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Biennial Places: Reciprocity, Expertise, and the Expansion of the Global Contemporary Art Industry

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### Publication Date

2019

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

*Biennial Places: Reciprocity, Expertise,  
and the Expansion of the Global Contemporary Art Industry*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History, Theory, and Criticism

by

Paloma Checa-Gismero

Committee in charge:

Professor Grant Kester, Co-Chair  
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Professor Norman W. Bryson  
Professor David Serlin  
Professor Rachel Weiss

2019



This dissertation of Paloma Checa-Gismero is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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University of California San Diego

2019

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not exist were it not for the support of a number of people and organizations. Librarians and archivists opened doors to worlds of wonder and care. Sol Henaro and Clara Bolívar welcomed me into the collections of Arkheia MUAC (Ciudad de México). Paul Domela, Marieke van Hal, and Max Bouwhuis facilitated open access to the Manifesta archive (Amsterdam). Wendy Bos and Adelheid Smit shared valuable material about their research on Manifesta 1 (Rotterdam). The team at the UC San Diego Special Collections Library helped me go through the many boxes of the inSITE Archive. Zulema Zaldívar's generosity eased my data collection work at the Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam's archives (La Habana). Gerardo Mosquera made his personal library available to me, as well as his memories and his home. Michael Kritchman and Carmen Cuenca offered their time in several occasions, as I inquired about manifold details of their work in inSITE. Lillian Llanes shared with me valuable memories of the early days of the Bienal de La Habana. I thank artists Louis Hock, Tracy MacKenna, Joseph Grigely, Jeanne van Heeswijk, Kamiel Verschuren, Henrik Plenge Jakobsen, Terry Smith, Jim Bliesner, Lesbia Vent Dubois; curators Nelson Herrera Ysla, Manuel Noceda, Jorge Fernández Torres, Margarita Sánchez, Lucía Sanromán, Osvaldo Sánchez, and many more who have generously shared a fraction of their world with me in the last years.

Since 2013 I have enjoyed much needed financial support from the Visual Arts department at UC San Diego; the TINKER grant program at the Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies at UC San Diego; the International Institute at UC San Diego; UC-Cuba, the University of California network of scholarship on Cuba; the Friends of the International House award committee at UC San Diego; and UCHRI, the University of California Humanities Research Institute.

My dissertation committee has been generous and supportive. I was lucky to be surrounded by trusted experts with whom to explore my insights, intuitions, and findings. My mentors, Mariana Botey Wardwell and Grant Kester, offered continuous support, wrote millions of letters, discussed methodologies and theories, and provided professional advice throughout the fieldwork and writing stages. Norman W. Bryson has been an inspiring source of clarity; his sense of poetry has brought needed emotional and intellectual accents to writing a dissertation. David Serlin helped me understand my own relationship to history, both through the formations of the archive and the essay. Luis Alvarez provoked in me, early in the process, questions about my responsibility as a historian and an academic that I hope I answer with this study. Rachel Weiss, through her writing, her feedback in academic conferences, and her most detailed reading and commenting of this dissertation, has helped me situate my work in decades-long conversations about the social role of art institutions. In addition to all the above, I thank my grad school friends – Noni Brynjolson, Alex Kershaw, Katrin Pesch, and Tim Ridlen – for years of quality discussions, edits, and dancing. I thank Matilde Córdoba Azcárrate and Tania Islas Weinstein for their support of my project in its early stages. Gracias a Ana y Charli por diecinueve años de sólido cariño y apoyo.

Gracias Mamá, Papá, Edu y Andrus por vuestro amor y apoyo a pesar de la distancia – y por haber aprendido a apreciar mis idealismos. Finally, I thank Christo, who has cuddled my brain, heart, and stomach in the most caring ways since October 2013. The following million pages would not be possible without his unconditional belief in my project and dreams. I thank Christo for his faithful companionship surfing the obstacles that migration, institutional hierarchies, and bilingualism often erect in the path to happiness.

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- 2016 *Yo veo / tú significas* (Bilbao: Consonni, 2016). Author: Lucy R. Lippard; original title: *I See / You Mean* (Los Angeles: Chrysalis, 1975).  
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## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

*Biennial Places: Reciprocity, Expertise,  
and the Expansion of the Global Contemporary Art Industry*

by

Paloma Checa-Gismero

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Theory, and Criticism

University of California San Diego, 2019

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What institutional forms sustain aesthetic colonization today? How do they contribute to Euro-American cultural hegemony? What social groups benefit from this phenomenon? This dissertation evaluates how three biennial exhibitions of contemporary art helped expand the Euro-American art complex to the U.S./Mexico borderlands, Cuba, and Eastern Europe in the 1990s. It analyses the discourses of international solidarity and forms of local recognition behind la Bienal de La Habana, InSITE, and Manifesta, during the forge of supra-national polities in their regions. This study argues that new forms of cosmopolitan curatorial expertise developed art organizations that often acted as institutional outposts of the Euro-American avant-garde and colonized aesthetic regimes hitherto autonomous from its legacy. In my dissertation I show how, although the globalization of the contemporary art industry was sustained in situated forms of social reciprocity in Havana, San Diego/Tijuana, and Rotterdam, the industry ultimately failed to amplify for global audiences the aesthetic traditions upheld at the local level.

## INTRODUCTION

How has the avant-garde, through history, become unwillingly complicit in the reproduction of social disparities formed in the basis of race, nationality, and social class? In what capacity have art institutions and experts participated in this division, even when operating under the belief that they were contributing to the common good? This dissertation departs from these concerns to study three biennials of contemporary art that sought to advance trans-national cultural collaboration in the very first years of the post-Cold War period. This study shows how internationally-oriented local elites in San Diego, Tijuana, Havana, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam became involved in these exhibitions as a way to access international networks. In this operation, forms of art endemic to these sites were shadowed by art trends imported from the Euro-American art complex, changing the aspect of these regions and their sociocultural fabric until today.

The three art biennials that this study considers – inSITE (1994-2005), la Bienal de La Habana (since 1984), and Manifesta (since 1996)– were pioneers of what has come to be known as the “biennial boom”. By 1984, when the first Bienal de La Habana opened in Cuba, only three other art exhibitions claimed the same international aspirations. These were the Venice Biennial (Italy, since 1895), the Sao Paulo Biennial (Brazil, since 1951), and documenta (Germany, since 1955). Sixteen years after, in 2000, the estimated number of art biennials rose to 150. Today, around 250 biennial exhibitions of contemporary art mark a planet-wide contemporary art complex where objects, ideas, and experts circulate informing a community of their own. It was in Havana, San Diego, Tijuana, and Rotterdam that, among other early places,

the curatorial and organizational practices that today are industry standards were first put in place. Sometimes improvised, sometimes imported from other institutions (such as the museum or the squat house), these at first local forms of selecting, organizing, producing, and displaying contemporary art were slowly altered to produce common international curatorial standards.

This dissertation provides a close look at those early moments. It aims to represent with fairness the ambitions, intentions, and forms of knowledge of the actors involved in these enterprises. For this, I have relied on extensive archival research in these institutions' funds, and I have carried out interviews with many agents involved in their inception. In addition, I hope to render with clarity how tensions between local cultural scenes and aspirations to access international spaces translated into the aesthetic field, changing the ways in which art production and its exhibition happens in these regions. Artworks are documents of historical cultural clashes that, when accurately situated in broader processes of cultural change, can shed light on the historical configuration of forces that shape the lived experiences of a group.

In the following pages I take a detailed look at the institutional formations, forms of curatorial expertise, and artworks that best trace these transitions between aesthetic and cultural regimes. In addition, I provide what I hope are clear expositions of the political programs driving social and political change in their regions. Of special interest to me are the historical victories of regional elites who saw in these three art exhibitions tools or mirrors to their desires for participation in international alliances. Around the U.S./Mexico borderlands, the North American Free Trade Agreement brought promises of capital accumulation to Tijuana and San Diego leaders in the manufacturing, tourism, and real state industries. In Cuba, revolutionary aspirations of anti-imperial resistance led the state to foster military, economic, medical, and cultural collaborations with other nations members of the Non-Aligned Bloc. Last, as the Berlin Wall fell, Western European leaders rubbed their hands in anticipation of a common market that

opened Eastwards. These three moments were moved by the belief that capital, culture, and social formations can pacify historical conflicts. In this context, art biennials had the potential to consolidate mass support for the political and economic elites behind their organization.

The inherent differences between the forms of political organization, social fabrics, and cultural practices of these regions show the multiple variations that cosmopolitan programs take. Most importantly, they show that culture, following Stuart Hall's understanding, is always a place of struggle where the powerful and the subaltern engage in an ongoing battle to secure control over the meanings, values, and beliefs that jell our life together.

\*

As I finalize this dissertation, the questions that it addresses are of utmost urgency. Thirteen miles south of my desk, where I write, is the international border between the United States and Mexico. Since November 2018, an estimated 2450 troops have been deployed along the line due to the unilateral decision of the sitting U.S. President, who claims that Central American and Mexican asylum seekers are bringing crime to the United States.<sup>1</sup> Of appalling shock to many of us, his openly racist and xenophobic electoral campaign awoke similar sentiments within the U.S. electorate: a right-wing populism, increasingly anti-cosmopolitan and belligerent in the domestic and international sphere, has actively sought to undo timid advances in human, social, and cultural rights in the U.S. in the last decades, while erasing environmental

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<sup>1</sup> The White House announced on January 30, 2019, that that figure would soon rise to around 4300 active duty military "Several thousand' additional troops to deploy at Southern Border", *Huffpost*, January 30, 2019. Last accessed on 01/31/2019 [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/troop-deployment-border\\_us\\_5c5164c8e4b0d9f9be6aac95](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/troop-deployment-border_us_5c5164c8e4b0d9f9be6aac95) As I edit these pages to finalize this draft on February 20, 2019, the sitting U.S. President has declared a national emergency to secure funds allocated to other causes to build a physical wall between both nations. Although this move is being contested in courts by five states (including California), it points to an increasing reliance in authoritarian attitudes by Heads of State in the United States and abroad.

policies and approving fiscal measures that broaden the distance between the rich and a growing pool of poor Americans. Current military deployment in the Southern border and the concomitant demand of U\$5.7 billion to build a physical wall between the U.S. and Mexico are futile performances of nationalistic sovereign power. Key for this study is the fact that these two overcompensating gestures symbolize the retreat of 1990s dreams of trade-driven conciliation between the U.S. and Mexico that framed the development of bi-national arts festival inSITE.

The rise of racialized patriarchal nationalism and the disregard for the benefits of interconnected cultures is very present, too, in the European Union. Italy and Hungary have now openly anti-immigrant and anti-European governments. In my country of origin, Spain, a declaredly neo-fascist party has achieved representation in regional elections by, partly, promising to pursue a Christian-led expulsion of Muslims and immigrants from the peninsula, emulating the fatal enterprise culminated in 1492. Current U.K. Prime Minister keeps failing, once and again, to close an agreement with the European Union that seals the nation's departure from the supranational treaty. In the meantime, anti-refugee sentiments are also on the rise in the continent, as millions of people flee the Syrian civil war and military conflicts in Africa, hoping to rebuild their lives in peace. Recently, a group of European intellectuals published a manifesto that portrays a Europe taken over by antisemitism, xenophobia, and the "disdain for intelligence and culture"; an isolated Europe lost to the perils of its worst nationalistic pasts.<sup>2</sup> The signers of this declaration warn that it may already be too late to fight to keep Europe's humanistic tradition alive. Who would have dare telling the enthusiastic backers

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<sup>2</sup> "Fight for Europe -or the wreckers will destroy it", *The Guardian*, January 25, 2019. Manifesto signed by Libération/Bernard-Henri Lévy. Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, Elfriede Jelinek and Orhan Pamuk. Other signatories include Vassilis Alexakis (Athens), Svetlana Alexievich (Minsk), Anne Applebaum (Warsaw), Jens Christian Grøndahl (Copenhagen), David Grossman (Jerusalem), Ágnes Heller (Budapest), Ismaïl Kadaré (Tirana), György Konrád (Debrecen), António Lobo Antunes (Lisbon), Claudio Magris (Trieste), Ian McEwan (London), Adam Michnik (Warsaw), Herta Müller (Berlin), Ludmila Oulitskaïa (Moscow), Rob Riemen (Amsterdam), Fernando Savater (San Sebastián), Roberto Saviano (Naples), Eugenio Scalfari (Rome), Simon Schara (London), Peter Schneider (Berlin), Abdulah Sidran (Sarajevo), Leïla Slimani (Paris), Colm Tóibín (Dublin), Mario Vargas Llosa (Madrid), Adam Zagajewski (Cracow). Last accessed on 31/01/2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/25/fight-europe-wreckers-patriots-nationalist>

of a culture-driven European unification in 1993 that their well doted actions would only pacify the region for a quarter of a century?

During a 2017 fieldwork stay in Havana, an internationally acclaimed local artist took me to visit his new project: a 19<sup>th</sup> Century palace, in ruins, in the process of becoming the city's new hot art center. As we toured the dark rooms and navigated the still floor-less structure, guided by the lamp of a guardian, he predicted that the venue would have a rotating roster of invited international curators and artists in residence. According to him, most capital to acquire the property came from his gallery in Spain. His condition of Cuban citizen eased the real state transaction. Contrary to other Havana cultural institutions described in this study, the new art center would not symbolize Cuba's state-sponsored third-worldist international solidarity mission. Support for those ideals has waned considerably since the early 1990s as the nation has experienced permanent economic crisis. This new art center will in turn be an example of other international flows, those by which financial resources from the north travel to acquire ownership and exploitation rights of the global south's built and natural patrimony. In the operation, Southern-born intermediaries, tuned to Northern values of legitimacy and success, take a profit; in his case: financial gains, social reputation, and power in the Cuban art scene.

My interest in these questions, as they appear in the globalized art world, rose from my own training and consequent professionalization as an artist in early 2000s Europe. During my early career stages I came to understand the classed nature of artistic practice as it takes shape in the centers of the global contemporary art world. Early on, too, aesthetic uniformity in these spaces puzzled me, as I struggled to make sense of the normative incongruencies between discourse and practice. Working as an artist, a curator, and the manager of a small artist-run organization, I came to see institutional practice as intimately implicated in broader social processes – but also as a space of rich creative possibilities. Later on, my work as an art critic



led me to pay attention to the ideologies guiding the missions of art institutions. I hope that the following dissertation provides some answers to these concerns.

This lengthy document has four chapters. Chapter 1 provides a theory framework for the three analytical chapters that follow. It traces a general history of the art biennial form, with its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century universal exposition. It presents the art biennial form as an institutionality directly implicated in the production of a new art historical category – ‘global contemporary art’ – that monumentalizes the historical victories of ruling elites. It describes it as an outpost of Euro-American colonialism, and explains the different forms of value production that are inherent to it. Last, this first chapter introduces a model of curatorial labor based in the production of narratives of newness and historicity around art objects.

Chapter 2 is a study of the early iterations of the Bienal de La Habana between 1984 and 1992. It situates this exhibition within decades-long efforts to consolidate Cuba’s leadership in Third World resistance to Euro-American domination, and as an institutional response to heated debates about the possibility of an autonomous yet socially conscious artistic avant-garde. This second chapter evaluates the forms of curatorial labor entailed in the exhibition, and stops to look in detail at the ways in which la Bienal de La Habana sought to overcome classic distinctions between high and popular art as a way of contesting the Euro-American avant-garde canon.

Chapter 3 takes inSITE in its 1994 and 1997 editions as object of analysis, and situates it in a long history of state interventionism in the US/Mexico borderlands. In this chapter I describe the anxieties to access international spaces of representation felt by Tijuana and San Diego elites at the moment and how, in their perceptions, inSITE constituted a good opportunity to change the image of the region to their benefit. Chapter 3 pays a close look at the encounters

between different avant-garde traditions in the exhibition, and how these clashes mirrored, as well, significant transformations in Mexican society and politics of the time.

Chapter 4 evaluates the first iteration of Manifesta in Rotterdam in 1996. This chapter looks at the alignments between policy driving European cultural integration, plans to reimagine Rotterdam as a cultural tourism destination, and the interests of Amsterdam cultural elites to champion the restructuring of the contemporary art scene in the continent. Here I show how efforts to promote identity integration through culture generated clashes between different European regions that re-awoke old regional antagonisms and prejudices. In this chapter I pay special attention to the responses by members of Rotterdam's art community to the exhibition, as they were not included in the exhibition's selection. These responses, born from the desire to provide a more accurate representation of their city to foreign invited artists and audiences, were later incorporated into the main program, altering narratives of locality for art biennials to come.

## CHAPTER 1. OVERCOMING THE NATION? ART BIENNIALS, COLONIALITY, AND THE PRODUCTION OF 'GLOBAL CONTEMPORARY ART'.

### Section 1. The contemporary art biennial.

Art biennials are large exhibitions of contemporary art that happen today in over 200 cities around the globe. Most of them occur every two years, although some follow a five year cycle (documenta, Kassel) or a three year cycle (Bienal de La Habana). These events are characterized by their universalist aspirations, their affinity with local and international elites, and their power to influence formal and thematic trends in contemporary art. They follow curatorial narratives, and participate in the social production of 'global contemporary art' as an analytic category. During the 'biennial boom' (1990s-2000s) post-colonial and post-Soviet nations joined the Euro-American international art complex by hosting art biennials and developing local art scenes with global aspirations.

The institutional form of the art biennial has been subject to debate since the Biennial boom's early moments. Some curators and scholars have placed these exhibitions under the sphere of influence of the New Institutionalism movement, which pushed for a less object-centric role of art institutions, instead favoring engagements with its surrounding social fabric, and highlighting its potential for knowledge production. This democratically oriented framework led many curators to see themselves in charge of reimagining the world.<sup>3</sup> Others see the art biennial form as an unfolding of the museum logic that, however, promises further independence from the forces active in the upholding of the latter. In this line, curator Okwui Enwezor remarks on the similarities between art biennials and museums, since they both have

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<sup>3</sup> According to curator Charles Esche in relation to his work at Rooseum Malmö in the early 2000s. See Lucie Kolb, Gabriel Flückiger, "New Institutionalism revisited", in *OnCurating* 21, 2013.

ideological roots and can shape cultural identity. Yet unlike museums, who through their permanent building, staff and budget can convey “civic pride and a sense of belonging to the great tradition of civilized cultures”,<sup>4</sup> biennials are fluid institutionalities better suited for the processes of globalization. Defending the art biennial against accusations of spectacle, Enwezor defends its disruptive potential: “The gap between the spectacle and the carnivalesque is the space, I believe, where certain exhibition practices, as resistance models against the deep depersonalization and acculturation of global capitalism, recapture a new logic for the dissemination and reception of contemporary visual culture today”.<sup>5</sup>

While seemingly closer to the supposed autonomy of museums than to the market driven interest of galleries, art biennials are, however, intimately involved with the international art market (seems like today, art fairs such as FRIEZE capture more industry attention than biennials). Further, they feed a sense of rivalry between host cities that often results in the rendering of these sites as tourism destinations. In art biennials, artworks and discursive events join in the production of narrative justifications for these events’ exceptionality.

In addition to the key precedents of the 19<sup>th</sup> century international exposition, the Venice Biennale, and the Carnegie International today’s art biennial owes its form and mission to documenta, an exhibition of avant-garde art first celebrated in Kassel, West Germany, in 1955. With fluctuating political positions since, documenta’s program has remained a good reference of the Euro-American art world’s ideological stands through time. As Charles Esche points out, while in documenta 2 (1972) curator Harald Szeemann’s hopes to include in its curatorial selection art from the Soviet bloc and Communist China were halted by government officials, during the 1990s documenta failed to acknowledge the growing interest in the international art

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<sup>4</sup> Okwui Enwezor, “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form”, in *Manifesta journal*, 2, Winter 2003/Spring 2004. p. 18

<sup>5</sup> Okwui Enwezor, “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form”, in *Manifesta journal*, 2, Winter 2003/Spring 2004. p. 31

world about art from the Global South. Not until documenta 11 (2002), curated by Okwui Enwezor, did the exhibition reflected a decolonial program.<sup>6</sup>

### **Art biennials' roots in the international exposition.**

The art biennial form keeps alive certain aspects of the international exposition, a form of universal exhibition product of European 19<sup>th</sup> Century nationalism and imperial expansion. In these events, material culture and spectacular aesthetics serviced the amplification of narratives of historical leadership upheld by national elites. Their frequency drew a map of international technological leadership among competing nations. It forged as well an implicit sense of rivalry between cities to host the latest developments and, by extension, to claim higher degrees of symbolic capital in their race for leadership.<sup>7</sup> These events were productions orchestrated by local elites that featured cosmopolitan programs advertising the belief that progress – understood as the combination of resource extraction, industrialization, and world wide trade – would supersede historical conflicts and ultimately lead to world peace. For architecture historian Bruno Giberti, these first French industry fairs prefigured the main characteristics of later universal exhibitions: “the development of elaborate systems of classification and

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<sup>6</sup> Despite Enwezor's effort, documenta remains an exhibition highly skewed towards the Euro-American modernist tradition. See Charles Esche, “Making Art Global: a Good Place or a Bad Place?” in Rachel Weiss (ed.), *Making Art Global (Part1). The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> In 1851, rivalry between Paris and London regarded the content and the format of the exhibition. French visitors to the Crystal Palace claimed that international exhibitions had in fact been a French idea, and pointed to two antecedents: Jacques-Louis David's plan to host public festivals as propaganda for the 1789 Revolution and Robespierre's 1794 Fête de l'Être Suprême (Festival of the Supreme Being), which he planned to continue as festivals honoring (and hopefully stimulating) the stagnant French industrial sector (for which he received approval by the National Convention yet never happened due to the ascent to power of Napoleon Bonaparte). Most French critics of the period were appalled at what they believed was England's stealing of their original idea to attract international visitors to their capital. Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1989) p. 24

concomitant systems of juries and awards, the publication of lengthy reports and catalogs, and the attempted imposition of bureaucratic forms of control".<sup>8</sup>

According to Caroline A. Jones today's art biennials share the presumption of universality of 19<sup>th</sup> Century international expositions.<sup>9</sup> They aspire to provide an all-encompassing picture of the state of art production. This universal aspiration is, like I show in the next three chapters, filtered by organizers' local and international interests and by the resources available on a local scale. Another important continuity between world fairs and art biennials is their referentiality to their local settings. Their spectacular displays of innovative and educating material culture have the effect of rendering these sites as stages for the unfolding of teleological progress. Thus, Paris, London, San Diego, Rotterdam, and many others, appear, for the space of some months, to be the unquestionable spaces where innovation – as technology first, as art in what concerns us here – marries locality.

