to the imperialist and neo-colonial politics of the Cold War in the hegemonic and also the subaltern centers. Giunta showed in her keynote 'Decolonising the Canon: Artistic Feminism in the Archives of Latin America, 1960s-1980s' how feminist artists raised their voices in the countries of the Southern Cone. Her paper made aware about the patriarchal structures within the socio-political

Cold War framework and showed how female artists, often suppressed in the canonical accounts, raised their voices against such structural oppression. Drawing on various telling examples, like for example the performance 'Me gritaron negra' (1970) by Victoria Eugenia Santa Cruz, Giunta's paper demonstrated how these artists developed powerful languages that fostered decisively the decolonial perspectives throughout Latin-America.

The first paper 'Transindividuality and Singularities. Western Artists Against the Free World' by JACOPO GALIMBERTI (University of Manchester) showed the Western European artists' groups Equipo 57, Spur, Geflecht and N and their positioning regarding the Cold War opposition of individuality versus collectivisation. Galimberti stressed that their communitarian working practices should be seen as an innovative idea of collective agency that was addressing the shortcomings of Western individualism and its ideologically coined notion of 'freedom'. MARÍA C. GAZTAMBIDE (ICAA, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) reflected in her paper 'Dead Matter for and Enlivened Practice: The Dissident Scatology of Venezuela's El Techo de la Ballena' about the exhibition 'Homenaje a la necrofilia'. She argued that the multidisciplinary corpus of this 1962 exhibition by the Venezuelan collective El Techo de la Ballena was not just an attempt to counteract the at that time hegemonic tendencies; reflecting in its artistic language the Freudian sexual and death drives it was also a protest against the violent cooptation of the actual conditions of contemporary Venezuelans, many of whom had been left behind in the country's zeal to modernize following the American model. This presentation was followed by GEORGE F. FLAHERTY's (University of Texas, Austin) paper 'Chicano Camera. Anti-colonial Aesthetics'. His paper focused on the anti-colonial and dissident practices in East Los Angeles, dealing with the video artist Harry Gamboa Jr. and the activist magazine La Raza. It showed how the traditional Chicano imagery was revised with the aim to link capitalism and (neo-) coloniality.

In his response to the contributions of the panel JAIME VINDEL (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) insisted on the neces-

sity to give agency to the large variety of cases and strategies of resistance and connect them with the urgency of the present. This summed very well up the conception of the panel that wanted to highlight the role of artistic production and cultural agents, operating in both, hegemonic and subaltern centres, and to show their potential for imagining alternative forms of society. Thus these strategies or some aspects of them might serve as historic examples for resistance against the normative culture(s) of the Cold War but also as general examples to actively transform society.

The afternoon panel 'Global order: Cold War and beyond' put an emphasis on the entanglements and dialogues between artistic and cultural spheres during the Cold war and their persistence in the contemporary world. It opened with the keynote 'Global Contemporary Art and Legacies of the Cold War: South Korea's 'Real DMZ Project', 2011-2013' by JONATHAN HARRIS (Birmingham City University). Harris' talk showed how contemporary art practices in Asia are (in part) still being informed by questions to (and arising from) twentieth century colonialism and Cold War superpower conflicts. The artworks created for the international art project in the Demilitarized Border Zone between South and North Korea had a reflected on distinct constellation(s) and questions, like for example connotations of 'freedom', which had emerged within the two camps of the Cold-War or outside (as non-aligned).

Harris keynote was followed by ERINA DUGAN's (Texas State University) paper 'Group Material's „Art for the Future“. Visualizing Transnational Solidarity at the End of the Cold War'. She focused her talk on Group Material's 1982 exhibition '¡Luchar! An Exhibition for the People of Central America', stressing that this show was a political statement of solidarity against the Reagan administration's interventionist policies in Central America. The following contribution 'Cold War Camera: Feeling Suspicious' by ANDREA NOBLE (University of Durham) and THY PHU (Western University, Ontario) introduced the public to their on-going, collaborative research-project, that proposes an enlargement of the critical tools in order to deal