The frequency of international exhibitions and the rivalry between their host cities remains a key aspect of today's global art biennials. Current estimates calculate an approximate amount of 200 biennials of art happen regularly around the planet. In the *Biennial Reader* (2010), a 500 page long compendium of literature about biennials including both academic and industry accounts of the form, sixteen out of twenty-eight chapters deal explicitly with the genealogy and originality of the biennial form in its historical and present formulations.<sup>10</sup> Where was the first international art biennial? Was it in Venice (1895), organized by prominent Venetian citizens in celebration of the silver wedding anniversary of King Umberto I and Marguerite de Savoy? Or was in Pittsburgh (1895), ideated by industrialist Andrew Carnegie following his philanthropic wish to educate locals and compete with Chicago for international attention? The

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<sup>8</sup> Giberti, Bruno. *Designing the Centennial* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002) p. 3

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Jones, "Biennial Culture: A Longer History", in Filipovic, van Hal, Ovstebo (eds.) *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010)

<sup>10</sup> Elena Filipovic, van Hal, Ovstebo (eds.) *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010)

Venice Biennale was an amplified version of the European *salons* (Paris, Munich),<sup>11</sup> and although it initially sought to represent European modernity by showcasing the most innovative art of the time, in practice it showed only salon art until it finally accepted abstraction in the 1948 edition.<sup>12</sup> In addition to its educational function, the Carnegie International also pursued acquisitions for the magnate's collection. Closer to today's biennial curatorial practices, the Carnegie International was assembled by a specialist after extensive travels and research.<sup>13</sup> Later, the Sao Paulo Biennial (1951) followed, organized by industrialist Francisco Matarazzo, with close ties to U.S. geopolitical interests in the region. Documenta (Kassel, West Germany, 1955) was next, hoping to re-signify Germany's position as a liberal European power after the WWII debacle. The list is long.

As a result, both exhibition forms have provoked changes in urban infrastructure. This often translates in the construction of temporary and permanent built infrastructure, or in the remodeling of specific urban areas surrounding the exhibition's emplacement. Examples of the first were the building of London's Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, a temporary architecture, and the construction of the arts pavilion for the Paris 1855 Exposition on Avenue Montaigne, a permanent building. Of the latter are the improvement of urban areas in Rotterdam (Witte de Withstraase) and Havana before the celebration of Manifesta and la Bienal de La Habana. In the late 1990s, the main exhibition of the Bienal de La Habana moved from the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes to the military complex of Morro-Cabaña, at the entrance of Havana Bay. The 17<sup>th</sup> Century defense fortress was reconditioned for this purpose thanks to the high-level political connections of Bienal de La Habana Director Lillian Llanes. Others, like the 2005

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<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale. From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1968)

<sup>12</sup> The only exception was futurist Italian art during the years of Mussolini. Rafal Niemojewski, "Venice or Havana: a Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial" in Filipovic, van Hal, Ovstebo (eds.) *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010)

<sup>13</sup> Rafal Niemojewski, "Venice or Havana: a Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial" in Filipovic, van Hal, Ovstebo (eds.) *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010)

Istanbul Biennial, sought to integrate the art object with autochthonous architecture causing an experience of urban wandering for biennial visitors.<sup>14</sup>

Further, both exhibition forms are tightly connected with local tourism developments. As I explore in my article “Global Contemporary Art Tourism Enaging with Cuban Authenticity Through the Bienal de La Habana”, art biennials often facilitate encounters between foreign audiences and local residents that are mediated by the interests of organizers. In 2015 Cuba, the curation of socially engaged and site specific art into the Bienal directed international art audiences into private homes, schools, and neighborhood gatherings, producing an illusion of access to everyday life in socialism that obviated the important distribution of power in the tourist-local relation. These forms of mediated access to otherness have their roots in the universal exposition’s display of cultural artifacts from outside the organizing metropolis, like the human scale mannequin of a Maori man, ready to fight, at view in London’s Crystal Palace (1851). Similarly, Caroline A. Jones argues that, due to ties to local tourism, art biennials “[play] a significant role in what has come to be known as contemporary art in the age of its global circulation. It is because of the biennials’ links to event structures, tourism, and apparatuses of knowledge-production that these exhibitions have produced and participated in the longer-term epistemic shift from objects to experience”.<sup>15</sup> More generally, both exhibition forms aim to attract visitors to their host cities as a way to generate revenue for the local service industry. For example, documenta 13 (2012) brought 905,000 visitors to the German city of Kassel, and the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2015) attracted an extra 500,875 visitors to the city’s already saturated tourism market.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew Schum, “To Walk on Worn-Out Soles: The 2005 International Istanbul Biennial and the Global Drift of Twenty-First Century Art” (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World’s Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017)

<sup>16</sup> Hannah Ghorashi, “2015 Venice Biennale passes 500,000 visitors, 5 percent increase from 2013”, in *ArtNews*, Nov. 23, 2015. Last consulted on October 31, 2018. <http://www.artnews.com/2015/11/23/2015-venice-biennale-passes-500000-visitors-a-5-increase-from-2013/>



## Placing the local in the global eye.

The high production value of both forms has important repercussions in their cities' political reputation. For Jones, international expositions were key aesthetic productions in the service of re-imagining authoritarian governments:<sup>17</sup> the Crystal Palace exposition celebrated British Imperialism (1851), and the Exposition Universelle glorified the Second Empire (1855, 1861). The international exposition's service to power remains present in 20<sup>th</sup> Century art biennials: the Bienal de Sao Paulo (1951) ritualized the propinquity of Brazilian industrial and military elites with U.S. geopolitical actors in Latin America; Manifesta honored the beginning of a new era in Europe, as the former economic treaty of the European Economic Community led its way to plans for political and identitary unification under the European Union (1992); la Bienal de La Habana helped the Cuban state consolidate hegemony at the national level while galvanizing sympathetic international experts around their decolonial program. In one way or another, these events perform for international audiences the transition of one political formation to another, regardless of the actual transformations taking place on the ground.<sup>18</sup>

Most recently, art historian Thierry de Deuve has stated that this dual aspiration to the local and the global is a characteristic common to the majority of art biennials since the early 1990s. For him, these exhibitions help ground global capitalism in municipal interests, superseding the framework of the nation-state. He remarks on the widespread use of the neologism 'glocal' among defenders of global capitalism, and says that:

“There is an interesting symptom in the conflation of global and local by the neologism glocal, a symptom that suggests that the name of art may be more than an umbrella under which to conduct experimentation on glocal ethics. The word

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<sup>17</sup> Caroline Jones, “Biennial Culture: A Longer History”, in in Filipovic, van Hal, Ovstebo (eds.) *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010)

<sup>18</sup> As the following chapters show, the changing composition of these international audiences is an important analytical point. In Cuba, for example, international audiences were attracted, in its early iterations, by their political solidarity with Cuba and the Bienal's anti-imperialist nature. Later on, around 2000, the composition of international audiences changed to include, mostly, members of the global art world elite.

glocal implies the bridging of a hiatus from the particular to the general, a conceptual jump across a discontinuity formulated in geopolitical terms: the city, the world".<sup>19</sup>

In 1980s Cuba, this tension between the need to ground in the local the international aspirations of the Cuban state and its cultural institutions, translated in the Bienal's curatorial emphasis on communicating to the public the conditions of existence of pieces from different cultures that were shown in the exhibition. This fidelity to the original meaning of pieces contrasted, however, with the universalist aspirations of the Bienal, evident in the ultimate belief in Euro-American modernism as a shared aesthetic tradition that they both built from and were hoping to reform.

The term 'glocal' is a renewed articulation of the aspirations to constitute a new cosmopolitan elite. In the work of Immanuel Kant cosmopolitanism appears as a moral program conducent to world peace.<sup>20</sup> In Kant's model, the community of cosmopolitans is formed by individuals whose privileged education and knowledge of the world allow them to formulate similar aesthetic judgments. Hence, for Kant, their agreement that "a rose is beautiful" is much more than a singular appreciation on the qualities of a concrete reality: it signals to the presumed universality of their knowledge of the world, a knowledge of the world that is, in principle, sought with the goal of understanding local differences better so as to attain world peace yet which extent ultimately reproduces the confines of their social group. Aesthetic judgments that cosmopolitans can agree on are, then, proof of common understandings and moral worldviews. I agree with De Deuve's argument that a certain form of global avant-garde art – 'global contemporary art' – came to perform this role for an emerging neoliberal cosmopolitan class at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (see section on 'global contemporary art').

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<sup>19</sup> de Duve, Thierry. "The Glocal and the Singuniversalae: Reflections on Art and Culture in the Global World." *Third Text* 21, no. 6 (2007): 681–88. doi:10.1080/09528820701761095.

<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. James Creed Meredith, Ed. Nicholas Walker (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)

These concerns about the rise of a neoliberal cosmopolitanism are also present in the work of Marxist geographer David Harvey. Harvey portrays the Kantian cosmopolitan model as essentially elitist, yet moved by a shared moral program of achieving world peace. Sadly, dreams of cosmopolitanism keep resurfacing, he says, in renewed historical articulations that align with the moral programs of the elites, such as global reconciliation through free-trade, or military invasion of Afghanistan to impose a political order modeled after Western democracies. One of the biggest shortfalls in the Kantian model, for Harvey, is his belief that individuals are free to circulate across borders since, in practice, the legal framework of the nation-state governs over their mobility. For him, this raises a key question: “only certain kinds of mature individuals were actually able to achieve a truly cosmopolitan perspective”.<sup>21</sup> Certainly art world agents, uprooted from site yet configuring of a new historical cosmopolitanism enjoy this freedom of mobility that Kant envisioned. As academics and art world actors, you, me, and the majority of my readers know what I'm talking about.

Cosmopolitanism is part of the moral program of hegemony. My dissertation shows how cosmopolitan programs like Cuban Third World solidarity, NAFTA free trade, and European political unification in the end favored the deployment of Euro-American aesthetic forms over local ones, configuring a cosmopolitan aesthetic category that has come to be widely known as ‘global contemporary art’. Yet political and aesthetic hegemony go hand in hand. The expansion of the Euro-American art complex via the organization of art biennials reproduces post-Cold War aspirations for world peace. Although underlying each of these cases are very different articulations of this desire for world peace, in all the art biennial form is the institutional response to the need for shared aesthetic judgments. The work of Francis Alÿs, a Mexico City-based Belgian artist included in inSITE97, is perhaps one of the most clear articulations of

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<sup>21</sup> Harvey, David. “What Do We Do with Cosmopolitanism?” In *Whose Cosmopolitanism? Critical Perspectives, Relationalities and Discontents*, edited by Nina Glick Schiller and Andrew Irving, 21–39. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015. doi:10.3167/sa.2008.520105.

cosmopolitan privilege that characterizes the fluid and mobile global biennial circuit. Chapter 3 closes with a detail look into his piece for the U.S./Mexico borderlands: *The Loop* (1997).

### **Total spectacles.**

International exhibitions are a form of all-encompassing spectacular production that some scholars portray as Modernity's *Gesamtkunstwerk* or 'total work of art'. Walter Benjamin, for example, wrote that world expositions "glorify the exchange value of the commodity. They create a framework in which its use value recedes into the background. They open a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted."<sup>22</sup> For Benjamin, these spectacular productions elevated individuals to the status of commodities. Caroline A. Jones claims that the international exposition embodies the "pledge to renew knowledge", the "pedagogical promises", and the cosmopolitan project of European Enlightenment.<sup>23</sup>

However, to better grasp the proximity between today's art biennials and political power, we must look at other historical moments where political elites realized avant-garde's aspirations to the reorganization of society. The Stalinist period is particularly illustrative in this regard as it shows how Soviet Realism, an aesthetic code built on the two-fold claim of classicist tradition and avant-garde newness, has been falsely canonized and historized as a form of cultural production identified with the masses. In *The Total Art of Stalinism* Boris Groys shows how, instead, Soviet Realism was crafted by high-ranking educated political elites.<sup>24</sup> This new aesthetic doctrine combined formal and pictorial solutions from European academicist

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<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002)

<sup>23</sup> Caroline Jones, "Biennial Culture: A Longer History", in in Filipovic, van Hal, Ovstebo (eds.) *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010)

<sup>24</sup> Boris Groys, *The Total Work of Art. Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992)

history painting, and the celebratory optimism for societal change of the historical avant-gardes. For Groys, soviet order was, in fact, “a work of state art”, a larger than life *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>25</sup>

Similar beliefs in the power of aesthetics to transform social organization followed important 20<sup>th</sup> Century political events such as the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and the Cuban Revolution (1959). If the first promoted the reorganization of artistic production in Mexico under the guidance of Secretary of Public Education José de Vasconcelos (1920-1924), the latter proposed a nation-wide reform of the cultural industries that continues to our days. In Mexico as in Cuba, the reorganization of the arts followed beliefs that aesthetic education was an important tool in the emancipation of subaltern peoples. Both programs are explored in detail in chapters 2 and 3.

### **The forms of capital within the biennial.**

All in one, the impact of these events on local infrastructure, their epistemological aspirations, the securing of a large local and international audience via tourism, and their implications for their organizers’ political reputation, jointly translate into the gain of symbolic capital for host cities. A chief consequence of hosting an art biennial is the rise of its host city’s status in the international map.

For Pierre Bourdieu, in order to understand socio-historical processes, one must pay attention to the ways in which capital circulates in society. He widens the notion of economic capital to acknowledge other forms, such as symbolic, cultural, and social capital. Bourdieu describes ‘symbolic capital’ as “the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image for respectability and honorability that are easily converted into political positions as a local or a

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<sup>25</sup> Boris Groys, *The Total Work of Art. Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) p. 12

national *notable*".<sup>26</sup> Cultural and social capital amount for the cultural and social credit of an individual.<sup>27</sup> All forms of capital are interchangeable, according to him, and can thus be reconverted into economic, symbolic, cultural, or social capital.

To illustrate, let's look at the case of inSITE: the exhibition helped re-imagine the U.S./Mexico borderlands from a space of nationalist conflict to a space of transnational collaboration. This gain of symbolic capital – this change of reputation – translated into economic gains for, among others, the local tourism industry, which hosted art world visitors, and real state investors in Downtown San Diego. InSITE also increased the social capital of local art actors that were involved in the event by connecting them to other non-local professionals who had traveled to the region to work or see the exhibition. Many of these connections likely translated into new professional opportunities (generating economic capital). Last, in its alliances with universities in Tijuana and San Diego, inSITE gained cultural capital or scholarly legitimization of their practice. For cities like Havana, San Diego, Tijuana, and Rotterdam, gains in symbolic capital due to the celebration of these three art biennials translated into economic gains, legitimization within the international art world, and their escalation in the social networks informing a growing global elite social class.

In Bourdieu's scheme, cultural, social, and symbolic capital are forms of disinterested capital because they are not expressed as economic exchange. Education, social contacts, and

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<sup>26</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (New York: Routledge, 1984) p.291

<sup>27</sup> In Bourdieu's scheme, cultural capital expresses the cultural position of a subject. It comes in three states: embodied state, objectified state, and institutionalized state. Embodied cultural capital includes the dispositions of body and mind that are transmitted unconsciously in the social group to which the individual belongs (family or other). Bourdieu uses the term 'habitus' to refer to embodied cultural capital. Similar concepts in French and German are "civilization" and "Bildung". Objectified cultural capital describes goods that trace specific theories or cultural references. They can be appropriated materially or symbolically. Institutionalized cultural capital relates to the academic qualifications of a subject. Bourdieu describes social capital as the "actual and potential resources linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." This belonging to a group "provides members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit". Bourdieu, P. (1986) "The forms of capital". In J. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood), 241-258.

reputation are among these disinterested forms. And for him this is a key point. Disinterested forms:

“ensure the *transubstantiation* whereby the most material types of capital – those which are economic in the restricted sense – can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital and vice versa. Interest, in the restricted sense it is given in economic theory, cannot be produced without producing its negative counterpart, disinterestedness. The class of practices whose explicit purpose is to maximize monetary profit cannot be defined as such without producing the purposeless finality of cultural or artistic practices and their products; the world of bourgeois man, with his double-entry accounting, cannot be invented without producing the pure, perfect universe of the artist and the intellectual and the gratuitous activities of art-for-art’s sake and pure theory. In other words, the constitution of a science of mercantile relationships which, inasmuch as it takes for granted the very foundations of the order it claims to analyze – private property, profit, wage labor, etc. – is not even a science of the field of economic production, has prevented the constitution of a general science of the economy of practices, which would treat mercantile exchange as a particular case of exchange in all its forms.”<sup>28</sup>

The juxtaposition of ‘interested’ and ‘disinterested’ forms of capital certainly brings back to mind the cohabitation of ‘purposeful’ objects of industry and ‘purposeless’ objects of art inside the Crystal Palace. Let’s remember that, in order to signify the importance of the former, the latter were strategically placed around the exhibition space, as symbolic markers of value. Through the process of ‘transubstantiation’ capital in its exchange forms becomes invisible yet it appears, in turn, as cultural, social, or symbolic capital. Transubstantiation takes place, for instance, any time an art curator singles out the work of an artist as an example of a particular curatorial discourse. In this situation, the artwork is objectified cultural capital of the theory expressed by the curator, the artist gains social capital in the ratification of their belonging to an avant-garde group, and the artist’s and curator’s educational credentials are, in part, reassured by the gesture. The curator gains symbolic capital, reputation, among their peers. This curatorial selection act will probably translate in future economic capital gains for both curator and artist.

<sup>28</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1986) “The forms of capital”. In J. Richardson (Ed.) Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education (New York, Greenwood), 241-258.

The potential of international art exhibitions to generate value is also explored by sociologist George Yúdice who, in his work on inSITE, questions the supposed “enrichment” that racialized communities experience after establishing contact with international artists via the festival apparatus. Like later sections of this Chapter discuss, in this model, this enrichment or surplus is product of the narrative (and organizational) labor of experts such as curators and artists.<sup>29</sup>

Further, for Bourdieu, “the structures of capital [have a tendency] to reproduce themselves in institutions or in dispositions adapted to the structures of which they are the product”.<sup>30</sup> This reproduction takes place by rational efforts to demobilize or depoliticize “dominated” populations groups. Bourdieu uses examples such as electoral choice or consumer habits to illustrate how subaltern groups can be manipulated into reproduce the structures in charge of their own domination. However, it is worth examining how art organizations play a role as well in this scheme. The next section of this chapter proposes a model of curatorial practice that builds from Bourdieu’s forms of capital yet complicates it by introducing another crucial element of curatorial practice: its power to produce history.

### **‘Global contemporary art’.**

The analytic category of ‘global contemporary art’ began to be used in the contemporary art industry at the last turn of the century and has since been incorporated by the academy. As with other analytic categories that seek to classify artistic production in a place and time, it is an unstable concept often contested by scholars, curators, critics, and artists alike. Formally, most acknowledge its debt with the Euro-American neo-avant-gardes (1960s-1980s) and its malleability to broaden their repertoire to include aesthetic forms from the Global South. In

<sup>29</sup> George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture. Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) p. 332

<sup>30</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1986) “The forms of capital”. In J. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood), 241-258.



addition, a big fraction of 'global contemporary art' thematizes political concerns that are sometimes present as well in its form, as it sometimes incorporates collaborative tactics from political activism and grassroots social organizing.<sup>31</sup> Many worry about the perils of homogenizing diverse aesthetic traditions. For example, already in 1989 Indian art historian Geeta Kapur spoke of how an emerging artistic model that sought to overcome colonial polarities between center and periphery could result, despite its conciliatory will, into the neutralizing of differences and "the reduction of the world into sameness".<sup>32</sup>

The emergence of 'global contemporary art' as a standard category in the field mirrored the 'biennial boom' of the 1990s and 2000s, to an extent that some interchange the term with the neologism 'biennial art'. Charles Esche remarks on its "critical acceptance of art's relation to politics and social context", "its engagement with location and penchant for discursivity" as essential traits of contemporary art across the globe today.<sup>33</sup> Monica Juneja warns that what looks like a de-territorialization in 'global contemporary art's' planetary dimensions might, in fact, be a re-territorialization that responds to a present distribution of power between, on one hand, those with access to informed knowledge and, on the other, a wider public excluded from the spaces of culture.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Grant Kester, *The One and the Many* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011)

<sup>32</sup> Geeta Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice. Some Polemical Categories" in Rachel Weiss (ed.) *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall, 2011) p. 195. This text was originally pronounced in the theoretical event at the 3<sup>r</sup> Bienal de La Habana (1989), later included in Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt and Ziauddin Sardar (eds.), *The 'Third Text' Reader on Art, Culture, and Theory* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Remarkably, Esche argues that the first iterations of the Bienal de La Habana were responsible for introducing these aspects in contemporary art production. See Charles Esche, "Makign Art Global: A Good Place or a Bad Place?" in Rachel Weiss (ed.) *Making Art Global. The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall, 2011) p. 12

<sup>34</sup> Monica Juneja, "Global Art History and the 'Burden of Representation'", in Hans Belting, Jacob Birken, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel (eds.) *Global Studies. Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture* (Karlsruhe: Hatze Cantz, 2011).

## Why 'contemporary'?

In 2009 art history journal *October* published a field-wide questionnaire about the state of the heterogeneous category of 'contemporary art'.<sup>35</sup> The journal published thirty-four responses by art historians, curators, and critics. The wide array of responses proposed a multitude of perspectives from which to consider what is 'contemporary art', how to study it, curate it, and write about it. This diversity signaled to the lack of a disciplinary consensus on what constitutes the 'contemporary' as much as to a turning point for the field of art history. How to apply disciplinary methodologies developed for the study of cultural artifacts from the past to studying artworks produced today? For most authors, the complexities of 'contemporary art' were two-fold: on one hand, its presumed continuity with former categories such as 'neo-avant-garde art', 'post-modern art' or, even, 'modern art' seemed to remain unquestioned. On the other hand, the geopolitical configuration of the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, after the planetary expansion of neoliberalism, seemed to determine new forms of human experience of time and space. In this new context, art historical methodologies and terminologies developed, mostly, during a second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century organized around First, Second, Third, and Fourth Worlds, seemed outdated.

The material and political urgencies of the present heighten, for Julia Bryan-Wilson, art history's self-awareness about its responsibility over the study of art production. Our contemporaneity, for her, should reflect on the necessity and responsibility of our discipline with the broader public: "*why we teach, why we research, why we continue to organize panels or write papers or curate exhibitions or write questionnaires*".<sup>36</sup> For Grant Kester, two characteristics inherent to contemporary art history (the fact that artists studied are often still alive, and that the historian's access to empirical data broadens to include contemporary

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<sup>35</sup> Hall Foster (ed.), "A Questionnaire on 'the contemporary'", *October* 130, Fall 2009

<sup>36</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, in Hall Foster (ed.), "A Questionnaire on 'the contemporary'", *October* 130, Fall 2009

audiences) question the discipline's historical articulation over the assumption of formal autonomy. In his words, "these factors tend to undermine the perception that the discipline of art history is defined by a capacity for the critical detachment or a more objective, less interested, relationship to its object of study".<sup>37</sup> Breaking today with the long-held belief on art's autonomy becomes not only necessary for the study of contemporary art production, yet it is a methodological necessity that the field must undertake in order to pay better justice to the role of art in past historical processes.<sup>38</sup>

Bryan-Wilson's and Kester's concerns about art's political responsibility and the need to revisit its assumption of autonomy reflect the state of debates about avant-garde art in the contemporary period. 'Contemporary art' owes to formal and perceptual solutions developed during the 'neo-avant-garde' moment (1950s-1970s) in Europe and the United States. The epistemological framework used today to study it, teach it, and curate it inherits the vocabulary developed then and seeks to widen it with periodic thematic and symbolic inclusions of aesthetic forms from outside the West. Further, the avant-garde's historical twofold relationship with power becomes of special urgency today. As Kester explains, "in avant-garde artistic practice the preservation of a critical relationship to hegemonic institutions and beliefs (expressed through exemplary symbolic gestures) often coexisted with a hierarchical and instrumental relationship to the viewer, which reproduced attributes of conventional bourgeois subjectivity".<sup>39</sup> For art historian Alexander Alberro, the neo-avant-gardes were a Cold-War

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<sup>37</sup> Grant Kester, in Hall Foster (ed.), "A Questionnaire on 'the contemporary'", October 130, Fall 2009. p. 8

<sup>38</sup> I share Bryan-Wilson's and Kester's concerns, and I address them in this dissertation with my study of institutional formations that prop up the illusion of art's autonomy today around the globe – art biennials –, with the hopes of producing an account of the art industry that pays justice to the cultural processes shadowed in the production of 'contemporary art'. The present, like Kester and Shannon remark in the Questionnaire, broadens the scope of empirical sources beyond the archive so as to include as well interviews – and informal conversations – with living artists, audiences, and experts, access to ephemera produced about specific events, and non-archived press material, etc. Historicizing the contemporary means avoiding the reproduction of the ordered knowledges about the past of the archive, emphasizing the value of local histories and narratives held in the space of gossip and the anecdotal.

<sup>39</sup> Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces. Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, 2013) p. xvii

materialization of the Enlightenment project. Their continuation today in the global as an articulating feature of 'global contemporary art' – and, most precisely, the sub-type found in art biennials – is a sign of the fact that the 'contemporary' is, instead of a period, a moment in the formation of hegemony.<sup>40</sup> In this hegemonic moment, 'contemporary art' testifies for both the contradictions and antagonisms inherent to its expansion and leaves an open door for the emergence of different forms of agency – some will reproduce the distribution of power upholding it, others will contest it –. In this line, a more hopeful Chika Oukeke-Agulu sees in 'global contemporary art' an overcoming of the "parochial paradigms" of the 'neo-avant-gardes' that, albeit its internal contradictions, is multi-sited and extends beyond purely Euro-American forms. Oukeke-Agulu wants to know: what is the role of art biennials in the production of 'global contemporary art'?<sup>41</sup>

### Why 'global'?

The consolidation of a global art market since 1980s has prompted ubiquitous debates on the nature of 'global art', up to an extent that scholars such as Hans Belting, Whitney Davis, or James Elkins consider it as a field of studies in itself<sup>42</sup>. The term 'global art' follows and replaces the earlier use of 'world art'<sup>43</sup>, signaling a general shift in the humanities away from area studies and its structuring according to the post World War II geopolitical world order. This 'global' turn acknowledges today's inter-connectedness of art markets, academia, and

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<sup>40</sup> See Alexander Alberro, in Hall Foster (ed.), "A Questionnaire on 'the contemporary'", *October* 130, Fall 2009. And Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.) *Institutional Critique. An Anthology of Artists' Writings* (Boston: MIT Press, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Chika Oukeke-Agulu, in Hall Foster (ed.), "A Questionnaire on 'the contemporary'", *October* 130, Fall 2009

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Hans Belting, Jacob Birken, Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *Global Studies. Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, Ostfildern : Hatje Cantz, 2011

<sup>43</sup> Hans Belting has explained world art in relation to Western modernist universalism, "bridg[ing] a Western notion of art with a multiform, and often ethnic, production to which the term 'art' is applied in an arbitrary manner." See Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate", in Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums*, Hatje Cantz Verlag: Ostfildern, 2009

communities of practitioners that inform the contemporary art world. Elsewhere I have evaluated the formal and narrative changes experienced in the work of non-Euro American artists as they have gained visibility in the circuit of art biennials throughout their careers.<sup>44</sup> Hans Belting has attributed increased formal standardization in late 1990s art to the circulation of art objects in the global free trade economy<sup>45</sup>. For him the disappearance of the Soviet bloc marked a transition between, on one hand, a notion of 'world art' structured around national localisms commenting on modernist Western universalist ideas of art and, on the other, a reformed notion of 'global art'. At the turn of the century, 'global contemporary art' was the hegemonic language spoken in the art industry's centers of power such as art biennials and art fairs. As an avant-garde form, it is in permanent expansion, fagocitating external aesthetic forms. According to Belting, although 'global contemporary art' lacks inherent aesthetic qualities, its characteristic loss of specific context makes it a perfect vehicle for displaying the inherent contradictions between regionalisms and the global. Most importantly, for Belting, 'global contemporary art' deals with inclusion and exclusion in representational circuits by marketing difference.

Furthermore, Luis Camnitzer's critique of the colonizing tendencies of global art institutions is also relevant for understanding the presence of 'neo-avant-garde' elements in the 'global contemporary' artwork<sup>46</sup>. Departing from Paulo Freire's revisions of the concept of literacy as pathway to emancipation, Camnitzer attributes the planet-wide standardization of aesthetic codes to the art institution's colonial nature. For him what makes the art world a specially interesting case study is that, although it ideally embraces literacies that pursue the development of individual creativity allowing a certain degree of critique, "in art, clearly, it is the

<sup>44</sup> See Paloma Checa-Gismero, "Realism in the work of Maria Theresa Alvez", *Afterall*, Fall 2017. Paloma Checa-Gismero, "Aesthetic concessions in the work of Teresa Margolles", (upcoming).

<sup>45</sup> Hans Belting, "Contemporary art as global art. A critical estimate" in *Global Art Museum* <http://www.globalartmuseum.de/media/file/476716148442.pdf> last consulted June 25, 2014

<sup>46</sup> See Luis Camnitzer, "Art and literacy" in *e-flux* 2, March 2009 <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-and-literacy/> last consulted June 25, 2014, and Luis Camnitzer, "ALPHABETIZATION, Part I: Protocol and proficiency", in *e-flux* 9, October 2009 <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/alphabetization-part-one-protocol-and-proficiency/> last consulted June 25, 2014

voice or personal expression that eventually is extolled by the market, as long as it operates within the hegemonic language".<sup>47</sup> Fitting to nascent formal standards is a trend within biennial art. So I wonder: what is the hegemonic language that non-Euro-American artists learn as they become global and contemporary? How does this 'learning' materialize in their work?

The term also overcomes the centrality that 'world art' gave to nation-states in cultural production. Instead, it emphasizes the role of trans-national agents in the production, curation, and exhibition of art. Scholars Miwon Kwon and Pamela M. Lee agree on the "instrumental role played by curators and critics in the colonization of new geographies" for the industry<sup>48</sup>. Like the next three chapters show, this function is a form of consumption of local difference prompted by claims of site-specificity<sup>49</sup>. Plus, 'global art' is a broad umbrella that assumes common concerns and practices to cultural producers all over the globe. This phenomenon is part of a broader redrawing of the processes behind a new international distribution of labor<sup>50</sup>. Literature on this debate is split between, on one hand, celebrators of the term as a place for the encounter of the multiple, as a new universal aesthetic category and, on the other, its critics, who see 'global art' as a sign of the international art world elite's failure to acknowledge the value of local aesthetic traditions.

Scholarly debates about art historiography are polarized between proponents of 'world art history' and of 'global art history'. Of the first, art historian David Summers proposed 'post-formalism', a new historiographical methodology that disregarded the temporal dimension of art and architecture to privilege their social function. Summers applies a universal taxonomy to the

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<sup>47</sup> Luis Camnitzer, "ALPHABETIZATION, Part I: Protocol and proficiency", in *e-flux* 9, October 2009 <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/alphabetization-part-one-protocol-and-proficiency/> last consulted June 25, 2014

<sup>48</sup> Pamela M. Lee, "Boundary Issues: the Art World Under the Sign of Globalism", in *Artforum*, vol. 42, no. 3, November 2003

<sup>49</sup> These claims, as those uttered by InSITE and La Bienal de La Habana, attempt to preserve particular representations of local identity intact in an effort to rise their attractiveness in the global market

<sup>50</sup> Aroch, Paulina, *Promesas Irrealizadas. El Sujeto del Discurso Postcolonial y la Nueva División Internacional del Trabajo* (México: Siglo XXI, 2016)

study of art in all times and places, organized around seven categories: “factures”, “places”, “the appropriation of the center”, “images”, “planarity”, “virtuality”, “conditions of modernity”.<sup>51</sup> Of the second position is James Elkins who, reluctant to reproduce what he sees as Summers’s Eurocentrism, argues instead for a relativist method adaptable to indigenous terms, ideas, and social functions of the cultural object. Elkins conceives interpretative frameworks such as feminism, semiotics, psychoanalysis, etc. to be inadequate for the writing of non-Euro-American histories, and hence futile in his program.<sup>52</sup>

This general turn towards the ‘global’ in contemporary aesthetics participates of a broader transformation in the notions of space and time soaking scholarly and quotidian experiences of the world and the narratives about them. Historian Bruce Mazlish characterizes the ‘global’ as an epoch, acknowledging the extensive effects that this new ordering of time and space has for the broader humankind and the environment. For him, ‘global’ history takes the present as vantage point, and “signifies processes best studied on a global, rather than local, national, or regional level” such as global capitalism, human rights as a universal ethical framework, the displacement of an international political system by a global one, the globalization of culture, and the planetary environmental crisis<sup>53</sup>. In his model, transnational agents such as art biennials carry the cultural leadership in the global epoch. Further, the growing freelance nature of creative labor is symptomatic of this condition which, within art biennials, takes the forms of Hal Foster’s artist as ethnographer, the in-house critic, the guest curator, the artist in residence, etc.

This new emphasis on the global registers a change in the experience of space and time. Historian Micol Seigel has defended global transnational history as a practice that narrates “the experiences of people for whom transcending national boundaries has been the norm rather

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<sup>51</sup> David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon, 2003)

<sup>52</sup> James Elkins, *Is Art History Global?* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007)

<sup>53</sup> Bruce Mazlish, “Comparing World History to Global History”, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 28, 3

than the exception or whose experiences of mobility have been particularly acute<sup>54</sup>.” Similarly, geographer Doreen Massey denounces the distribution of power determining not only who is mobile and who is not, but in what direction do particular social groups move. What she calls “space-time compression” refers to the lived experience of “movement and communication across space, to the geographical stretching-out of social relations”, and experience that derives from the internationalization of capitalism that accelerated since the early 1990s.<sup>55</sup> In addition to experiencing it, the groups in charge of space-time compression are in charge of producing representations of it for the public. In the following chapters I describe how different curatorial teams crafted their own representations of this changing experience of space and time that, while seemingly normal to them, was of restricted access to local cultural producers unacknowledged in their enterprises.

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<sup>54</sup> Micol Seigel, “Beyond Compare: Comparative Method After the Transnational Turn”, in *Radical History Review*, 91 (Winter, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994)



## Section 2: Art institutions, art scenes, and art worlds.

There have been several attempts within aesthetic theory to provide an exposition of art's nature in relation to its context and its social nature. Caroline A. Jones speaks of 'biennial culture' to point to the "practices and appetites fueling artists' and viewers' commitments to art as experience" within the biennial circuit.<sup>56</sup> From a semiotic perspective, Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson call for the exploration of the ways in which discursive practices and systems of value frame signs (images). For them, by understanding the social processes that inform context – "a text in itself" – can help the art historian "to analyze simultaneously the practices of the past and our interaction with them, an interaction that is otherwise in danger of passing unnoticed".<sup>57</sup> In the 1970s, George Dickie and Arthur Danto proposed their own modes of addressing the institutional nature of art. Exposing the insufficiency of both the Imitation Theory of art and the Realistic Theory of art to explain contemporary art forms such as Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes, Danto called for "another theory of art, [...] the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is".<sup>58</sup> Aware of Danto's work, philosopher George Dickie proposed an analytical model that focuses on the actions that humans practice so as to confer the status of art to certain objects. Instead of looking into the properties of objects, Dickie's model focused on the art institution as a framework for the attribution of such status. In his words, "given the great variety of the systems of the art world it is not surprising that works of art have no exhibited properties in common. If, however, we step back and view the works in their institutional setting, we will be able to see the essential properties that they

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<sup>56</sup> Jones, Caroline A.. *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience*, University of Chicago Press, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Mieke Bal, Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History. A Discussion of Context and Senders" (1991), in Donald Preziosi (ed.) *The Art of Art History. A Critical Antology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 244

<sup>58</sup> Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld." *The Journal of Philosophy*, (1964) p. 573

share”.<sup>59</sup> Dickie’s and Danto’s work acknowledged the power of the art institution to frame and bring in common diverse art forms with little similarities. However, speaking from the U.S., and trying to make sense of the formal and narrative developments of the 1970s avant-garde, their theories are purely explicative, and fail to acknowledge the extent of the impact that the conventions followed by the art institution can have outside itself.

### **Framing ‘art’.**

The way in which societies confer the status of ‘art’ to objects provides insights into the social hierarchies upholding those distinctions. New institutional frameworks for the conferring of the ‘art’ status, like inSITE, Manifesta, and la Bienal de La Habana, select portions of the broader cultural production of that region to signify it as more ‘art’ than others. Given that these art biennials had an international orientation, their framing also marked a distinction between what was more worthy of international attention than the rest. Thus, in 1996 Manifesta initially did not confer the status of ‘European art’ to Rotterdam’s local art production, leaving it less visible for international specialized visitors than objects by artists from other European regions chosen for the exhibition. Not until Rotterdam’s art community protested against this lack of representation, the exhibition’s organization agreed to include in its framing several projects by Rotterdam artists (this inclusion, however, happened in the form of peripheral events). Similarly, those involved in conferring the status of ‘art worthy of international attention’ in San Diego and Tijuana could have chosen other objects for their selection from the rich cultural production of both regions. In Cuba, however, there was an emphasis on Cuban artists, which for some members of the public discredited their program of crafting a ‘Third World avant-garde’.

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<sup>59</sup> George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974) p. 23

More recently, social science scholars interested in the study of institutions and networks have taken on the seemingly autonomous worlds, such as the art world or the scientific community, as their object of analysis to understand how social groups confer the specific status of 'science' or 'art' to objects. For example, historian of science Sheila Jasanoff speaks of institutions as 'inscription devices' "through which validity of a new knowledge can be accredited". She builds from Mary Douglass's argument that successful institutions classify, confer identity, act as repositories of memory and forgetting, and make decisions for society.<sup>60</sup> Sociologist Pascal Gielen speaks of the 'art scene' as a cohesive form of social organization that produces an identity of its own. Belonging to the art scene, for Gielen, is based on the not-so-rigid following of tacit rules. Creative ideas circulate in the art scene, as it provides "a safe, familiar, yet admittedly temporary home in a globalized world".<sup>61</sup> The art scene gathers in "semi-public venues" like the museum or the Kunsthalle, recognizing its globally-dispersed members as "the non-seen scene becomes the seen scene".<sup>62</sup> The relevance of today's art scene, for Gielen, is its following of a post-Fordist logic of production, where labor – like belonging – is temporary, informal, and exploitative, "boosted unconditionally by young talent".<sup>63</sup> I share Gielen's concerns about the exploitative nature of the art world, in its academic and non-academic versions. The following chapters show several instances where events within Manifesta, la Bienal de La Habana, and inSITE happened only because of the voluntary and enthusiastic labor of students and other collaborators. Yet Gielen's work speaks of a labor ethos –that he calls 'post-Fordist' – that is symptomatic of the current stage of capitalism. The period 1984 to 1996 only announces some of post-Fordism's features, while they coexist with other

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<sup>60</sup> Sheila Jasanoff, "Ordering Knowledge, Ordering Society", in Sheila Jasanoff (ed.) *States of Knowledge* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004) p. 40

<sup>61</sup> Pascal Gielen, "The art scene. A clever working model for economic exploitation", *onCurating*, 16/13 (2013), p. 46

<sup>62</sup> Pascal Gielen, "The art scene. A clever working model for economic exploitation", *onCurating*, 16/13 (2013), p. 49

<sup>63</sup> Pascal Gielen, "The art scene. A clever working model for economic exploitation", *onCurating*, 16/13 (2013), p. 49

practiced ethos in socialist Cuba, squat communities in Rotterdam, and strong state sponsorship of the arts in Mexico.

All of the above mentioned models acknowledge the importance of groups of specialized professionals in the constitution of the art institution. For instance, Dickie explains that “critics, historians, and philosophers of art become members of the art world at some time after the minimum core personnel of a particular art system get that system into operation”.<sup>64</sup> Gielen makes an important point about the relational nature of the art scene when he states that “ultimately an art biennial relies on the personal connections of those involved in the organization”.<sup>65</sup> These two points are crucial for my study: who are agents involved in the formation of art worlds and why do their relationships within and beyond the limits of their art worlds matter.

### **The importance of cooperation.**

Howard Becker's theory of art worlds is specially helpful for understanding the relationships between art world agents, their patterns, and the interests they follow. For Becker, art worlds sit on three determining factors: the nature of the artworks in them, the nature of the cooperation that needs to happen for those artworks to exist and be available to the public, and the conventions followed by those engaged in cooperation. Although in the following chapters I provide some insights on the processes of cooperation entailed in the production of specific artworks, my study stops to highlight the role that local processes of cooperation made art biennials possible in their beginnings. Underlying the embeddedness of cultural organizations such as art biennials in the situated and practiced forms of cooperation not only questions the

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<sup>64</sup> George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974) p. 25

<sup>65</sup> Pascal Gielen, “The art scene. A clever working model for economic exploitation”, *onCurating*, 16/13 (2013), p. 49

supposed autonomy of art, its ideas and objects, but it helps explain the effervescence of the art biennial form in the immediate post-Cold War period with direct relation to the interests of states and local elites.

Cooperative networks, for Becker, are necessary for the making of art. Yet their role is not limited to the material fabrication of art objects. Cooperation in art worlds also produces theoretical programs that justify the attribution of the label 'art' to an object, as well as the exhibition solutions that allow audiences to access these. Similarly, Sheila Jasanoff reminds that collaboration renders naturalized cultural regularities visible, and helps explain the continuity of "particular socio-technical formations" such as, in our case, the art biennial form.<sup>66</sup> Jasanoff builds from Foucault's and Latour's work to defend that adopting a coproduction framework to study the production science, in her case, permits to consider hegemonic not as preexisting ahistorical structures, but as products of particular interactions. In Rotterdam, San Diego, Tijuana, and La Habana, cooperation among members of the curatorial team was key to produce 'European art', 'Border art', and 'Third World avant-garde art'. The chapters to follow provide details on how, for example, 'specialists' in La Habana traveled the extent of Cuba's diplomatic network looking for art from those regions to exhibit in their biennial. More, cooperation between curators and other actors within and outside the organization determined the way in which audiences accessed artworks: in museums and squatted art centers in Rotterdam, in university galleries and international border fences in San Diego and Tijuana, and in public parks and neighborhood galleries in La Habana. Many times, cooperation in these three very different regions was only possible because of personal connections between members of the curatorial team and other regional agents. Like the historical chapters show, reciprocity and trust were key in upholding these cooperative links.

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<sup>66</sup> Sheila Jasanoff, "Ordering Knowledge, Ordering Society", in Sheila Jasanoff (ed.) *States of Knowledge* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004) p. 42

However, everyone involved in cooperation does so moved by their own interest. For instance: student volunteers helping organize Nina Katchadourian's, Steven Matheson's, and Mark Tribe's piece *Car Park* (inSITE94), probably saw their involvement as an opportunity to access the San Diego/Tijuana art world, meet international and local artists participating in inSITE94 and, potentially, as an experience leading to further professional opportunities after their MFA. In addition to individual actors, an important actor in Becker's and Jasanoff's model is the state which, as my analysis shows, is moved by its own set of interests. "Political leaders believe that the symbolic representations embodied in both high and popular art affect whether citizens can be mobilized and for what means", says Becker.<sup>67</sup> In fact, the belief in 1992 by European officials that the forging of a supranational feeling of Europeanness would help bring peace and stability to the region went as far as to create a supranational polity, the European Union, that provoked cultural ventures as ambitious as Manifesta. Further, in Becker's model, the state is implicated in the nurturing or censoring of art worlds because they can be "a positive force in national life":<sup>68</sup> by actively producing a national culture they can maintain social stability, they can help muster citizens in support of specific causes, and they can also alter the course of social processes by intervening in how these are rendered and justified in public debate. The alignment between curatorial agendas and state interests was, for example, clear in the Bienal de La Habana, an exhibition ideated by Fidel Castro to promote Cuba's policy of *third-worldism*.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) p. 166

<sup>68</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) p. 181

<sup>69</sup> The concept of *thirdworldism* was, of course, interpreted differently by Fidel Castro and the Bienal's curatorial team. In particular, Gerardo Mosquera, head of research in the early iterations, disagreed with Castro's program and proposed his own reading of the term based in the defense of popular arts as a cultural universal through which to access the aesthetic traditions of different cultures. See Chapter 2.