better with the subtle nuances of Cold War visual culture, focussing, amongst others, on the appropriation of visual material that could foster empathy across the borders of the two blocks. KRISTIAN HANBERG (University of Copenhagen) was comparing in his following talk 'Multiple modernism: New Globalized Framings of the Postwar Era in the Contemporary Exhibitions After Year Zero and The World Goes Pop' two recent exhibition that were dealing with art practices during the Cold War period. He discussed on the basis of these art shows different approaches regarding curatorial practices that deal with and interpret the artistic legacies of the Cold War years. TERRY SMITH (University of Pittsburgh) talked in the following contribution 'Cold War Recurrence, Contemporary Currents' about his theory regarding contemporary art practices (and beyond). He explained the shifts and developments highlighting the possibility to overcome too rigid and still persistent Cold War configurations.

PAULA BARREIRO LOPEZ (Universitat de Barcelona) remarked in her answer to the fourth panel how the Cold War continues to shape our present global perception especially regarding current disciplinary experiences and structures. Taking Guy Debord as a starting point, who had looked behind the monumental façade of the bipolar division of the world - Capitalism versus Communism - and outlined a global and interdependent system of total spectacle, Barreiro Lopez stressed the importance of re-reading and interpreting the artistic production of that period in order to enrich our understanding of the contemporary reality(/ies). The papers of the panel could only give a hint about the complex geopolitical entanglements, and the repercussions in the political, social and cultural spheres, but nevertheless exemplified well the impact of transatlantic configurations (and beyond) on the current globalizing order(s), and put a focus on the transition from modernity to contemporaneity.

The four panels tackling the transatlantic artistic relations from different angles have shed light on numerous nuances regarding artistic practices or artistic and institutional relations during the Cold War, which are in general not considered sufficiently. A

round-table (with Wilson, Giunta, Harris and Mignolo as participants) chaired by SERGE GUILBAUT (University of British Columbia, Vancouver) closed the Cold Atlantic conference. The following discussion highlighted that the simplifying Cold War dichotomy of two blocks and an alternative way of non-aligned players has certainly to be extended. Artists and institutions followed agendas that were informed by very different constellations of socio-political interests, which were enriched by a strong sentiment of solidarity that could take very different shapes within the artistic practices. Rather than understanding the latter as emerging from centres and spreading to the peripheries it became clear that ideas, concepts and strategies were developed within networks that transgressed the (pre-)determined and constructed Cold War geography. These networks, based on friendship, solidarity, professional relations as well as interest could merge in hubs that would visibly express in platforms, such as exhibitions, meetings or institutions. Shifting the rather steady geographical focus towards a more dynamic angle seeing artists and their practices within the ever-shifting framework of networks promises, as Cold Atlantic has shown, more differentiated analyses that take in account the socio-political realities of the Cold War period; such shift might also help preventing to fall into the tempting trap to creating counter-canons, which again would inhibit with a hierarchizing structure the manifold nuances of discourses, positions and practices of the artistic practices that are at the basis of today's globalised perception of existence.

The positive outcome of the conference that showed the potential of the Cold War angle regarding the study of 20th century art practices was complemented by the international doctoral seminar that took place right after the conference's ending (8-9 September). Thanks to a substantial financial support of the Terra Foundation for American Art, the members of the research project MoDe(s), on whose initiative both events were based, could give a group of (17) young scholars and PhD students the chance to present their research at the Universitat de Barcelona; furthermore they were able to discuss it in the light

of the outcomes of the prior Cold Atlantic conference with various international scholars (namely Johnathan Harris, Serge Guilbaut, Mark Nash, Paula Barreiro López, Fabiola Martínez, Olga Fernández Lopez, Juan Albarán and María Íñigo Clavo) who had also come from Madrid to Barcelona. The two-day-long seminar closed with SERGE GUILBAUT's (British Columbia University) keynote lecture 'Out of Fashion: Foreign Women Artists in Paris in the 1950s'. This talk, presented by ANNA MARIA GUASCH (Universitat Barcelona) in the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona [MACBA] gave insight into Guilbaut's current exhibition project for the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid and provided again interesting examples regarding the transatlantic axis the Cold Atlantic venture wanted to stress.