## **Conventions and standards.**

Conventions help articulate cooperation within art worlds. These include, on one hand, those of non-artistic nature and practiced extensively in the social space enveloping cooperation, such as speaking the same language or using compatible archive formats. On the other hand are conventions internal to each art world, like specific aesthetic theories used to justify that something is art, techniques used to produce art objects, and methods of recruiting audiences into exhibitions. In the late 1980s to mid 1990s, for example, the development of the internet affected the way in which curators and artists communicated. Documents gathered during my archival research register a change from letter and fax based communication in the early 1990s to the fast-paced nature of emails in 1996. The nature of communication conventions was critical in la Bienal de La Habana, especially at times of increased isolation and scarcity during the Special Period. Had email and personal web-pages been available in 1984, Bienal 'specialists' would probably have not spent months traveling around Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. Their curatorial selection would have probably relied on what email and artist web-pages already make available, like they do today.

Conventions held exclusively by members of an art world mark the limits of this art world. In my study, I focus on art world conventions pertaining to the nature of curatorial work, avant-garde art forms, and exhibition standards. Yet these go as far as to include knowledge of the history of art and of specific mediums, failed and successful past solutions to present problems, gossip about actors and institutions, etc.<sup>70</sup> To illustrate, an important conflict in Stockholm (1996) that preceded Manifesta in Rotterdam (1996) shows the different understandings of the limits of tolerable human action within the exhibition space. Performing his dog-man persona at an art gallery in Stockholm, Russian artist Oleg Kulik physically attacked members of the exhibition

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<sup>70</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982)

audience. What for the show's Russian contingent was a test of Swedish society's openness to difference, for French and Swedish participants in the event Kulik's behavior was enough reason to call the police. Two art worlds, one from Western Europe and one from Eastern Europe, were yet to agree on a convention as important as what should be allowed to happen within the art institution. During Kulik's dog-man performance in Rotterdam four months later, no incidents were reported, what probably means that artist and organizers had previously convened on what would be the limits of his actions.

Like chapter 2 shows, conventions internal to particular art worlds are learned via participation in them. Most often, the tacit and embodied nature of internal conventions requires their everyday practice along other professionals. This comes clearly in my analysis of curatorial work in la Bienal de La Habana, where its group of 'specialists' learned the conventions of their new job in their everyday need to solve problems specific to their role. While neither of them had been exhibition curators before, some of them had spent time working at other cultural institutions, like Casa de las Américas. Others had experience writing critical essays or contacts with artists abroad. The core group of experts became a learning space where professional knowledge was shared, produced, and altered to meet the demands of the exhibition. In addition, learning art world conventions is also a way of training that allows for outsiders to enter, sometimes partially, forms of collaboration active in upholding the art world. Art students learn some art world conventions at school, yet they become fluent in them once they access art world institutions as interns, artists, studio assistants, etc. Last, when audiences get exposed to conventions internal to the art world, their sense of belonging to the latter grows. Public programs organized around la Bienal de La Habana, inSITE, and Manifesta shared the mission of making accessible internal conventions such as the installation processes of specific artworks or the aesthetic theories guiding curatorial work to the broader public. Together with this



transference of professional knowledge, audiences also got educated into the political programs moving each of these three art biennials.

Art world conventions that guide what is labeled as 'art' might remind of the notion of taste. A hard-to-pin concept, debates about the nature of taste and its judgment are foundational for the fields of aesthetic theory and art history. With my dissertation I hope to shed light on the impact that such insider philosophical debates can have on broader constituencies. English empiricist philosophers such as Hume and Hutcheson used the word 'taste' to designate the faculty to discern beauty. While for Hume the pleasure felt via the experiencing of beauty was a purely subjective phenomenon, for others, such as Hutcheson, it obeyed to specific characteristics of objects. Later on, Addison would debate Hume's understanding of taste as a sensual pleasure, to argue that it is a pleasure derived from the free play of human imagination, a faculty mediating between knowledge and sensibility. Yet it is via Kant's understanding of aesthetic judgment as a priori disinterested and universal what reaches key significance for my study. The universality of aesthetic judgments does not imply that they are in fact shared by all human beings, yet it allows for them to be a universal condition for the knowledge of all individuals. Kant formulated his aesthetic philosophy with a very limited knowledge of the diversity of understandings of beauty around the world. His assumption that everybody's taste could be trained so as to potentially convene in the universal experience of beauty anticipates the importance that shared aesthetic programs have in the forging of art worlds. If a group of individuals believe to be experiencing pleasure via their relation with the same object, and agree that this common experience could potentially be universal, this shared understanding of beauty joins them in an aesthetic community. This common sense, or *sensus communis*, provides a shared explanation of their experience in their world.

Although Becker does connect his concept of internal conventions to the concept of taste, his analysis fails to acknowledge the importance of the latter in the formation of communities around the art object. What distinguishes art worlds from other worlds of experts in, for example, the sciences are the centuries-long disputes about what makes it into the 'art' category. (Unlike in the scientific community, where there is only one 'science' status, the 'art' status can differ in different art communities)

Dissonance with others' taste is a constitutive feature of art worlds. Frequent conflicts arise from these disagreements. In the U.S./Mexico borderlands, in the 1990s, different beliefs in what constituted good-quality art confronted communities like activist Chicano artists, watercolor Sunday painters, and inSITE artists coming from Mexico City, Europe, and the U.S. As chapter 3 shows, the big pool of resources gathered in the service of advancing the aesthetic program mobilized via inSITE had the twofold effect of, first, excluding other understandings of art from the exhibition and, second, erasing from publicly held representations of "art in San Diego" the rich decades-long art production of politically motivated Chicano art. Today, most members of the global art world would probably think of Javier Tellez *One Flew Over the Void / Bala Perdida* or other spectacular inSITE piece when asked to name an artwork about the San Diego/Tijuana border fence. Unless they are personally involved in migrant activist circles, have a personal relationship with the region, or identify as Chicano, global art world members are unlikely to have heard about 1970s Tijuana political theater. Art world conventions as specialized as niche definitions of what constitutes art can have substantial effects in the everyday life of non-art world members when aligned with the interests of the state or powerful elites.

From all of the above we can agree that art worlds are not solid immutable units. They change in pace with artworks, the forms of cooperative activity they nourish from, and the

conventions guiding cooperation. The role of curators, art critics, and art historians (what Becker calls ‘aestheticians’) in enacting change is explored in other sections of this chapter. One element from Becker’s model that I would like to recover is his tracing of a correlation between the conventions used in cooperation and the moral beliefs shared by those who practice them. For Becker, change happens when art world innovations threaten the stability of the internal social structure that maintains the criteria for what constitutes art while also questioning the relations of cooperation that make its production and circulation possible. The commitment to exhibit art from the Third World behind la Bienal de La Habana provoked broader changes in an international art world that until then had failed to pay attention to contemporary art outside Western Europe, the U.S. and some Latin American regions. This innovation, joined by artists, critics, and curators from Cuba and abroad, was soon met with efforts to curate art from the Third World by European and U.S. based institutions. Chapter 2 shows how this effect happened within the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, at the Centre Pompidou (Paris, 1989). For Becker, the new ideas behind revolutionary changes inside art worlds have the power to rally other art world members and transform their activities.<sup>71</sup> In his words,

“when an innovation develops a network of people who can cooperate nationwide, perhaps even internationally, all that is left to do to create an art world is to convince the rest of the world that what is being done is art, and deserves the rights and privileges associated with the status”.<sup>72</sup>

A good example of changing conventions is la Bienal de La Habana. During its first three iterations, the exhibition modified the conventions dictating what ought to be displayed in an international exhibition of contemporary art. Exhaustive preliminary research around the world, complex collaborations between local cultural institutions, and the celebration of rigorous theoretical symposiums around the show, made la Bienal de La Habana a turning point for the

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<sup>71</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) p. 338

<sup>72</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) p. 339

consideration of art made outside of the Euro-American traditions. In words of Rachel Weiss, these efforts “made art global” by broadening the category of contemporary art to include objects, ideas, and practices from African, Middle Easter, and South-East Asian nations.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Rachel Weiss, *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall, 2011)

### Section 3: Coloniality and art biennials.

“Victims of powerful market mechanisms, artists from the world that has come to be known as *third* have had to struggle to make room for themselves in the big metropolitan centers. Isolated, they lack real possibilities of mutual confrontation. This is how those whom we today recognize as consecrated made it in their day. This is how the new generations begin to define themselves. And to our balkanized world these images arrive like distant reflections, often through publications, reviews, or vague news. Artists and public, who produces images and their receiver, are in different ways victims of cultural dependency. The present and future of art demand that one and the other grow together. To know each other is a way of propitiating that growth.”<sup>74</sup>

These words open the catalog of the first iteration of the Bienal de La Habana (1984). In them, the Bienal organizers openly acknowledged the position of subalternity of art made in Cuba and, more generally, in the Third World. To overcome their subaltern position was their goal. Their method would be to create spaces of artistic legitimization independent of those drawn by the market-reliant art world of Western Europe and the United States. In addition, and parallel to the building of strong infrastructures that advance art from the Third World, Bienal organizers believed in the need to educate Third World audiences in the value of their own artistic production. As I explain in chapter 2, the Bienal’s extensive research work in Latin America, first, and in Africa, the Middle East, and South-East Asia from 1985 onwards, widened the scope of the definition of art to include art made in these regions. The impact of this epistemological contribution was soon felt in Europe and the US in exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) or the 1992 Whitney Biennial. The educational mission given to the Bienal was backed with a variety of city-wide workshops, lectures, and socially-engaged projects. The Bienal de La Habana began thus as an epistemological and pedagogical decolonial project aimed to not only fight for the inclusion of Third World art in the “big

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<sup>74</sup> 1 *Bienal de La Habana 84* (La Habana: Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, 1984) p.7 My translation.

metropolitan centers” but to design and implement Third World art historical and educational methodologies to define and disseminate this new broader notion of art. Its socialist and decolonial character advanced social equity and Third World cooperation over ideals of value accumulation and heritage production moving the Western biennials to date. Initially, the Bienal was a tool designed to counter the colonialism of Western epistemology in the Third World.

Coloniality is a permanent thread in the three chapters that follow. A declared interest for la Bienal de La Habana, against which it tries to fight, coloniality is present as well in inSITE and Manifesta, who do not share with the Cuban one a mission to correct existing colonial relations. Instead, these two art exhibitions worked as colonizing institutions in their host regions. At the US/Mexico border, mid-1990s avant-garde art trends highly visible in the European and New York art worlds were joined with the work of a young generation of Mexico City artists. The strong support that these two foreign groups received from inSITE organizers to display the unique features of the region via site-specific art shadowed a rich local tradition of Border art, which was barely represented in the exhibition. Further, in its first iteration in Rotterdam, Manifesta sought to define ‘European art’ by ignoring the parallel –yet different- aesthetic traditions in the work of Western and Eastern European artists. Moved by this unifying mission, Manifesta organizers not only obviated the particular features of art made in former Soviet nations, but failed to acknowledge the presence of a strong local art scene in Rotterdam. The colonial aspect of inSITE was based in the preference of art made in Europe, New York, and Mexico’s capital over aesthetic programs long active in the region. InSITE colonized the borderlands making territory visible via the language of foreign artists, thus occluding local forms of meaning attribution to place via art. Manifesta’s colonial nature is more visible in its *neutralizing* effect of art made in former Soviet nations, translating the latter to the reception standards of Western European art audiences via the exhibition conventions of this art world.

Like all other forms of coloniality, those briefly outlined here are sustained in institutions, actors, processes of meaning making, and ideologies of *civilization*. They require conversion to new moral orders and the production of narratives of tradition. Each of the following chapters provide a detailed analysis of their institutional aspect, their curatorial processes of meaning making, and the underlying belief –motivated by different political ideologies in each- that renewed and more inclusive art categories would lead to conciliation between peoples. We need wider historical distance to grasp the actual impact of the planet-wide aesthetic colonization by the Euro-American neo-avant-garde program that accelerated in the early 1990s. Today I can only provide an analysis of the institutional formations that worked as early outposts for this colonizing enterprise in Cuba, the US/Mexico borderlands, and Europe.

The belief that shared aesthetic codes would lead to the resolution of conflicts between peoples has been a constant presence of other colonization processes through history. For example, this belief moved as well the reinforcement of the Counter-Reformation aesthetic program<sup>75</sup> along the territories of the Spanish Empire during the first globalization of the 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The conflict, in this case, was the interest of the Spanish Crown to subject indigenous populations in the American continent to forced labor for the Crown’s exclusive exploitation of indigenous natural resources. Peruvian philosopher Aníbal Quijano explains how as part of the Spanish Crown’s broader mission to break down the identities of the colonized populations and assert its dominance over them, colonized people “were not allowed to practice their needs and faculties of visual and plastic objectivation, but only and exclusively with and through the patterns of visual and plastic expression of the dominators”.<sup>76</sup> Together with the

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<sup>75</sup> The Counter-Reformation aesthetic program, also known as Baroque, was a series of aesthetic conventions that followed the regulations of religious and civic life agreed on between the Spanish Crown and the Vatican in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The agreements signed in the Council of Trent (1545-1563, ratified in Madrid in 1574) and the Council of Toledo (1582) were a direct response to the threat that the Northern European Lutheran Reform posed to the hegemony of Catholic faith in Europe and the Spanish Empire.

<sup>76</sup> Quijano, Aníbal. “Colonialidad Del Poder, Cultura y Comocimiento En América Latina.” *Anuario Mariateguiano* 9, no. 9 (1997): 113–21.

imposition of metropolitan aesthetic codes in the colonies came the shaming and persecution of practices that followed local aymara, aztec, or quechua conventions. Slight deviations from the norm were tolerated as sign of local authenticity. Thus, although Latin American Baroque art follows the patterns of Spanish Baroque, slight thematic and formal variations signified their distance from the metropolitan canon –and the extent of metropolitan dominance. This reinforcement of Spanish Counter-Reformation aesthetics in the colonies happened via the dissemination of these aesthetic conventions in schools, monasteries, and workshops, as well as via their selection for display in the monumental architectures of the colonial capitals and, even, their shipment back to the metropolis as symbols of successful *culturization* of the Indian.

Similarly, most representations of Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Oceania found inside 19<sup>th</sup> Century world fairs reproduced Eurocentric exotizations of these territories. Productions of the non-European ‘other’ were accomplished with the combination of material culture, images of foreign territories, and sometimes even actual people from non-European cultures. These productions fell within the Orientalist knowledge-production framework that Edward Said has described as the European disciplining of politics, society, and culture in the Orient.<sup>77</sup> Timothy Mitchell’s term ‘world-as-exhibition’ further reinforces the idea that international exhibitions were the public face of the period’s Orientalist network.<sup>78</sup> to illustrate, Debra Hanson explains how the Tunisian section of the Crystal Palace exhibition received acclaimed support because it was organized after the form of a *bazaar*. The section featured a selection of garments, dresses, and fabrics “indicative of the peculiar characteristics of Oriental taste and design”.<sup>79</sup> This array of material culture was supplemented with the presence of a Tunisian man and a boy dressed in

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<sup>77</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Book, 2003)

<sup>78</sup> Timothy Mitchel “The World as Exhibition”, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31, 2 \*April 1989). Timothy Mitchel, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)

<sup>79</sup> *Official Catalogue*, cited in Debra Hanson, “East meets West”, in Raizman, David, and Ethan Robey, eds. *Expanding Nationalisms at World’s Fairs*. New York: Routledge, 2018.



typical Tunisian fashion. After her visit, writer Charlotte Brontë compared the Crystal Palace exhibition to the *Arabian Nights*.

This slight deviation into one case of aesthetic colonization in the early modern period supports my argument that the proliferation of contemporary art biennials since the 1990s is a symptom of the growing Euro-American planetary hegemony. The failure of the Bienal de La Habana to resist the advance of the global contemporary art world into Cuba, and the success of inSITE and Manifesta to change the aspect of 'Border art' and 'European art' in the art world imagination happened in parallel to the steady settlement of neoliberalism in Eastern Europe, Mexico and, albeit at a slower pace, even socialist Cuba. It is no coincidence that changes towards market-reliant economic policy were in place in these regions in the mid to late 1990s. The three following historical chapters clarify the tight bond between the ideologies of modernization held by regional elites and the formalization of these three exhibitions.

### **Global designs and the geopolitics of knowledge.**

The geopolitics of knowledge come forward in this comparative study of the extent of the Euro-American neo-avant-garde colonization of other aesthetic traditions. Much like in scientific production, art historical knowledge production is –still today – centered around 'art capitals' in the U.S. and Western Europe. Despite the 'global contemporary art' industry's success in anchoring itself in big urban centers of neoliberal power like Mexico City –an anchoring that can in this case be partly explained through inSITE's impact in the Mexican avant-garde scene, see chapter 3 – cities like New York, Los Angeles, Berlin, Amsterdam, and London hold the epistemic privilege within the planet-wide industry. Experts in these centers ultimately consider and produce new aesthetic categories and theories. The latter are formalized, conventionalized,

and institutionalized in museums and biennials around those centers, to later be incorporated by similar events further away towards the limits of Empire. (A highly visible Spanish artist of my generation participated last year in *La bienal del fin del mundo* (2017) in the Chilean Atacama desert. She bragged enthusiastically, upon her return, of the wonders of installing her sound-piece “where there was nothing else”.)

In his analysis of inSITE’s impact in the social fabric of the US/Mexico borderlands, George Yúdice describes a landscape of uneven distribution of knowledge production that is, for inSITE organizers, fertile soil for the implementation of collaborative art proposals. In his words, the “‘reconfiguration of space’ and new knowledge of the two cities are seen by the curators as political acts that generate ‘new cultural articulations’”.<sup>80</sup> This differential between both sides of the international border, not always directly addressed by participating artists, is seen by curators as a resource to be exploited, a source of symbolic value or, in Yúdice’s terminology “culture’s expediency”.<sup>81</sup>

It would be wrong to imply that the art biennial is an a priori defined cultural form meant to be implemented in diverse locations with no acknowledgment of its surrounding locality. Empirical data analyzed in the following chapters shows the art biennial as a design that is flexible and adaptable to different sociopolitical scenarios such as San Diego and Tijuana, La Habana, and Rotterdam. However, as a form of exhibition making and as a space of epistemological production, all biennials of contemporary art claim specific art exhibitions as their immediate referents: the Venice Biennale (Italy, 1895 – ongoing), the Bienal de Sao Paulo (Brazil, 1951 – ongoing), and Kassel’s documenta (Germany, 1955 – ongoing). Like I explain in

<sup>80</sup> George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture. Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) p. 302

<sup>81</sup> George Yúdice describes how, under cultural and economic globalization, culture becomes an expedience and is exploited as such by different cultural and social actors. With regards to the concrete case of inSITE, Yúdice draws parallel lines between the exhibition and *maquiladoras*, sweatshop factories in the Southern side of the US/Mexico border that have emerged since the 1960s under different deregulatory legislative frameworks. George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture. Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003)

the opening sections of this chapter, each of these first three art biennials were created at moments when renewed political discourses of national unity joined the implementation of modernization programs by regional elites. Yet this cultural form was conceived in the West (Western Europe or regions, like Brazil in the 1950s, where the national project followed US-bred modernization programs). A Western conception that, via its implementation in other regions came, ultimately, to receive the attribute of 'global'. Argentinian decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo uses the term 'global designs' to speak of the reception and incorporation of Western cultural forms in local contexts. His understanding of the local is wide enough to accommodate both Latin American and local European contexts as objects of colonization: "I am not, therefore, setting a stage in which local histories are those of the colonized countries, or Third World, and global designs are located in the colonizer countries of the First World. Global designs, in other words, are brewed, so to speak, in the local histories of metropolitan countries; they are implemented, exported, and enacted differently in particular places".<sup>82</sup> This geography responds, for him, to the loss of protagonism of the nation-state since the mid 1990s. Instead of nation states, it is trans-national corporations and polities, like the art world in our case, who are performing the work of identity making on a global scale.

The global art biennial is one such global design. Like the next chapters show, the biennial has the power to colonize Third World local histories (La Habana) and First World local histories (Rotterdam) alike. During the 1990s, it advanced the aesthetic program of raising post-Cold War international elites. Acting as institutional vessel for the spread of 'global contemporary art' – which, like I explain elsewhere, is an enriched form of 1960s/1970s Euro-American neo-avant-garde art as it has been received and modified in different local histories – the global art biennial marks the reach of neoliberal colonization.

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<sup>82</sup> Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) p. 65

## The hubris of the zero point.

Today, curators of global biennials live in the Western centers of the art world, from where they temporarily relocate to direct these major events upon commission. Residence in Western art centers legitimates curatorial exercises of value attribution to art objects via narrative production. Yet by producing the epistemology while, simultaneously, belonging to it, experts in the Western art centers suffer from what Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez calls “the hubris of the zero point”, that is, “the impression that knowledge-making has no geo-political location and that its location is in an ethereal place”.<sup>83</sup> This Western-centric propensity towards universalism is more clearly apparent in the ideologies of cosmopolitanism fueling each biennial. It dates back to the Kantian articulation of aesthetic judgment discussed elsewhere in this dissertation.

In the global contemporary art world, Western-centric blindness to epistemological colonization is often addressed with apparently corrective solutions at the institutional and human level. Institutionally, the form of the art biennial has proven to be a successful ‘package’ for the deployment of Western influence. Further, the training of local experts into the linguistic and industrial conventions of the Euro-American neo-avant-garde legacy is a successful tactic. Like the following chapters show, young actors outside the Western art capitals face this decision at some point of their career: do I stay, solidify my reputation in the local scene, or do I leave, master the literacy of the industry’s language, adopt its conventions, and develop a global reputation? By choosing the latter, the artist, curator, or critic “*comes closer to being a real human being*”<sup>84</sup>, to use Fanon’s terms, – or a real curator – strapped of the conventions of their local history, yet conversant enough in them so as to filter other local actors who will

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<sup>83</sup> Cited in Mignolo, Walter D. “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 8 (2009): 159–81. See, also, Castro-Gómez, Santiago (2007) ‘The Missing Chapter of Empire: Postmodern Re – organization of Coloniality and Post-Fordist Capitalism’, *Cultural Studies* 21(2–3): 428–48.

<sup>84</sup> Fanon, Frantz (1967 [1952]) *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lum Karkmann. New York: Grove Press

access global spaces of enunciation. This double bind conditioning the ethics of organic intellectuals is explored in detail later in this chapter and in chapters 2 and 3.

### **Provincializing Europe.**

Why did I include a European case in a study of the contemporary art biennial as colonial institutionality? To subject the blindness of Western-centrism to an analysis of its impact in its very space of enunciation adds universalizing evidence to all already valid arguments about its coloniality made from outside the West. The problem, thus, gets reformulated: it is no longer only an outward colonization, from within the West towards the rest of the world. At times of the demise of the nation-state and the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, the spread of neoliberalism as economic policy and form of life has taken planetary dimensions. The problem is, now, the conflict of the colonization of local histories – within and beyond Europe – by trans-national corporations via global designs.

I take on the task of documenting how specific cultural organizations – art biennials – worked to naturalize the superiority of Euro-American neo-avant-garde aesthetic programs over local histories of art making. In San Diego, Tijuana, Rotterdam, and La Habana these local histories were superseded by foreign, *modern*, aesthetic programs imported via the global art biennial. Yet, how did these *modern* art forms take root in these regions? Dipesh Chakrabarty calls for 'provincializing Europe' as a path to elucidating the historical processes that naturalized European Enlightenment reason as a superior form of reason and thus justified its export and imposition in other parts of the world. Its derivatives, in the form of nation-states, democracy, citizens' rights, and others, were instrumental in processes of decolonization –like in Mexico and Cuba, with their 1917 and 1959 *Revoluciones*- yet also altered local social fabrics in such a way

that, since, they are 'naturally' receptive to subsequent Western cultural colonial enterprises. The West, in its historically privileged status as center of art historical knowledge production, distinguished its own avant-garde art production as 'modern', 'new', under the logic of avant-garde newness guiding the production of commodities, first, and spectacles, later.

Chakrabarty says,

"First, [historians must recognize] that Europe's acquisition of the adjective 'modern' for itself is an integral part of European imperialism within global history; and, second, the understanding that this equating of a certain version of Europe with 'modernity' is not the work of Europeans alone; third-world nationalisms, as modernizing ideologies par excellence, have been equal partners in the process".<sup>85</sup>

"I ask for a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices, the part it plays in collusion with the narratives of citizenship in assimilating to the projects of the modern state all other possibilities of human solidarity."<sup>86</sup>

The victory of one modernity over others, Chakrabarty claims, rests on the practice of coercive mechanisms. Here is helpful to remember Antonio Gramsci's analysis of the formation of hegemony in the Italian post-Risorgimento period that I explain later in this chapter. In the most recent European unification process, linguistic diversity has been respected. However, other forms of cultural production have been subject to the definition of overarching standards of Europeanness. Chapter 4 shows how Manifesta, an exhibition of contemporary art, made significant efforts to feature art from all corners of the EU and the former Soviet Eastern republics in its Eastern limits. In this inclusive gesture, exhibition tactics to "tame" potentially disruptive Eastern European artworks were devised so as to guarantee art world and Rotterdam audiences non-conflictive aesthetic experiences.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History." In *Provincializing Europe. Colonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Press, Princeton University, 2000) p.43

<sup>86</sup> Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History." In *Provincializing Europe. Colonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Press, Princeton University, 2000) p.45

<sup>87</sup> *Modern Western art was – is – institutionally produced and exported. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and until today, different programs of international cultural cooperation designed in the U.S., Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Spain, to name a few countries, have fostered the implementation of modern Western art*

## Epistemic disobedience.

Refusing the validity of epistemic claims by calling into question the practices producing them can open spaces of dissent and, potentially, reform the conventions underlying knowledge production. In chapters 2 and 4 I describe instances of epistemic disobedience against the formation of the Western avant-garde canon. In Cuba, state and culture officials devised a complex operation of epistemic disobedience with the Bienal. The exhibition was an idea of Fidel Castro, who believed that contesting Western dominance in the space of avant-garde art was part of the Third World's mission of resistance to new forms of colonial influence. The unquestionable success of this exhibition was sustained in local forms of institutional, community, and individual solidarity. Their disobedience lasted until national resources were chocked by external causes such as the U.S. embargo and internal forces such as increased corruption, initiating a state of permanent economic crisis known as the Special Period.

In Rotterdam, members of the local art scene disagreed with what, in their eyes, was Manifesta's imposition of its aesthetic model onto a city with rich local cultural production. Like chapter 4 tells, these actors proposed their own counter agenda programming encounters with African migrant hip-hop groups, rave crowds gathering in the industrial docks, squatters, and community-based artists. In an announcement at a local art magazine they wrote: "NESTWORK wants to focus attention on the place where work is done. [...] Every space – and therefore also the space of the artwork and the artistic activity – has its own history. [...] The space already exists before the guest arrives".<sup>88</sup> Further, Manifesta had been ideated and was governed from Amsterdam, reproducing in the space of cultural politics the historical rivalry between both cities

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conventions in the Latin American continent. See, for example, the involvement of the CIA and New York's MoMA in the export of U.S. abstract art during the 1940s-1950s to Brazil, Venezuela, and Cuba. Likewise, ventures such as Manifesta show how, since the demise of the USSR, art scenes in Eastern Europe, first, and Southern Europe, later, entered the receiving end of the aesthetic colonizing mission.

<sup>88</sup> NestWORK announcement, *Lokaal Europa*. Date non-available, estimated early 1996. Reproduced in Jeanne van Heeswijk (ed.) *NesTWORK. Manifesta 1, Rotterdam 1996. activities. Blueprint* (Rotterdam: NestWORK, 1998) p. 23

(in the Dutch national imaginary, Amsterdam is the seat of the Crown, the government, and trade wealth, while Rotterdam is the industrial working class port). Yet this frontal denounce of Manifesta's colonization of the local art scene stopped once the organization agreed to include NesTWORK's project into their own programming.

Walter Mignolo suggests that, in order to carry out successful attempts at epistemic disobedience, the loci of knowledge enunciation must be taken into question. For him, it is the rules of the game that need modification. He explains: "As far as controversies and interpretations remain within the same rules of the game (terms of the conversation), the control of knowledge is not called into question. And in order to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the knower rather than on the known. It means to go to the very assumptions that sustain locus enunciations".<sup>89</sup> Yet, how to pursue a project of epistemic disobedience from within a historically Western-centric space like the 'global contemporary art' industry?

I will close this section with a fieldwork anecdote. During my fieldwork in Amsterdam, in November 2017, I attended a three-day symposium for art world professionals. In keeping with current global contemporary art world trends, one of the round tables discussed the possibilities of decolonizing the art institution. To my surprise, one of the three conveners was a museum director of a Southern Dutch city. Wearing an edgy minimalist black baggy dress and silver shiny sneakers, she argued that recent cuts in national cultural budgets were a big impediment to implementing decolonial programs in Netherlands art institutions. A young, energetic curator from New York who acted as moderator, rolled the microphone up in the air (which was hid inside a big stuffed fabric cube, resembling a dice) to an audience made, mostly, of young European artists and independent curators. The conversation about decolonial curatorial work

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<sup>89</sup> Mignolo, Walter D. "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom." *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 8 (2009): 159–81.



morphed into a conversation about economic precarity in the Netherlands. Two weeks later, in Rotterdam, I participated in an informal lunch-time conversation hosted at Witte de With, an avant-garde art center named after an 18<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch colonial magnate and, coincidentally, one of the venues for Manifesta in 1996. The prompt was to discuss ways in which this center could deal with its colonial heritage. “Changing its name?”, someone suggested. “Hiring curators from the former colonies?” “Curating art by racial minorities in Rotterdam?” The institution’s representative, one of its associate curators, was curious about these suggestions, yet they didn’t convince him, he said, as he was reluctant to sacrifice quality standards in their exhibitions for the sake of a change in the institution’s identity. These two experiences led me to wonder: are today’s trends of decolonizing the art institution – and academia – merely performative? Are we witnessing yet another rhetorical move by a field historically savvy in incorporating the visual aspect of that which is alien to it, *just to look modern*? Local histories of attempts to counter colonial influence, such as the organization of the Bienal de La Habana and Border artists’ denunciations of appropriation of their terminology by the San Diego art establishment, must be brought before Northern European museum directors complaining about slight museum budget cuts and rising young curators concerned about losing their jobs to racialized experts from Indonesia and Surinam.

#### Section 4: Curating heritage, organizing consent.

In a 1926 attempt to clarify the Italian Communist Party's position on the "Southern question", Antonio Gramsci described a relation of colonial exploitation by Italy's industrial North of the nation's agrarian South. In it, the latter's disintegrated social fabric was exploited for the production of raw materials to be transformed in the new Northern factories.<sup>90</sup> This coloniality lied on the reinforcement in the North of an image of the South as culturally and biologically backwards, as well as on the formal backing of this difference by the newly unified Italian state and the clergy,<sup>91</sup> articulators of the legislative and moral orders. Key in the preservation of this relation was, as well, the role of rural intellectuals who showed a twofold class affiliation with, on one hand, Southern rural landowners and clergy and, on the other, Northern industrialists. The Southern rural intellectual came from the rural bourgeoisie: landowners who did not work the land but leased it to peasants, yet they sought to maximize revenue by disassociating themselves with the latter. Like Northern capitalists, they owned the means of production and provided functionaries to the state. This figure played the "function of intermediary between the peasant and the administration",<sup>92</sup> and gained political power in the transaction.

Yet economic coloniality is always cultural coloniality as well. In their role as intermediaries between peasants and national administration, this new intellectual that unifies the interests of industrialists and landowners was also a translator between the world-views and forms of meaning-making of the former and those of the exploited landless peasantry. In this context, the myth of Southern backwardness transpired as well into the project for linguistic

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<sup>90</sup> Antonio Gramsci, "Some aspects of the Southern Question", Unfinished manuscript, October 1926, in *Selections from Political Writings* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978).

<sup>91</sup> The cultural, political, and economic unification of Italy, a process called the *Risorgimento* (1815-1871 approx.), resulted in the Italian nation-state as we know it today. Despite its unification, Italy inherited the fragmentation of its social fabric characteristic of the previous periods.

<sup>92</sup> Antonio Gramsci, "Some aspects of the Southern Question", Unfinished manuscript, October 1926, in *Selections from Political Writings* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978).

unification in the new Italian state. Linguistic forms of the North were amplified throughout the national territory via state-sponsored printed literature, schooling, etc. Northern urban dwellers disregarded the linguistic forms spoken at the industrial centers by recent Southern migrants as signs of their cultural underdevelopment. Gramsci's attempts to make sense of the Southern Question gave language a prominent role, as it was the cultural lubricant that sustained North-South coloniality in recently unified Italy.

This relation of North-South economic coloniality is, however, not exclusive of post-Risorgimento Italy. Post Cold War geopolitical reorderings and changes in media technologies have kept economic and cultural coloniality alive. Geographer David Harvey has documented the use of media by financially conservative sectors in the organization of consent that preceded the implementation of neoliberal policies in the United Kingdom and the U.S. during the 1970s, and in nations such as Mexico and Brazil in the 1990s.<sup>93</sup> These series of reforms ultimately led to the formation of 'neoliberal states' across the globe after the disappearance of the Soviet Union.<sup>94</sup> The planet-wide spread of neoliberalism has resulted in the rise of inequality between and within nations. In this scenario, Harvey remarks that producers of 'common-sense' are closely identified with capitalist elites. He explains that "the activities of capital circulation and accumulation are refracted through actual discursive practices, understandings, and behaviors", which ultimately help shape what he calls 'uneven geographical development'.<sup>95</sup> Culture is, still today, a key battleground between competing class interests on the local and international level.

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<sup>93</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism. Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2004).

<sup>94</sup> Harvey writes: "The fundamental mission of the neoliberal state is to create a 'good business climate' and therefore to optimize conditions for capital accumulation no matter what the consequences for employment or social well-being. This contrasts with the social democratic state that is committed to full employment and the optimization of the well-being of all its citizens subject to the condition of maintaining adequate and stable rates of capital accumulation". David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism. Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2004). p. 25

<sup>95</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism. Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2004). p. 87

## Gramscian theory of the 'passive revolution'.

Gramsci's perspective on culture grew from his embrace of the positions of turn of the century Italian spatial linguists Matteo Bartoli and Graziadio Isaia Ascoli. Like them, Gramsci was declaredly opposed to the positivism of the German Neo-Grammarians School.<sup>96</sup> Bartoli, a teacher of Gramsci, understood language to be the product of historical change. In his model, languages transform as they enter in conflict with other languages, and a battle for linguistic domination – not always violent – takes place. Bartoli spoke of the 'irradiation' of a word to signal the cultural power of the speaker.<sup>97</sup> The reach of a particular term marks the influence of its speaker group. In this model, language is always cultural and historical, and is in permanent change as it encounters other linguistic systems through time.

In this context, Gramsci criticized Esperanto for being a metaphor for elitist cultural domination. A language fabricated by Polish Jewish ophthalmologist L. L. Zamenhof in the 1870s, Esperanto proposed a pragmatic response to the laborious process of translation and learning of different national languages that an increasingly economically interconnected Europe demanded. For Zamenhof, Esperanto opened a modern cosmopolitan space that promised world harmony and international integration. Yet Gramsci saw Esperanto's top-down nature as a clear example of an arbitrarily created cultural norm formulated by experts disconnected from the situated and practiced uses of language. Contrary to this case, according to Gramsci, language change should happen bottom-up, and must reflect the historical reality of speakers. Top-down languages curtail speakers' creativity and delegitimize their practices of meaning-making.

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<sup>96</sup> The German Neo-Grammarians School proposed a scientific model for the study of language. Their unit of study was the idiolect, subject to isolation within a person and hence subject to observation. They valued the sound level of language as autonomous from syntax and semantics, and they considered it the most important level of study of a language. The Neo-Grammarians School sought to formulate a universal model for the historical change of language sound.

<sup>97</sup> Peter Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

Together with the Rissorgimento and the Southern Question, the case of Esperanto is for Gramsci yet another example of what he termed 'passive revolution'. In words of Gramsci scholar Peter Ives, 'passive revolutions' are "processes by which subaltern people submit to top-down impositions of specific policies and more general world-views or ideologies, which are in conflict or friction with their own lives, experiences, and interests".<sup>98</sup> This takes place thanks to the subaltern groups' identification with the ideas and interests of the dominant classes. Moments of passive revolution secure the existing distribution of power instead of subverting it. Passive revolutions are "revolutions from above", they lack mass participation, and involve "elite-engineered social political reform that draws on foreign capital and associated ideas, while lacking a national popular base".<sup>99</sup> Adam David Norton and Alex Callinicos argue that passive revolutions are techniques of state formation and techniques of state maintenance.<sup>100</sup>

Yet passive revolutions are not lineal regular phenomena. As trajectories for the consolidation of the status quo and the preservation of power distribution in a society, they are dialectical historical processes: in them, instances of revolution and restoration supersede each other.<sup>101</sup> Their materialization depends on the relation of forces at play between contending groups, who seek to realign themselves strategically. Following his reading of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, Adam David Morton argues that it is through passive revolutions that "aspects of the social relations of capitalist development are instituted or expanded, resulting in both a 'revolutionary' rupture and [the] 'restoration' of social relations".<sup>102</sup> These ruptures and restorations, characteristic of systemic changes within capitalism, occur in moments of capitalist

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<sup>98</sup> Peter Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* (London: Pluto Press, 2004). p. 58

<sup>99</sup> Adam David Morton, "The Continuum of Passive Revolution." *Capital & Class* 34, no. 3 (2010): 315–42. p. 317

<sup>100</sup> Alex Callinicos, "Bourgeois revolutions and historical materialism". *International Socialism*, second series 43 (1989) 113–71. Adam David Morton, "The Continuum of Passive Revolution." *Capital & Class* 34, no. 3 (2010): 315–42. p. 317

<sup>101</sup> Adam David Morton, "The Continuum of Passive Revolution." *Capital & Class* 34, no. 3 (2010): 315–42. p. 317. Adam David Morton, "Change within continuity: The political economy of democratic transition in Mexico". *New Political Economy* 10(2) (2005) 181–202. Adam David Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007)

<sup>102</sup> Adam David Morton, "The Continuum of Passive Revolution." *Capital & Class* 34, no. 3 (2010): 315–42. p. 317.

crisis, such as the 1920s-1930s, time of Gramsci's writings,<sup>103</sup> and the 1990s, when the three art biennials that I study took place.

During these systemic crises, elites seek to organize consent to perpetuate their domination, and they do so wielding aspects of culture, such as language and art, into their favor. In this search for hegemony, language and art play a predominant role because they provide structures of meaning-making with more or less 'irradiation', signaling the influence reach of those who coin them.<sup>104</sup> The metaphor of Esperanto as a form of top-down imposition of a new language, plus Gramsci's emphasis on framing the Southern Question in cultural terms so as to overcome economic determinism, foreground a notion of culture as the space where antagonisms between social groups are fought. This notion of culture as a battlefield, where powerful and subaltern engage in negotiations about race, gender, and nation, will be recovered in the 1980s by British cultural theorist Stuart Hall (see further in this section).<sup>105</sup> Within this framework, culture is the scenario of the battle for hegemony.

During the 1990s, the formation of 'global contemporary art' as an increasingly influential repertoire of aesthetic forms, raises crucial parallels with the role of Italian language in the consolidation of North-South coloniality within modern unified Italy. Let's remember here concerns about the avant-garde's complex relationship with power expressed by Bryan-Wilson,

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<sup>103</sup> The historical context for the formulation of the concept was marked by the consolidation of what Gramsci called 'Americanism', a moment of capitalist expansion provoked by the fordist reorganization of labor. It was in early 20<sup>th</sup> century 'Americanism' that profit maximization became an unquestionable point of departure for capitalism. Since then, capitalist accumulation has grown rooted on the shared belief that workers and industrialists need to cooperate to achieve this systemic goal. This relation has been up-kept by the reinforcement of the belief that surplus value would, ultimately, be redistributed so as to improve the life conditions of working classes. This long 'passive revolution', which has been taking place on a planetary scale since, has been partly supported on the use of culture to transform the identifications of subaltern groups so that they aspire to defend the goals of the dominant class.

<sup>104</sup> See, for instance, the rapid world-wide spread of the neologism "fake-news" after the 2016 US Presidential race. The neologism was originally disregarded as a symptom of non-educated mistrust of knowledge sources that incarnate the Enlightenment values of science, democracy, and nation-making, and was thus labeled as 'backwards' and 'uninformed'. However, it now populates global media, a sign of the term's – and its inventor's – irradiation.

<sup>105</sup> Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular". In R. Samuel (ed.) *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1981)

Kester, and Alberro that I discussed earlier in this chapter. For them, this bond made avant-garde art a key potential tool in the construction of hegemony. Like the new normative grammar of Italian, government institutions, architects of moral orders, and local elites collaborated into the constitution of 'global contemporary art' and its spread across the planet. The scope of action was now larger. Motivated by the renewed cosmopolitanisms of the post-Cold War era, this new artistic language would incorporate a diversity of aesthetic traditions from different parts of the world – yet, as this dissertation shows, the formation of this category reproduced the interests of local and international elites –. I do not want to imply any Machiavellic intentions behind this phenomenon: the study of the constitution of 'global contemporary art' as a new artistic grammar at times of global passive revolution, is a clear example of how seamless the organization of consent and the reproduction of class interests can be.

As I state elsewhere in this chapter, a chief aspect of curatorial labor is the production of narrative justifications for the valuing of objects as art. Biennial curators' mastery in justifying why certain objects are, in fact, 'Border art', 'European art', or 'Third World art' (all later subcategories of 'Global Contemporary art') is what made inSITE, Manifesta, and la Biental de La Habana successful organizations in the production of convincing representations of their host regions' repositioning in the new international geopolitical order. The narratives behind those three art categories included art historical articulations that justified these categories' natural proximity (in the case of 'Border Art' and 'European art') or nuanced difference (in the case of 'Third World art') with the Euro-American artistic canon. The following chapters are lengthy analysis of these rhetorical and organizational manouvres.

This tension between objective and subjective historical conditions is central in Gramsci's articulation of the 'passive revolution':

“[...] it should be noted that it is necessary to pose with great precision the problem which in certain historiographical tendencies is called that of the relations between the objective conditions and the subjective conditions of an historical event. It seems obvious that the so-called subjective conditions can never be missing when the objective conditions exist, in as much as the distinction involved is simply one of a didactic character. Consequently it is on the size and concentration of subjective forces that discussion can bear, and hence on the dialectical relation between conflicting subjective forces.”<sup>106</sup>

Part of the mastery of curatorial narrative justification is the call for a two fold bond between the art object and a specific aesthetic tradition: avant-garde art objects continue the tradition while introducing a formal innovation in it. Continuity is a key aspect in the organization of consent also within art history because, in words of Gramsci, it “tends to create a ‘tradition’ – understood of course in an active and not a passive sense: as continuity in continuous development, but ‘organic development’.”<sup>107</sup> Following, I discuss the role that art biennials play in the production of tradition and the specific roles of curators in the organization of consent.