A huge asset after the end of the conference and the doctoral seminar is the (Spanish/English) web-page of MoDe(s) as well as the one of the Reina Sofia Museum, where information about the conference, including some recordings of the conferences given in Barcelona and Madrid, are available.

Conference overview:

Carlos Prieto del Campo (Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid) / Paula Barreiro López (Universitat de Barcelona) / Fabiola Martínez Rodríguez (Saint Louis University, Madrid): Welcome and presentation

Panel 1: Networks, nodes and contact zones for a non-aligned geopolitical order

Chair: Jesús Carrillo (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

Keynote

Walter Mignolo (Duke University): The Bandung's Legacies at Large.

Armin Medosch (University of Sigmund, Belgrade): Cold Art Collectives.

Jennifer Josten (University of Pittsburgh): Non-Aligned Modernisms in Mexico: Mathias Goeritz and the 1968 Olympics.

Katarzyna Cytlak (UNSAM/CONICET, Buenos Aires): Red Atlantic: Artistic Networks of the Cold War Margins. Relations Between Eastern Europe and Latin America

in the 1970s and 1980s.

Bojana Piškur (Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana): Solidarity in Arts and Culture. Some Cases From the Non Aligned Movement.

Atreyee Gupta (Minneapolis Institute of Art): Response to papers of panel 1

Panel 2: Competing Hegemonies

Chair: Mark Nash (Nanyang Technological University / Birkbeck University of London)

Keynote

Sarah Wilson (Courtauld Institute of Art, London): Picasso in China: Writing the Opera, 2014.

Vardan Azatyan (Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts): Art History, the Ape of the Cold War: the Case of H. W. Janson.

Michele Greet (George Mason University, Fairfax): Andean Abstraction as Displayed at the OAS.

Fabiola Martínez Rodríguez (Saint Louis University, Madrid): The Inter-American Biennials in Mexico 1958-1960.

Irene Herner (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México): Siqueiros and the Cold War.

Julia Bailey (Tate Modern, London): Response to papers of panel 2.

Panel 3: Resistance, dissidence and utopias(s)

Chair: Olga Fernández López (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

Keynote

Andrea Giunta (Universidad de Buenos Aires and University of Texas at Austin): Descolonización del canon: archivos del feminismo artístico en América latina, 1960s-1980s.

Jacopo Galimberti (University of Manchester): Transindividuality and Singularities. Western Artists Against the Free World.

María C. Gaztambide (ICAA, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston): Dead Matter for and Enlivened Practice: The Dissident Scatology of Venezuela's El Techo de la Ballena.

George F. Flaherty (University of Texas, Austin): Chicano Camera. Anti-colonial Aesthetics.

Jaime Vindel (Universidad Complutense de Madrid): Response to papers of panel 3.

Panel 4: 'Global order: Cold War and beyond'

Chair: Chema González (Museo Reina Sofía)

Keynote

Jonathan Harris (Birmingham City University): Global Contemporary Art and Legacies of the Cold War: South Korea's 'Real DMZ Project', 2011-2013'.

Erina Dugan (Texas State University): Group Material's „Art for the Future“. Visualizing Transnational Solidarity at the End of the Cold War.

Andrea Noble (University of Durham) and Thy Phu (Western University, Ontario): Cold War Camera: Feeling Suspicious.

Kristian Handberg (University of Copenhagen): Multiple modernism: New Globalized Framings of the Postwar Era in the Contemporary Exhibitions After Year Zero and The World Goes Pop.

Terry Smith (University of Pittsburgh), Cold War Recurrence, Contemporary Events

Paula Barreiro López (Universitat de Barcelona): Response to the papers of panel 4.

Round table

Chair: Serge Guilbaut (University of British Columbia, Vancouver)

Participants: Sarah Wilson (Courtauld Institute of Art, London), Andrea Giunta (Universidad de Buenos Aires and University of Texas at Austin), Jonathan Harris (Birmingham City University), Walter Mignolo (Duke University).

Final remarks

Tagungsbericht *Cold Atlantic. Cultural War, Dissident Artistic Practices, Networks and Contact Zones at the Time of the Iron Curtain*. 05.09.2016–07.09.2016, Madrid, in: H-Soz-Kult 04.04.2017.