### **Curating heritage but – *whose heritage?***

In the three cases of study of this dissertation the crafting of supra-national identities joins, in the biennial form, efforts to re-write regional history in the light of early 1990s international geo-political events. For Caroline A. Jones, through repetition every two years, biennials engage in the production and “preservation of memory”.<sup>108</sup> This historiographical nature of curatorial work is rooted, in the global contemporary art biennial, on the legitimacy that ‘heritage’ provides, connecting the present to selectively re-claimed pasts. Further, Indian art

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<sup>106</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971, 2012) p.113

<sup>107</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971, 2012) p.195

<sup>108</sup> Jones, Caroline A.. *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (University of Chicago Press, 2017)



historian Geeta Kapur warns that seemingly aseptic categories such as ‘tradition’ as patrimony and ‘contemporaneity’ are strictly bound to state-making.<sup>109</sup>

Jamaican theorist Stuart Hall’s understanding of heritage as a discursive practice of governmentality is especially relevant for this study. For Hall, the preservation and production of heritage responds to the needs of national elites to root their power into selective representations of the past. Speaking of late 20<sup>th</sup> Century United Kingdom, for Hall “[h]eritage becomes the material embodiment of the spirit of the nation, a collective representation of the British version of tradition, a concept pivotal to the lexicon of English virtues”.<sup>110</sup> Hall’s concept of heritage grows from the work of David Scott and Raymond Williams. From Scott, Hall recovers his notion of tradition: authoritative narrative structures that link past with present, community, and identity.<sup>111</sup> From Williams, the emphasis on the distance between experienced pasts and their fragmented recollection in the present.<sup>112</sup> This operation, that Williams calls ‘selective traditions’, leads for Hall to the “selective canonization” of culture, simultaneously upholding a unilateral version of history and erasing the trace of competing perspectives. In England, as in Cuba, Rotterdam, San Diego and Tijuana in the early to mid 1990s, the production of heritage via art biennials engraves the moral and political program of local elites into cultural productions that are in turn upheld as authoritative formulations of a region’s present before the broader public.

While the selective retelling of the past is a spontaneous practice common to all of us in our everyday lives, its practice on the national level is sustained in institutions, experts, and knowledges that, while instinctive, are far from involuntary. Hall uses the word ‘heritage’ to

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<sup>109</sup> Geeta Kapur, “Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories” in Rachel Weiss (ed.) *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Aftreall, 2011).

<sup>110</sup> Hall, Stuart. “Whose Heritage? Un-Settling ‘the Heritage’, Re-Imagining the Postnation.” *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of Race* 8822 (2004): 21–31. doi:10.4324/9780203339978.

<sup>111</sup> See David Scott, *Re-Fashioning Futures: Criticism After Post-Coloniality*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>112</sup> See Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1963)

designate “the whole complex of organizations, institutions, and practices devoted to the preservation and presentation of culture and the arts – art galleries, specialist collections, public and private, museums of all kinds (general, survey or themed, historical or scientific, national or local) and sites of special historical interest”.<sup>113</sup> This list amounts to a rich roster of highly specialized resources. In my study I show how in sociopolitical contexts as diverse as socialist Cuba, social-democratic European Union, and neoliberal US/Mexico borderlands, organizations, experts, politicians, artifacts, and mobilized audiences were put in the service of changing a region’s relationship to its past in the service of specific political agendas. In these cases, new categories such as ‘Third World avant-garde art’, ‘European art’, and ‘Border art’ aimed to substitute previously held representations of the Third World, Europe, and the US/Mexico borderlands. Citing Stuart Hall once again, “what the nation ‘means’ is an on-going project, under constant reconstruction”.<sup>114</sup>

Yet we should ask: who is heritage for? Who are the mobilized audiences complicit in the validation of these three analytic categories and, per their addition, in the ultimate formation of what has come to be known as ‘global contemporary art’? And, last: how can contemporary art –which is, in short, art made in the present- behave as heritage?

### **Biennial audiences.**

Answers to my first question will be found in detail in each of the three following chapters. Let’s however take now a general look at the target audiences for these three art biennials. The most democratically-oriented of all, the Bienal de La Habana, successfully joined artists, intellectuals, and political officials with the broader public. As chapter 2 shows, public

<sup>113</sup> Hall, Stuart. “Whose Heritage? Un-Settling ‘the Heritage’, Re-Imagining the Postnation.” *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of Race* 8822 (2004): 21–31. doi:10.4324/9780203339978.

<sup>114</sup> Hall, Stuart. “Whose Heritage? Un-Settling ‘the Heritage’, Re-Imagining the Postnation.” *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of Race* 8822 (2004): 21–31. doi:10.4324/9780203339978.

attendance to the event in 1984 was estimated in 200,000. While most biennial-goers were local *habaneros*, the event attracted a big number of artists, critics, and curators from around the world. What they all shared in common was their support to Cuba's internationalist program and the emancipatory optimism that the country still symbolized against the advance of capitalism in the late 1980s. Audiences of inSITE, in its 1994 and 1997 iterations, also came from within and outside the art world. The event hoped to attract publics from the Los Angeles and Mexico City's art scenes as well as the local one, and it was widely advertised in American specialized art media. With its site-specific installations, it reached publics hitherto alien to contemporary art spaces such as unauthorized border crossers, everyday commuters at the San Ysidro port of entry, or beach-goers in Playas de Tijuana. Last, Manifesta in Rotterdam was probably the most niche event of the three. Both local media and specialized international art press remarked on the exhibition's art world self-referentiality and, as I discuss in chapter 4, its ultimate failure to connect with local audiences.

For the three art biennials audience aspirations combined an idealized selective target audience with wider attendance of non-expert visitors. Reaching extensively into a region's population meant broader distribution of the exhibitions' discourses among the general public. These three art biennials worked as consensual spaces which, even in cases where the public disliked what they saw, they had at least consented to validating the shows' curatorial discourse as subjects interpellated by the cultural institutional apparatus at place in each case. In inSITE, La Habana, and Manifesta, art biennials that have increasingly included socially engaged and participatory artworks, consent by audiences also takes the form of active participation in the exhibitions' discourses. Like I have discussed elsewhere, the predominance of socially engaged and community artworks in recent iterations of the Bienal de La Habana has had the two-fold effect of, on one hand, allowing the state to perform as benefactor of the local communities

engaged via these art projects while, on the other, aligning state tourism objectives with the scripted on-ground experiences of international art tourists to the exhibition. I have yet to explore how the inclusion of socially engaged art and participatory artworks in inSITE and Manifesta has opened spaces of public consensual participation into the organizations' discourses.

On the other hand, niche target audiences strengthened each exhibition's political program and its place within the growing international exhibitions calendar. Specialized target audiences in La Habana were international intellectuals and political figures supportive of Cuba's revolutionary ideals. While most of them came from Latin America and Third World countries, left-leaning figures of the European and U.S. art worlds also attended the show. In many cases, their presence helped publicize the Cuban program upon their return home. Key names in the late 1980s U.S. art world such as Dore Ashton and Lucy Lippard published several reports of their experience in La Habana after their visits to the first and second Bienal (1984, 1986). The specialized target audience for inSITE were members of the U.S. and Mexican contemporary art worlds. The festival had been widely advertised in specialized U.S.-based media such as Artforum and Art in America, and Mexican avant-garde publications such as CURARE. To secure the festival's visibility outside the San Diego/Tijuana region, inSITE organizers invited rising and established names from the U.S., European, and Latin American contemporary art scene, like, for example, curators Cuauhtémoc Medina and Ivo Mesquita, artists Anya Gallacio, Rosangela Rennó, Francis Alÿs, Allan Sekula, and Vito Acconci, philosopher Susan Buck-Morss, etc. Last, Manifesta's specialized target audience included artists, intellectuals, and political figures supportive of the post-Maastricht European unification program. This included figures from both Western and Eastern Europe's art worlds, along with some very visible rising names in the international contemporary art scene such as curators

Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Viktor Missiano, and internationally visible artists like Joseph Grigely, Marlene Dumas, Rirkrit Taravanija, and Olaffur Eliasson, among others. In addition, archival documents show that several private tours of Manifesta in Rotterdam were organized for political representatives from participating nations, as well as for guests of the exhibition's main private sponsor, tobacco manufacturer Philip Morris. Idealized target audiences in the three cases were a combination of local elites and intellectuals supportive of the exhibitions' missions.

This double faced nature of biennial audiences supports my framing of contemporary art biennials as forms of heritage. While specialized and elite audiences share with biennial organizers a narrative of the present, participation and engagement of the broader public provides these events with wide-held –yet tacit- consent of their mission. The three following chapters provide a detailed analysis of the congruence between the narratives of progress upheld by local elites in Rotterdam, La Habana, San Diego and Tijuana, and those promoted by the three exhibitions' curatorial teams.

### **Biennials as monuments.**

I would like to return now to my second question of this section: how can a contemporary art biennial behave as heritage? For this purpose I must consider the features of a particular form of heritage: the monument. A form of public art historically tied to nation-building and the celebration of the values of national elites, the monument has been object of intense scrutiny during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some avant-garde aesthetic programs, like Futurist disruptions or the technocratic urban planning ideas of Le Corbusier, shared a spirit of anti-historicism, seeking for the break away with classical orders and their sustaining grammars. Others, such as Mumford, Giedion, and Broszat, were concerned with the dangers that monuments celebrating older

systems of values may face to contemporary society, and have called for either their destruction or their re-framing under renewed moral lenses. Most recently, Suzanne Lacy and Judith Baca have used the term 'cannon in the park' to refer to traditional forms of public art that "display sculptures glorifying a version of national history that exclude[s] large segments of the population".<sup>115</sup> An important aspect of these forms of public art is that they often belong to broader urban renewal and beautification efforts.

In words of art historian James E. Young, "[i]f part of the state's aim, [...] is to create a sense of shared values and ideals, then it will also be the state's aim to create the sense of common memory as foundation for a unified *polis*. Public monuments, national days of commemoration, and shared calendars thus all work to create common *loci* around which seemingly common national identity is forged".<sup>116</sup> Why not include the contemporary art biennial in this list? Unlike earlier biennials such as Venice (1895), Sao Paulo (1957), and documenta (1955), which meant to signify the protagonism of certain nations within different international circuits of art circulation, the three art biennials under scrutiny in this dissertation advertised discourses of supranational unity. Unlike classical monuments, they did not celebrate military victories, but the political 'victories' of regional elites. These included supra-national conciliation programs such as the market-driven North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (1993), the political unification project ratified by the Treaty of Maastricht (1992), and the long-term political alliance between members of the Non-Aligned Bloc (1961).

In her canonical 1979 article "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", art historian Rosalind Krauss remarked on the self-referential character of modern and post-modern monuments. She explained the process of formal abstraction of post-War avant-garde sculpture as a feature inherited from the medium's monumental character. For her, in post-War avant-garde art

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<sup>115</sup> Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994) p. 21

<sup>116</sup> James E. Young, "Memory/Monument", in Robert Nelson, Richard Shiff (eds.), *Critical Terms for Art History* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) p.237

“the new is made comfortable by being made familiar, since it is seen as having gradually evolved from the forms of the past. Historicism works on the new and different to diminish newness and mitigate difference. It makes place for change in our experience by evoking the model of evolution, so that the man who now is can be accepted as being different from the child he once was, by simultaneously being seen –through the unseeable action of the telos- as the same”.<sup>117</sup>

In this fragment, Krauss speaks of two important aspects of the avant-garde artwork. On one hand, she remarks on its inherent claim to the overcoming of artistic impasses by renewing its formal repertoire. On the other is the narrative continuity between present and tradition produced in the operation. Given that contemporary art biennials’ claim for newness – the forging of new identities via the display of new art arranged within innovative organizations – is rooted on a belief of overcoming former forms of art making and celebrating historical change, should we consider them, in a way, as expanded avant-garde monuments?

Under this logic, art biennials are avant-garde organizations, offshoots of the museum institution that have overcome the latter’s ties with the nation state, and become an autonomous organizational type over time. For example, Manifesta’s advisory board launched their opening ceremony in Rotterdam with a manifesto that began: “The need for a new platform for artists was most keenly felt in 1989, after the fall of the Berlin wall. It wasn’t hard to see then that there would be a new need for information, for open discussions, for new infrastructures and alternative exhibition spaces. [...] The demise of the various ancient regimes was not the only motivation for taking a new direction”.<sup>118</sup> Other reasons were the “worn-out” exhibition standards for contemporary art, the need to learn from the mistakes of the Venice Biennale, and the “aim to alter the general mentality over time”.<sup>119</sup> In their portrayal, Manifesta then came as a natural solution for diverse historical necessities. Today’s art biennials, despite some claims otherwise, fail to root in place, and become empty signifiers of newness easily interchangeable in the

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<sup>117</sup> Krauss, Rosalind. “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.” *October* 8 (1979): 30. doi:10.2307/778224.

<sup>118</sup> *Manifesta 1* (Amsterdam: Manifesta Foundation, 1996)

<sup>119</sup> *Manifesta 1* (Amsterdam: Manifesta Foundation, 1996)

service of broader political discourses. Art biennials are tied to history by strong discursive apparatuses that include catalog writers, critics, and other media narratives. These discursive apparatuses have the power to naturalize the newness of these exhibitions claiming direct bonds to remarkable events in regional history. Yet, instead of fulfilling the prefigurative potential of avant-garde art, the monuments celebrate the historical achievements of organizing elites.

### **Curating heritage.**

Heritage not only naturalizes identity identification, aiding in the formation of ‘imagined communities’ (see chapter 4).<sup>120</sup> It also has the potential of naturalizing economic regimes. In this section I explain the relation between the production of heritage objects (such as artworks) and curators as experts who legitimize the presence and mobility of these objects across the globe. I borrow from Luc Boltanski’s and Arnaud Esquerre’s description of the heritage industry under what they call “integral capitalism”.<sup>121</sup>

One social consequence of de-industrialization and the worldwide relocation of the productive sectors is the increased relevance and mobility of luxury objects across the globe. ‘Heritage objects’ or ‘collectibles’ are a sub-category of luxury objects. The latter are defined by their novelty (in relation with a tradition), their price (usually higher than standard objects or assets), their authenticity (they are often markers of national identity), and an aura of exceptionality (unlike standard objects, they are unique or produced in limited copies; they also bare a close relationship with their origin and/or author). Luxury objects are never displayed

<sup>120</sup> ‘Imagined communities’ is a term by Benedict Anderson that remarks on the importance of cultural production to reinforce myths of group unity. Anderson coined it to refer to nation-making processes in post-independence Americas, then adopted in Europe and in the colonial territories. Chapter 4 provides a longer analysis of this term, vis-a-vis the role of Manifesta in the production of a post-Maastricht European identity. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1993).

<sup>121</sup> ‘Integral capitalism’ is, for Boltanski and Esquerre, the contemporary stage of capitalism, characterized by the existence of three different value forms: standard objects, asset objects, and collectable objects. Heritage objects belong to the category of collectables. Luc Boltanski, Arnaud Esquerre, “The Economic Life of Things”, in *The New Left Review*, 98, March- April 2016.



alone; their visibility always denotes their insertion within a specific sphere of circulation and their proximity to specific actors who aid in these objects' distinction. This correlates with earlier sections in this chapter, where I state the institutional nature of art objects. For Boltanski and Esquerre, the circulation of luxury objects is a symptom of the rise of the heritage industry, in which the cultural industries play an important role. Art biennials are part of the cultural industries and are not exempt from being involved in the production of heritage objects.

Yet, how do standard objects become luxury and heritage objects? They need to enter the logic of enrichment. Standard objects gain value as heritage objects by their proximity to different actors whose hierarchical positions in the heritage industry determine their reputation and, by extension, also the reputation of their choices or actions. For example: the difference between a man traveling by plane between Tijuana and San Diego around the Pacific Ocean in twenty days, and an artwork by Belgian artist Francis Alÿs in which he departs from Tijuana to arrive to San Diego twenty days after, is the action's proximity to Mexican curator Olivier Debrouse, who selected this performance to be included in art biennial inSITE 97.

Unlike in earlier stages of capitalism, when the state played a more direct role in the attribution of reputation to actors, value acquisition today is more reliant on the internal hierarchies of each industry – in our case, the global contemporary art industry. In this context of de-industrialization, when the agricultural and factory worker is invisible (is elsewhere), conflicts between working and capitalist classes become less and less visible in the enriched object itself. While traces of social conflict are erased from the heritage object, evidence of its novelty and strong ties to past gain protagonism.

In Boltanski's and Esquerre's model, objects gain value as they change hands. Value, in the art market, has a price. But most importantly, value is established narratively by comparison with other objects in the same sphere. Reputable actors play a determining role in crafting these

narratives. Take, for example, Anya Gallacio's gold leaf interventions at Casino Aguascalientes (Tijuana) for inSITE94. Documents of these actions have, first, a market price or economic value. Secondly, the narratives crafted by inSITE curator Lynda Forsha connect Gallacio's ephemeral interventions with the artist's earlier work on ephemeral nature constructions, with her belonging to the Young British Artists generation, and a centuries-long tradition of gold leaf use in Western painting. This narrative aspect of value refers to the object's inherent properties (properties invisible to the common eye, only disclosed by the narrative master hand of the expert), and is the justification of the heritage object's price and its belonging to the sphere of heritage.

While changing hands, objects experience displacements. These displacements are not necessarily geographical (although geographical displacements certainly are important in the attribution of newness to objects entering the Euro-American complex from other regions – see chapter 2). Displacements mostly occur between different forms of valoration. For example: a porcelain urinal (standard object that loses value as it is used) becomes *Fountain*, a 1917 artwork by Marcel Duchamp (a collectable or heritage object that accumulates value as it moves through space and time, and it is displayed along other objects fitting to curatorial and art historical narratives). For the transformation to be successful, the narrative justification ought to be well crafted, appealing to both tradition and newness.

Further, the exchange of things set in the boundaries (geographical or categorical) benefits from what Boltanski and Esquerre call a "forbidden surplus value". To illustrate: by incorporating African masks in place of women faces, Cubist portraiture subjected African artifacts to a displacement not dissimilar than the one experienced by African cultural artifacts exhibited in the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre National d'Art Georges Pompidou, 1989). In both cases, African sculpture was re-framed within the logic of Euro-American heritage

production. Signaled out in the choices of Pablo Picasso, first, and Jean-Hubert Martin, later, African culture as seen within the Cubist painting and the Parisian museum entered French heritage.

Boltanski and Esquerre argue that:

“those who profit most from the development of the enrichment economy have an interest in maintaining the separation between ordinary things, whose trade is supposed to obey only economic laws, and exceptional things, which, although they are traded, are presented as if they somehow essentially elude the universe of commodities, conferring an extra value on them and supporting their price”.<sup>122</sup>

Reputable actors –experts in the sphere or circulation– produce these narratives to justify the enrichment of specific objects, marking their difference from other similar ones, and their ultimate transformation into what Boltanski and Esquerre call ‘collectables’. (Why was this specific mask chosen to be displayed at Magiciens, and so many others were not?) Once objects enter the collection form of valuation, they accumulate value through time, independently of their use. In this sense, they are different from standard or asset objects, which lose value as they are used. The more collectable or heritage objects change hands, the more narrative layers they accumulate that link them to both newness (Gallacio’s gold leaf interventions were innovations from her former work) and tradition (yet they continued Gallacio’s long-held concerns about the vulnerability of priced materials).

The art industry is one of the spaces of circulation for collectable or heritage objects. Tightly bound to reputable actors (Boltanski and Esquerre call these actors ‘collectors’, yet for the sake of clarity in our analysis, I use the terms ‘curators’ or ‘experts’ to refer to them). They state that “the individual must gain influence in the field” with the crafting of a new narrative layer, “which often depends on holding a position of authority”.<sup>123</sup> In today’s ‘integral capitalism’,

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<sup>122</sup> Luc Boltanski, Arnaud Esquerre, “The Economic Life of Things”, in *The New Left Review*, 98, March- April 2016.

<sup>123</sup> Luc Boltanski, Arnaud Esquerre, “The Economic Life of Things”, in *The New Left Review*, 98, March- April 2016.

curators are moved more by the gain of reputation than the actual economic profits that come with their narrative production. In Boltanski's and Esquerre's model they participate in the enrichment economy out of disinterestedness. Highly qualified, these experts are art curators, critics, or art historians just like you and me. Most participate in the enrichment economy out of sheer belief in the complexity of the narrative exercise or, like Nancy Fraser calls it in her response to Boltanski and Esquerre, the “discursive épreuve or test [that serves for] justifying or criticizing prizes.”<sup>124</sup> Curators maximize their symbolic profit by exploiting the “differences [they] establish between the status of varying commodities”.

## **Conclusion.**

This first chapter provides a theoretical framework for the three next historical chapters. I began with a detour into the form of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century international exposition to remark on these events' ties with state-formation and the development of national identities, their role as instruments for the amplification of elite class interests, and their capacity to display their organizers' international and colonial influence. Whereas international expositions took place at times of national unification within Europe, today's art biennials reflect a present state of global capitalism where trans-national corporations exert increasing political power over our everyday lives. During the 1990s, time period of my study, planet-wide post-Cold War optimism moved beliefs in the obsolescence of the Westphalian nation-state and cosmopolitan dreams of supra-national conciliation.

Like its predecessor, the international exhibition, art biennials rely on complex operations that involve material culture and narrative production to justify a city's protagonism in the

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<sup>124</sup> Nancy Fraser, “A new form of capitalism? A response to Boltanski and Esquerre”, in *The New Left Review*, 106, July-August 2017

international sphere. I have described art biennial's implication in the redrawing of present colonialities within neoliberal hegemony, since they operate as 'global designs' that connect local governance with a global elite in consolidation. This chapter has explored how these justifications act in the space of heritage production and the attribution of the status of 'art' to specific objects. It has also shown how these efforts, albeit centralized within the institution of the art biennial, rely on meta-institutional processes of social reciprocity and knowledge production. The last sections of this chapter introduce an analytical model of curatorial work in which curators work to produce sophisticated narrative justifications for the conferring of 'newness' and 'tradition' to art objects. I argue that these moments of value attribution are situated within a logic of production of tradition and heritage symptomatic of today's planet-wide reach of neoliberalism. The three next chapters provide detailed illustrations of how these processes took place between 1984 and 1997 in Cuba, the US/Mexico borderlands, and Europe.

## CHAPTER 2: ORGANIC CURATING IN THE BIENAL DE LA HABANA'S INITIAL ITERATIONS (1984-1991).

Black and white. The news camera zooms in to a still. In the foreground, a man, slim and bare chested, bows to a longitudinal piece of wood. He applies white paint with an air brush and wears a white hat with the 1986 Bienal de La Habana's logo. Next to him, a chair and a table with diverse workshop materials: pieces of wood, tools, tape. In the back, two men talk. One is young, his back to the camera. He wears a stripped cotton shirt. The other, older, is Argentinian artist Julio Leparc, in a white lab robe and the same white hat with the Bienal logo. Behind these two men, four tall wood-cut figures prompt up against the wall: a naked man in profile with wings, a crown, and a tiny trumpet; a woman, long hair, big cubist eyes, and a tiara; a figure wearing a long leopard fur-like robe, long braided hair, facing us; the other is half horse, half woman in profile, her big mouth open, head tilted up. Voice over says: "With the purpose of provoking an attitude of creative experimentation, this workshop by Julio Leparc, Argentinian painter and engraver, protagonist of the optic-kinetic trend and of attempts of collective participation in the work of art, is informed by a group of Cuban artists who are interested in calling the attention of spectators in active exchange with the public".<sup>125</sup>

This vignette captures part of a longer clip broadcast in Cuban national television about Julio Le Parc's public art workshop in the 1986 Bienal de La Habana. It shows several elements that will be important for this chapter's analysis: collaboration performing manual labor in the context of a workshop, the joining of an internationally-known Latin American avant-garde artist

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<sup>125</sup> Referencia video ICAI. Taller Julio Leparc

with art students from Havana, organizational sophistication, and a shared interest in engaging with the broader public through participation and extended media coverage. The clip also shows new symbols in the making: wood human-like figures that combine African and European traditional fashion, elements from the Euro-American avant-garde canon, and non-human elements. Scenes like this one suggest the strong democratic orientation of cultural events in Havana that was based, on the one hand, on the state's encouraging of citizen engagement as producers and audiences of culture and, on the other, on the promotion of the popular arts as anchors with the rural and urban working classes.<sup>126</sup>

This chapter discusses the democratic orientation of the arts in Cuba as this impulse materialized in the Bienal de La Habana between 1984 and 1991, amidst attempts to institutionalize Cuban revolutionary socialist humanism and propose transnational alliances to counter the advance of capitalism. The 1980s experienced an effervescence of the cultural field in Cuba, of a freedom and diversity not seen since the early years of the Revolution. New Minister of Culture Armando Hart relaxed state control of the arts. Younger generations of artists born after the Revolution and formed within the reformed art education system enjoyed, for the first time, the two-fold national and international projection of their work. Plus, everyday experience and avant-garde art had achieved a high degree of integration. The spirit of the time was well represented in Volumen I, an exhibition that projected a distinctively Cuban yet international vision of art, revisiting minimalism, abstract expressionism, and povera with a Cuban lens. In a defense for artistic freedom unseen in Cuba since the early 1960s, Gerardo

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<sup>126</sup> The democratic orientation of the culture fields aligns with a broader interest from the government to encourage citizens' participation in the revolutionary process, and an emphasis in the importance of revolutionary praxis over revolutionary theory. For example, Ernesto Guevara wrote in October 1960 that: "This is an unique revolution, which for some does not fit in with one of the most orthodox premises of the revolutionary movement, expressed by Lenin: 'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.' It should be said that revolutionary theory, as the expression of social truth, stands above any particular presentation of it. In other words, one can make a revolution if historical reality is interpreted correctly and if the forces involved are utilized correctly, even without knowing theory". Ernesto Guevara, "Notes for the ideology of the Cuban revolution", in David Deutschmann (ed.) *The Che Guevara Reader, Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics and Revolution* (New York, Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1977) p. 106

Mosquera wrote in the catalog: “[the artists] were sensitive to the latest directions in the search for the evolution of art. Based on this, they tried to speak for themselves, since they believed that aesthetic language has to march to the beat of its own time”.<sup>127</sup>

This chapter builds from Chapter 1's defense of art biennials as institutional forms that monumentalize historical consciousness<sup>128</sup>, are aligned with the interests of local elites, and amplify modernity programs like, in this case, Cuban socialist decoloniality. In addition to its material culture, the Bienal de La Habana, like InSITE and Manifesta, is informed by multiple rituals, discourses, subjects, and forms of relation that change in compass with their historical time.<sup>129</sup> Unlike those two, however, the Bienal de La Habana was initially not an instance of colonization by neoliberal Euro-American forces, but an attempt to resist those forces by constituting a historical bloc that joined nations from the Third World (see Chapter 1). Simultaneously, the Bienal helped the Cuban state solidify its hegemony on the national level and reproduced the diversity of class interests of the nation's diverse cultural and political elites that were involved in its organization.<sup>130</sup> Laying bare the practices, subjects, and ideas behind cultural institutions with a decolonial program like the Bienal is of special urgency today: expositions like this one demonstrate that other modes of organizing social and cultural life are possible. Most importantly, showing successful traditions of cultural work driven by political stimuli rather than financial ones de-naturalizes the current neoliberalization of art institutions

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<sup>127</sup> Gerardo Mosquera, *Volumen I*. Centro Internacional de las Artes, 1981. The exhibition featured work by artists Flavio Garciandía, Tomas Sanchez, Jose Manuel Fors, Jose Bedia, Gustavo Perez, Ricardo Rodriguez, Leandro Soto, Israel Leon, Juan Francisco Elso, Ruben Torres and Rogelio “Gory” Lopez Marin. All of them were under 25 years old at the time.

<sup>128</sup> Pascal Gielen, “The Biennial: a Post-Institution for Immaterial Labor”, in *Open. Cahier on Art and the Public Domain*, n. 16. 2009

<sup>129</sup> Jodi Melamed, “Proceduralism, Predisposing, Poesis. Forms of Institutionality in the Making”, in *Lateral. Journal of the Cultural Studies Association*, issue 5.1, Spring 2016. <http://csalateral.org/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-institutionality-making-melamed/#ts-fab-bio-below>

<sup>130</sup> Like Rachel Weiss points out, political and cultural elites in Cuba did not necessarily share the same ideas and aesthetic taste. More ‘bourgeois’ positions coexisted with more ‘militant’ ones. See later sections for a thorough exposition of this complexity.



and questions the present fetishization of 'austerity' within the cultural sector in Europe and the U.S..<sup>131</sup>

Moreover, this chapter tells the story of how the forging of a new Third World counter-hegemonic bloc from Havana was sustained in multiple practices of recognition, at the local and international level. Aesthetically, the Bienal de La Habana enacted a tactical alliance with the discursive systems of Euro-American modernism, joining avant-garde and popular art together. Organizationally, the exhibition practiced the ideals behind a socialist humanist conception of labor.

In its early iterations the Bienal was an organic exhibition of art from the Third World that existed in continuity with longer historical efforts to institutionalize socialist humanism in Cuba. However, it progressively incorporated organizational and conceptual elements from the 'global contemporary art world' in formation that distanced the organization from its initial goals. Albeit initially successful in its purpose, the Bienal slowly succumbed to the structural inequality between center and periphery slowly surrendering to practices, subjects, and ideas that are now common currency in the 'global contemporary art world, and resembling the art biennial as 'global design' as exposed in chapter 1.

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<sup>131</sup> See these questions historicized in present debates about art institutionalities in Chapter 1.

## **Section 1: Emancipation, internationalism, and cultural labor.**

Since its creation in 1983, the Bienal de La Habana has been caught in an inherent internal contradiction. On one hand, it sought to satisfy the Cuban state's goal to emancipate Third World art from its historical subordination to Euro-American forms of legitimization. On the other, Bienal organizers realized early on that this emancipation would only be fruitful if it were to be fought wielding the same aesthetic codes of the Euro-American avant-garde. The Bienal played the role of an institutional translator organically affiliated to the interests of Third World subaltern peoples yet proficient in the languages and practices of the Euro-American art world. This act of epistemic disobedience grew from a state-wide institutional reform in the cultural field that began in 1959, among revolutionary efforts to sever Cuba's economic and cultural historical dependency from international powers like Spain (1492 – 1898), the U.S. (1898 – 1959), and the U.S.S.R. (1961 – 1991). While complete autonomy of Cuba's economy has never been reached, the Bienal de La Habana played a key role in leveraging the nation's visibility in the international cultural field.

During the Cold War period, the First World's determination to consolidate its international hegemony translated into the renewal of cultural colonialism over the national cultural fields of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Cuban plans to organize a biennial of art from the Third World-only initially excluding European and U.S. artists-mirrored efforts to consolidate a third non-aligned geopolitical bloc after the Bandung Conference in 1967. The first section of this chapter provides an interpretative framework for my case study of the Bienal. In the context of animated public discussions on the possibility for art's autonomy within socialism during the 1960s, it interprets the impact of Guevara's socialist humanism on Cuba's reform of cultural institutions after 1959. Further, this first section evaluates the reform's impact on the model of curatorial

labor practiced within the Bienal with particular attention to the forms of recognition present in it. To close, it introduces the argument that the strength of the Bienal operation was characterized by a tactical alliance with the Euro-American avant-gardes. The second section of this chapter looks at the exhibition's democratic orientation and its composition. It scrutinizes in detail two instances that illustrate the Bienal's initial questioning of the separation of avant-garde art and craft practices: Julio Le Parc's workshop (1986) and an exhibition of Mexican drape dolls (1989). In closing, it exposes the long-lasting effects that the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris, 1989) had on the Bienal de La Habana.

In 1983 Fidel Castro created the Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, honoring the renown Cuban artist after his death. This institution was to transplant the Cuban regime's third-worldist aspirations into the field of avant-garde art, joining world-wide decolonial struggles and combating raising Euro-American artistic hegemony in the international field. Its first Director, from the Dirección de Artes Plásticas, Beatriz Aulet, was appointed without a team, venue, nor budget. The Wifredo Lam center's main role was to produce the Bienal de La Habana, the first art biennial of the Third World, in only one year. Decree 113 of March 30, 1983, explained the Wifredo Lam center's functions. They included:

- b. to promote internationally the art work of artists from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as of artists that struggle for cultural identity and that are related to those territories.
- c. to endorse international activities in the field of visual arts in order to develop and establish networks of cooperation.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Decree 113 of March 30, 1983 states as the Bienal de La Habana's functions:

- a. to promote the study and promotion of Lam's work as a universal expression of contemporary art.
- b. to promote internationally the art work of artists from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as of artists that struggle for cultural identity and that are related to those territories.
- c. to endorse international activities in the field of visual arts in order to develop and establish networks of cooperation.
- d. to facilitate the development of the visual arts in Cuba and to pro-mote the contemporary manifestations of Cuban contemporary artists of most significance.
- e. to offer services of specialized information about contemporary art, artists, critics, and researchers.
- f. to enrich the cultural patrimony of the country through the creation of a permanent collection of visual arts and the systematic exchange of artistic and cultural documentation.

A counter-hegemonic device, the Bienal would join Marxist decolonial theory and practice with a two-fold purpose: to survey the state of art production in the Third World, and to offer First World and Third World audiences the object of the Third World artwork as produced by Third World experts in a Third World venue.<sup>133</sup> Thus, the Bienal was foremost an epistemic device of art historical knowledge production that sought to overcome the Euro-American avant-garde categories of knowledge and their legitimization channels. Most importantly, it pursued a redrawing of the geopolitical distribution of artistic production. The Bienal would “replace the historical cultural dependency of the Third World with a new international order by creating new circuits of cooperation”, in words of scholar Rachel Weiss.<sup>134</sup>

Given the initial limitations of resources and time, the first Bienal (1984) comprised only Latin American regions. The territorial scope traced the network of cultural cooperation built from the Casa de las Américas and replicated the scope of continental fraternity of José Martí’s Pan-American project. In his opening remarks to the first Bienal catalog, poet Eliseo Diego wrote:

“The in-communication between the peoples of the Third World has been a catastrophe encouraged by the vicious intentions of decrepit imperialisms, already in a critical moment of corrupt decomposition. The Cuban Revolution has proposed, with unyielding resolve, to break every barrier between brothers, to reintegrate the dispersed. Because of this, the first Bienal will be not only an important artistic event, but also a fact of historical significance that will have incalculable, and comforting, consequences for the future of all”.<sup>135</sup>

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g. to present periodically national and international events related to visual arts and to give artistic recognition in form of grants and prizes.

h. to promote a broader interest in the visual arts to the society through didactic and artistic activities and the use of mass communication.

<sup>133</sup> This initial mission would be modified in 1989, when the Centre d’Art Georges Pompidou in Paris opened the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*. See later section.

<sup>134</sup> Rachel Weiss, *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Bienal de La Habana* (London: Afterall, 2011) p. 17.

<sup>135</sup> Eliseo Diego, “Introducción”, in *Catálogo General* (La Habana: Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, 1984) p. 10. Cited in Rachel Weiss, *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Bienal de La Habana* (London: Afterall, 2011) p. 19.

In order to achieve this emancipation from colonial categories of culture, experts in the Bienal began what it became a years-long process of investigation about the state of art production in the Third World.

### **The avant-garde in post-revolutionary Cuba.**

The history of the avant-garde in Revolutionary Cuba has been conditioned by the dialectical struggle between 'orthodox' or 'pragmatists' and 'liberal' or 'extremist' factions of the government. Orthodox factions were members of the neo-Stalinist Partido Socialista Popular (PSP). They defended Soviet-oriented bureaucratization and control, and viewed all avant-garde art as essentially bourgeois and a threat to implementing Soviet-styled socialism in Cuba. On the other hand, 'liberals' were mostly members of the July 27<sup>th</sup> Movement like Ernesto Guevara, who argued for a critical Marxism akin to that of its contemporaneous New Left, autonomy from the USSR, and defended the avant-garde's potential for social emancipation. Orthodox factions saw liberals as being too left-leaning and romantic, while liberals accused the orthodox of following the USSR's right-wing tendencies and prioritizing Cuba's economic growth over its moral transformation.

These ideological discrepancies first came to the fore in the cultural sphere during the Revolution's early days, when the censoring in 1961 of *PM*, a short documentary on Havana night life,<sup>136</sup> prompted altered discussions between government factions and members of the Instituto Cubano de las Artes e Industria Cinematográfica (ICAIC). In their defense of their right to freedom of form and content in their art, the film-makers signed a public letter stating that competing but coexisting "aesthetic ideas and tendencies live *necessarily* in *struggle*", and claimed that "formal categories of art had no class character". In this healthy struggle, the left-

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<sup>136</sup> Data on PM.

leaning filmmakers understood the victory of certain aesthetic forms over others as a result of dialectic superation rather than of suppression.<sup>137</sup> However, President of the Consejo Nacional de Cultura and 'orthodox' communist, Edith García Buchaca, denied the possibility for different aesthetic tendencies to coexist within the context of the socialist state, and negated the right of artists to determine, even in speculative form, the parameters for the development of aesthetic forms.<sup>138</sup> This latter point, according to her, was of exclusive competence of the Government, in charge of guiding and directing the evolution of the arts, because “the conditions for this coexistence can not be established from the principles signaled by our film-maker comrades, if we are to obey purely Marxist criteria”.<sup>139</sup> These discrepancies about cultural policy reproduce historical clashes within Marxist theory between defenders of bottom-up revolutionary processes and celebrators of the state as exclusive motor of social change.

Attempting to silence these debates Fidel Castro delivered his speech “Words to Intellectuals,” which was followed by substantial debate in printed media about the limits of creative freedom, the role of the State in promoting and guiding national culture, and the autonomy of artists in setting the conditions for their work. Castro's 1961 speech opened an ambiguous gate for freedom of form and content in art, stating that “everything made within and for the Revolution” would have a place in new Cuba.<sup>140</sup> At first glance, this ambiguity distanced Cuba's position from the Soviet doctrine of social realism. However, its freedom of interpretation has become instrumental at times of alternate repression and tolerance until the present, most significantly during the *quinquenio gris* or Grey Years (1971 to 1976).

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<sup>137</sup> “Conclusiones de un debate entre cineastas cubanos”, in *La Gaceta de Cuba*, año II, no. 23, August 3, 1963.

<sup>138</sup> A compilation of documents from these debates can be found in the volume XXXXXXXXX. Completar cita.

<sup>139</sup> Edith García Buchaca, “Consideraciones sobre un Manifiesto”, in *La Gaceta de Cuba*, año II, no. 23, October 18, 1963.

<sup>140</sup> Guevara and Castro's initial position responded to fiery controversies around freedom of form and content in art at the time in that had been triggered by the censoring of the documentary PM, by Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal. It echoed contemporary discussions on the nature of avant-garde art in Cuba and abroad, placing art's innovative potential in the free development of its form and entrusting the fitting of its content to the Revolutionary narrative framework to art's self-critical attitude.

In 1961 the doctrine of socialist realism was still in place in the U.S.S.R. – albeit in a tamed form – during Nikita Khrushchev's presidency (1953-1964), placing official Soviet cultural policy in the Stalin-Pujanov-Gorki line. Socialist realism was “realistic in form, socialist in content”, and defended the use of theory to optimistically portray the role of social life in the formation of the new soviet individual.<sup>141</sup> Important defenders of this doctrine in Cuba included, for example, the above-mentioned first two Presidents of the Consejo Nacional de Cultura, Edith García Buchaca, and Luis Pavón Tamayo.<sup>142</sup> Vocally against it were artists, writers, and film-makers, who had been active cultural producers before the Revolution, and had participated on international discussions around the different forms of the modern avant-gardes, like abstract surrealist painters René Portocarrero and Wifredo Lam, and geometric abstract painters Loló Soldevilla, Zilia Sánchez, and Raúl Martínez (an important pop-art designer as well, author of Ché's and Camilo Cienfuegos's mural portraits in Plaza de la Revolución).<sup>143</sup> Supporters of socialism, these modernist artists disagreed with the implementation in Cuba of Soviet-styled guidelines for cultural production. Instead, they defended ideas about the role of culture in social change discussed in Havana's continent-wide reaching art publications of the 1950s, such as *Noticias de Arte* and *Arquitectura*, in line with international debates about the role of avant-garde art in advancing social change. Their initial support for the Revolución did

<sup>141</sup> Zhdanovism, Soviet cultural policy in place between 1946 and 1953, divided the world into two moral blocks, 'Imperialistic' (influence of the United States) and 'Democratic' (influence of the USSR). With a marked anti-cosmopolitan and anti-avant-garde character, it persecuted every cultural producer accused of producing 'bourgeois' artworks. Although this policy ended with Stalin's death in 1953, cultural officials upheld socialist realism as doctrine until the glasnost reforms on the mid 1980s. Green, Jonathan, and Nicholas J. Karolides. 2005. *The Encyclopedia of Censorship*, rev. ed. New York: Facts On File.

<sup>142</sup> For more details on the formal implications of her position and that of her followers, see later section on institutional reform.

<sup>143</sup> Like Rio de Janeiro, Caracas, and Buenos Aires, Havana was in the 1940s and 1950s an important hub for the development of Latin American modern abstraction. The journal *Noticias de arte*, for example, sought to “contribute modestly [...] without the prejudices that might tarnish the free expression of thought, to disseminate any cultural manifestations from this country or from abroad” (See *Noticias de arte*, issue 1, 1957, La Habana). In this line, issue 11 (1957) was entirely devoted to analyzing Cuban presence in the second Sao Paulo biennial. It published essays by important Latin American critics of the time like Argentinian Jorge Romero Brest. Important names in Cuban abstraction at the time were artists Carmen Herrera (based in New York since 1934), Zilia Sánchez, Loló Soldevilla (who returned to Havana from Paris in 1957), and critics Juan Marinello, Pedro de Oraá and José Lezama Lima, among others. Soldevilla curated in 1957 the exhibition *Pintura de Hoy. Vanguardia en la Escuela de París* at the Palace of Fine Arts. She and critic de Oraá later opened *Galería de Arte Luz Color*, around which gravitated the group *Diez Pintores Cubanos*.

not, however, impede later censorship and persecution by the regime, like show the cases of writers Nicolás Guillén and Antonia Eiriz, and artists Raúl Martínez and Chago.<sup>144</sup>

Liberal positions sympathetic to those held by the film-making community and the avant-garde art scene were also found within the high cadres of government at the time. Ernesto Guevara, for example, criticized socialist realism as a sign of bureaucratization of socialism. Further, he trusted in the natural development of “cultural ideological mechanisms that allow for investigation and the discarding of bad weeds, easily multiplicative under state subsidies”, a clear defense of the self-regulating capacity of art and a strong argument for its relative autonomy from the state. For Guevara, socialist realism was a “Proudhonian mistake of returning to the past”, forcing man to renounce to the strength of his contemporary art expressions.<sup>145</sup>

The positions held by Guevara and the film-makers echo art theorist Peter Bürger's interpretation of the *Grundrise*, where he sets as requisite for the development of art's self-criticism the coming to being of the proletariat. For Burger, art's ability to practice self-criticism permits the identification of traces of capitalism, it necessarily roots art in society and invalidates any argument in favor of its autonomy, an autonomy that is never real but an illusion sustained in capitalist alienation of artists from their means of production. In words of Bürger:

“Like the public realm, the autonomy of art is a category of bourgeois society that both reveals and obscures an actual historical development. All discussion of this category must be judged by the extent to which it succeeds in showing and explaining logically and historically the contradictoriness inherent in the thing itself”.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Weiss, Rachel. “To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture – but, Which Version?” *Art Margins*, 2017. doi:10.1162/ARTM.

<sup>145</sup> Ernesto Guevara, “El Socialismo y el Hombre en Cuba”, in *Marcha*, March 1965.

<sup>146</sup> Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) p. 36.



This position not only makes art's self-critical faculties beneficial for a transition to socialism, but also demonstrate the error of top-down Soviet-styled regulation of form and content in the arts. For the Cuban film-makers, art's self-criticism would lead to the "victory of some aesthetic forms over others".<sup>147</sup>

As further sections of this chapter claim, the 'liberal' position endowed parts of the Cuban cultural sphere with an emancipatory mission that materialized not only in the crafting of a Third World avant-garde but, most importantly, in the consolidation of an international counter-hegemonic historic bloc that would lead the way against the expansion of neoliberalism. The discussion between the 'liberal' film-makers and 'orthodox' early Government figures is still relevant in the present Cuban cultural field to some extent and testifies for the different interpretations of Marxist theory that coexist in the nation.

### **The formation of a counter-hegemonic bloc.**

Within the framework of the post-Cold War expansion of liberalism<sup>148</sup> set in chapter 1, the Bienal de La Habana's counter-hegemonic operation resembled Gramscian schemes for the constitution of historic blocs (for a detailed explanation see Chapter 1 and later in this section). Ernesto Guevara described the revolution as an alliance, "always involv[ing] people from very different tendencies who, nevertheless, come to agreement on action and on the most immediate objectives".<sup>149</sup> In this context, initial Bienal efforts were yet another instance of

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<sup>147</sup> "Conclusiones de un debate entre cineastas cubanos", in *La Gaceta de Cuba*, año II, no. 23, August 3, 1963.

<sup>148</sup> Chapter 1 presents the expansion of liberalism of the late 1980s-early 1990s as an instance of passive revolution in which the three art biennials under scrutiny participate in different ways. This historical consolidation of the power of the international capitalist forces of development is mirrored in the international art world with increasing commonsensical agreement of the superiority of the Western avant-garde's legacy and its forms. The industry's expansion to new regions played on the combination of the production of consent (the direct assimilation of aesthetic forms from the West assumed to be qualitative superior), and of coercive mechanisms (Western-sponsored awards, exclusion from the industry, selective sponsoring of local *converts*, etc.)

<sup>149</sup> Ernesto Guevara, "Notes for the ideology of the Cuban revolution", in David Deutschmann (ed.) *The Che Guevara Reader, Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics and Revolution* (New York, Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1977) p. 106

Revolutionary Cuba's belief that social change – in the form of humanity's emancipation from capitalist alienated labor – would come from the organization of international networks of civil society agents and their joint alliance as a new historic bloc,<sup>150</sup> in coherence with its internationalist socialist creed. Among Cuba's roles would be to sponsor that alliance by promoting multilateral cultural cooperation. This way, the Bienal became part of Cuba's long engagement in a war of position<sup>151</sup> with the liberal First World to be played against the latter in the field of the international avant-garde art world.

The regime's internationalism revisited ideals of pan-American fraternity as they were expressed in the writings of independence leader José Martí. Martí aligns with other 19<sup>th</sup> Century Latin American leaders in his calls for the end of Cuba's – and Latin America's more broadly – dependency from foreign powers. His thought is re-framed by the Revolución from a 19<sup>th</sup> Century context of Spanish colonialism to a 20<sup>th</sup> Century scenario of U.S. neocolonialism. Such relations of dependency, Martí argued, place peoples in condition of mental subalternity that impede their liberation from their own exploitation. A careful student of subsequent U.S. plans for an interamerican system that followed the Monroe Doctrine (1823) Martí rejects these due to growing U.S. political and economic influence in the rest of the continent. Martí described Cuban reality as one caught between “centripetalism and nation”, between “*cubanidad* and foreignness”.<sup>152</sup> This position safeguarded Cuban interests before growing US influence, yet sought to connect the nation to debates about shared Latin American identity of the time. Mental

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<sup>150</sup> H. Katz, "Gramsci, Hegemony, and global Civil Society Networks" in *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, n. 17 (December 2006). The term 'civil society', along with the writings of Antonio Gramsci, were not popular in Cuba's intellectual circles. For a study on the trajectory of this term in Cuba see Alexander I. Gray, Antoni Kapcia (eds.) *The Changing Dynamic of Cuban Civil Society* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008). Of special relevance regarding the acceptance of the term is Michelle Marín-Dogan, "Civil Society: The Cuban Debate", in the same volume.

<sup>151</sup> As Peter D. Thomas reminds us, the war of position is not chosen by the subaltern; instead, it is "a strategy of biopower deployed by the bourgeoisie to which the proletariat had no option but to respond with a realistic strategy". P. D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment. Philosophy, Hegemony, and Marxism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009)

<sup>152</sup> See Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2002) p.140

subalternity, in the work of Martí and later Cuban decolonial intellectuals like Fernández Retamar, is inscribed in that ways language hides the interests of the colonizer.<sup>153</sup>

### **The avant-garde and the Popular Front.**

An important historical precedent for Cuba's strategy was the development of a politically committed avant-garde under the Popular Front in Europe (1935). Facing the advance of fascism in 1930s Europe, the seventh International meeting of the Comintern (1935) declared the doctrine of The People's Front Against Fascism and War (widely referred to as The Popular Front). This strategy encouraged communists to pursue tactical alliances with other political groups with the aim of opposing the advance of fascism internally and internationally. Although it was pursued in France, Spain, and China with most direct involvement from the Comintern, Popular Fronts existed in Latin American nations as well, such as Chile, Uruguay, and, most relevant for this study, Cuba. In this climate, left-leaning artists and philosophers of different political convictions debated the possibilities of an avant-garde practice that joined the goals of the Popular Front while retaining its freedom of content and form. A particular exchange between Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch and Communist composer Hans Eisler represents well the Comintern's position. In it, they declared that:

“The Popular Front needs progressive artists, progressive artists need the Popular Front. The Popular Front defends artistic freedom and supplies artists with genuine, truthful subject matter. Likewise, artists need the Popular Front, in order to connect with the greatest social development of our time. [...] The Popular Front needs progressive artists because it is not sufficient to possess the truth; rather, it is necessary to impact it with the most up-to-date, precise, and colorful expression”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> For a contextualized analysis of José Martí's thought, see Ward, Thomas. “Martí y Blaine: Entre La Colonialidad Tenebrosa y La Emancipación Inalcanzable.” *Cuban Studies* 38, no. 2007 (2018): 100–124.

<sup>154</sup> The exchange took the form of a dialogue between a *Skeptic* and an *Optimist*, hoping to represent widely held feelings among artists about the Popular Front. “Avantgarde-Kunst und Volksfront”, in *Die Neue Weltbühne* (December 9, 1937).

The “greatest social development of our time” was, for Popular Front sympathizers, the tactical joining of diverse political factions against the advance of fascism. According to Bloch and Eisler, avant-garde art would develop a true “progressive consciousness” by converging with the vanguard of the proletariat in their joint opposition to capitalist alienation and fascism.<sup>155</sup> This new progressive consciousness would see no distinctions between “everyday and exaltation”, “serious life and joyous art”.<sup>156</sup> In 1960s Cuba, the struggle against capitalism called for a similar form of alliance. Despite attempts from orthodox members of the government like García Buchaca to implement control mechanisms similar to those of Soviet social realism, liberal government cadres and avant-garde artists believed in the promise of emancipation that formal innovation in the arts could bring about under the tactical joining of Cuban avant-garde art and art from other Third World nations in the formation of a new Third World avant-garde. In 1988 Cuban art critic and curator, and early key figure for the Bienal, Gerardo Mosquera described this alliance as a “synthesis [based on] the hybridization or coexistence of various traits from different cultures”.<sup>157</sup>

As Chapter 1 explains, the Gramscian model of counter-hegemonic formation requires three elements: the organization of a new historic bloc, an ideology that includes this new bloc's shared myths and ideals, and action.<sup>158</sup> Given the international ambitions of Cuba's revolutionary agenda, the Bienal needed to avoid localism pursuing supra-national alliances that included artists from Africa, Asia, Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Further, to avoid reproducing what they perceived as the Euro-America avant-garde art world's propinquity with capital, the Bienal favored an integrative approach in the composition of this new alliance,

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<sup>155</sup> “Avantgarde-Kunst und Volksfront”, in *Die Neue Weltbühne* (December 9, 1937)

<sup>156</sup> “Avantgarde-Kunst und Volksfront”, in *Die Neue Weltbühne* (December 9, 1937)

<sup>157</sup> Gerardo Mosquera, “Raíces en acción”, in *Revolución y Cultura* (La Habana), no. 2 (February 1988), p. 32-39 Cited in David Craver, *Art and Revolution in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002)

<sup>158</sup> H. Kats. Op. Cit. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971, 2012)

facilitating the participation of local workers and students, Cuban artists and specialists, members of the Cuban Government, recognized foreign names of the international contemporary art world (including scholars and curators from Europe and the U.S. sympathetic to the non-aligned cause such as Shifra Goldman, Dore Ashton, Lucy Lippard, Jimmy Durham, Carl André, etc.), non-legitimated Third World artists, legitimated avant-garde Latin American artists, etc.. The new bloc's ideology, as formulated from the Bienal, rested upon such ideals as Guevara's socialist humanism, Third World solidarity, and pan-American fraternity as recovered from of the thinking of independence leader José Martí. This program transpired in art works either as conditions for their existence, or as themes. Empirical material discussed in this chapter shows how Bienal specialists presented in the exhibition ways of understanding the world unique to this new historic bloc in formation. Lastly, the action element was the production of the Bienal itself, as a cultural and political intervention in the distribution of power and linguistic hegemony of the international avant-garde art world. The production of each iteration required preparatory research travels, collaborative decision making by specialists, and cumulative production (see below).

Gramsci's linguistic analysis is key tool for framing the strategic use of aesthetic forms in the Bienal de la Habana.<sup>159</sup> In his model, language configurations are metaphors of their speakers' positions within the broader distribution of power in history. This resonates with attempts by Bienal organizers to counter Euro-American avant-garde aesthetics with a Third World avant-garde aesthetic model of their own crafting. In line with positions held by the 1960s film-making community previously described, Bienal organizers sought recognition of a diversity of subaltern aesthetic forms in the international avant-garde art world, and favored an integrative approach to the selection of artworks. This approach combined the language of the

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<sup>159</sup> See Chapter 1 for a thorough discussion on the production of linguistic hegemony during the expansion of the international avant-garde art industry in the 1990s.

Western avant-garde as practiced by Latin American artists with art practices from the Third World on the basis of a shared emphasis on participation and heteroglossia as enablers of community formation by allowing different voices and aesthetic forms to coexist in the shared representational space of the gallery. In its initial iterations, the Bienal was an organic exhibition in which objects from different regions of the Third World signified in-keeping with their original social functions. This paradoxical relation – pursuing international alliances while defending the importance of its local roots – mirrors Martí’s portrayal of Cuba as a society caught between “cubanidad and foreignness” referenced above.<sup>160</sup> In doing so, the Bienal hoped to constitute a new supra-national historic bloc to engage in aesthetic and epistemic struggle against the advance of a renewed Western international avant-garde in configuration. Later sections of this chapter demonstrate how elements from the avant-garde repertoire and the popular arts were combined in this new aesthetic model.

### **Socialist humanism.**

It is worth stopping here to explore the roots of Cuba's socialist humanism, representative of liberal positions in the early government like that of Ernesto Guevara.<sup>161</sup> This position influenced Cuba's 1960s cultural institutional reform and shaped two institutions key for my analysis: Casa de las Américas (established in 1959), and la Bienal de La Habana (established in 1983). Guevara's humanism blended ideas from Latin American independentist ideologies with elements from Marx's early writings, like *The German Ideology*, and the German idealist tradition.

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<sup>160</sup> I have shown in chapter 1 how this tension between local and international aspirations is present in all biennials of contemporary art. In my article “Global contemporary art tourism: engaging with Cuban authenticity through the Bienal de La Habana” (*Tourism and Development*, v. 15, 3) I analyze how these double intentions play out in the contemporary use of socially engaged art within the Bienal.

<sup>161</sup> “Orthodox” or “hardcore” positions within the government included those aligned with USSR doctrines and former members of the pre-Revolutionary Partido Socialista Popular. “Liberals” in the government did not align with Soviet doctrine and often represented less rigid interpretations of Marxism.

First, socialist humanism brought to the new state ideology a partial re-reading of Cuban independentist leader José Martí's program of national sovereignty, human equality, and dreams of continental union, that marked a strong historical continuity with Cuba's past. Martí's work was re-purposed for Cold War colonial processes. In the Marxist tradition, socialist humanism rooted a theoretical program to defeat human alienation, oppression, exploitation and inequality informed by the philosophy of Lenin and, chiefly, early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui. The latter stressed the necessity of a path towards socialism situated in the multiple local specificities of Latin America and disagreed with the implementation of European development models in the continent.<sup>162</sup> Mariátegui's project to establish long-lasting relations of mutual recognition between intellectuals and the masses had failed in Perú, but was taken as model for socialist humanism's goals of situating Cuba's struggle in the popular classes.<sup>163</sup>

A key contemporary influence was that of Spanish-Mexican Marxist philosopher Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, a frequent figure in Cuban academic circles since the Revolución. Sánchez Vázquez expanded Marx's writings on aesthetics in ways that became highly influential for the Cuban cultural institutional sphere. For Sánchez Vázquez, the capacity of individuals to produce art was inherent to their capacity to mediate between culture and nature with their labor. Sánchez Vázquez understood artistic labor as a sensitized form of labor that educated the senses and, ultimately, humanized those engaged in it.<sup>164</sup> Cuban curator and critic Gerardo Mosquera, a key figure in the first Bienal years, was a close student of Sánchez Vázquez's work, and has acknowledged the big imprint that the Spanish Republican's work left on Cuban

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<sup>162</sup> For translations of his work, see José Carlos Mariátegui, *The Heroic and Creative Meaning of Socialism. Selected Essays*. - Edited and Translated by Michael Pearlman. (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996)

<sup>163</sup> Miller, Nicola. "A Revolutionary Modernity : The Cultural Policy of the Cuban Revolution." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 40, no. 4 (2008): 675–96.

<sup>164</sup> See, for example, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, "Ideas estéticas en los manuscritos económico-filosóficos de Marx", *Casa de las Américas* 2, 13-14 (July – October 1962). Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *Las ideas estéticas de Marx*, (México: Siglo XXI, 2005)

cultural institutions.<sup>165</sup> Within this program, socialist humanism assigned to art labor the role of intervening in the production of reality by transforming man's relationship with nature and, in the process, generating not only art objects but, most importantly, a new subject.<sup>166</sup> This belief in the emancipatory potential of art and craft work amplified early Marx's defense of this form of work as a model for fully integrated subject recognition and paved the way for strong state interventionism in culture.<sup>167</sup> Art historian David Craven claims that Guevara's defense of the potential of art to unfold individual and social revolution was, in fact, a defense of the importance of artistic experimentation as a practice of self-recognition from which a *new man* would emerge. In words of Rachel Weiss: "the promulgation of culture was seen as a crucial element in developing a revolutionary consciousness among the population at large, and cultural participation was germane to the nascent 'new man', who would be unalienated and motivated by moral imperatives rather than material rewards".<sup>168</sup>

For Guevara, culture could perform the ideological work that would pave the way into complete social reform:

"For a long time man has been trying to free himself of alienation through culture and art. While one dies everyday during the eight or more hours that one functions as commodity, individuals come to life afterward in their spiritual creations. But this remedy bears the germs of the same sickness: it is a solitary individual seeking harmony with the world".

Many objects included in the Bienal between 1984 and 1991 shared this belief in formal innovation as a path to self-realization. Unlike the emphasis on individual freedom of Euro-American art worlds of the time,<sup>169</sup> in Cuba formal innovation ought to be a form of self-realization in society based on the ridding of traces of capitalist relations of production. Lastly,

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<sup>165</sup> Gerardo Mosquera, "Estética y marxismo en Cuba". *Cuadernos Americanos* 5, 29 (September – October 1991).

<sup>166</sup> Karl Marx, "Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy," in *Collected Works*, vol. 28 (New York, 1975). p. 30.

<sup>167</sup> Karl Marx: Early Texts, ed. David McLellen (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971)

<sup>168</sup> Weiss, Rachel. "To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture – but, Which Version?" *Art Margins* 6, no. 1 (2017). p. 68

<sup>169</sup> Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983)



all Government factions shared an internationalist interpretation of Marxism<sup>170</sup> that shaped the internationalist character of the new cultural institutional field in Cuba.

Emphasis on moral values like equality and freedom places Cuba's articulation of socialist humanism in the tradition of European Enlightenment as it was translated via Latin American 19th Century independentist projects like those spearheaded by Simón Bolívar, first, and José Martí, later. In addition to defending national sovereignty and a Third World cosmopolitanism, two key convergences link this program with the Enlightenment roots of emancipatory ideologies. First, is Guevara's belief that the ultimate goal of socialism be the individual's realization in social equality. This point is the root of liberals' defense of the importance of collective moral labor incentives over individual financial ones. Terry Karl classifies labor incentives in Cuba according to a moral – material classification. Moral awards are “of purely symbolic value” and recognize an individual's willingness to participate in the betterment of society. These awards, in the form of medals, certificates, and public recognition acknowledge labor efforts that involve a personal sacrifice such as engagement in “voluntary labor, workers mobilization, renounced overtime, and socialist emulation”. Material incentives, on the other hand, translate in “monetary value of their labor”, including “higher wages, work bonuses, vacations, commodity prizes”. All incentives can be collective or individual, stressing group belonging or individual competition over time. Like Terry Karl stresses, any attempt to understand the motivations behind workers' efforts must be contextualized in a broader analysis of the goals of socialist Cuba.<sup>171</sup> The liberal sector's preference for moral incentives over monetary ones shaped their criticisms of the Soviet model as ‘extremely bureaucratized’ and ‘state capitalist’. This chapter shows cases of voluntary participation, socialist emulation via art

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<sup>170</sup> Kronenberg, Clive W. “Manifestations of Humanism in Revolutionary Cuba : Che and the Principle of Universality Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 36, No. 2, Cuba : Interpreting a Half Century of Revolution and Resistance, Part 2 (Mar., 2009)

<sup>171</sup> Karl, Terry. “Work Incentives in Cuba.” *Latin American Perspectives. Cuba: La Revolución En Marcha* 2, no. 4 (1975): 21–41.

historical knowledge production, and mobilization of workers and students in support of this exhibition that are crucial for understanding the importance of the Bienal de La Habana in its overall support of the humanist socialist cause.

In this model, common good can only be achieved as long as individuals act with others as they wish others acted with them. This relationship is mediated by the aesthetic by informing a shared *sensus communis*.<sup>172</sup> Socialist humanism's belief in the key role that art and education play in the formation of an emancipatory and socially-oriented consciousness, echoes Schiller's characterization of the aesthetic experience as a two-fold gate: on one hand, towards self-fulfillment and self-realization, the overcoming of individualism in harmony, or "humanity"; and, on the other, towards the development of institutions that preserve that newly acknowledged path to self-realization. Guevara, like Schiller, placed art and culture as mediators between understanding and action, reason and ethics, granting to the "aesthetic man" a central role in the overcoming of alienated labor in capitalism and connecting humanity to its true nature (in this case, man's self-realization in communism) via artistic work. Further sections of this chapter explore the implications of Guevara's philosophy and its impact in the Bienal de La Habana, its organization and artworks.

### **Institutional reform.**

In the early Revolutionary period the Cuban government undertook a comprehensive institutional reform of public institutions seeking "complete identification between the government and the community".<sup>173</sup> In Guevara's words the objectives of this reform were to

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<sup>172</sup> Kronenberg, Clive W. "Manifestations of Humanism in Revolutionary Cuba : Che and the Principle of Universality Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 36, No. 2, Cuba : Interpreting a Half Century of Revolution and Resistance, Part 2 (Mar., 2009)

<sup>173</sup> Ernesto Guevara, "Socialism and man in Cuba", in David Deutschmann (ed.) *The Che Guevara Reader, Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics and Revolution* (New York, Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1977) p. 205

“address the lack of formation [by] redirecting labor from other enterprises”, “correcting lack of motivation by bettering education”, and turning work spaces into educational spaces, providing workers the technical and political skills for better identification with their labor and the extended community.<sup>174</sup> These new institutions would “guide people to the future [and] select those to form the avant-garde,” translating state ideology to quotidian life. Not limited to the cultural sphere, these undertakings framed the unfolding of a socialist humanism where individuals, through formal education and participation in political organizations would “each day acquire better conscience of their necessity to integrate society and their importance as its motors”. This new subject in formation, an enthusiastic and socially-oriented worker, educator, creator, and mobilizer,<sup>175</sup> would be ideally moved by moral incentives rather than economic ones (moral stimulus was a man's “fulfillment of his social duties”<sup>176</sup>), thus orienting the purpose of his labor to the common good.<sup>177</sup>

Further, redistribution of labor force would help integrate manual labor with intellectual or managerial labor, a big step towards overcoming the relations of production upholding the capitalist class system.<sup>178</sup> In this idealist schema, man as commodity would disappear, freed

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<sup>174</sup> Ernesto Guevara, “Against bureaucratism”, in David Deutschmann (ed.) *The Che Guevara Reader, Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics and Revolution* (New York, Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1977) p. 161

<sup>175</sup> Ernesto Guevara. “A New Culture of Work”, speech pronounced at the meeting of the Central Organization of Cuban Traditions, CTC. August 21, 1962, in David Deutschmann (ed.) *The Che Guevara Reader, Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics and Revolution* (New York, Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1977)

<sup>176</sup> Ernest Guevara, “El Socialismo y el Hombre en Cuba”, in *Marcha*, March 1965, in David Deutschmann (ed.) *The Che Guevara Reader, Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics and Revolution* (New York, Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1977)

<sup>177</sup> The debate between Soviet-oriented System of Economic Management and Planning and Guevara's proposed Budgetary Finance System was a longstanding conversation in the Government, which reflected the historical struggle between orthodox and liberal party factions. The System of Economic Management and Planning was a decentralized planning system mirroring capitalist relations between enterprises, where value was determined by buying-selling relationships, therefore based in personal material stimulus or workers. The budgetary finance system, on the other hand, promoted grass-roots integration of workers in the production sectors via the mobilization of the working classes and voluntary labor, and proposed income control and group moral stimuli. Although the latter system influenced the 1960s institutional reform, with the transition from Cuban-USSR interdependence in the 1960s to Cuba dependence from the USSR in the mid 1970s, the first system became doctrine in 1973. See Leogrande, William M, and Julie M Thomas. “Cuba's Quest for Economic Independence.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, no. 2 (2002): 325–63; Tsokhas, Kosmas. “The Political Economy of Cuban Dependence on the Soviet Union.” *Theory and Society* 9, no. 2 (2017): 319–62.

<sup>178</sup> Ernesto Guevara, “Una Actitud Nueva Frente al Trabajo”, August 1964, in David Deutschmann (ed.) *The Che Guevara Reader, Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics and Revolution* (New York, Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1977)

from the need to sell his labor force and in closer identification with nature.<sup>179</sup> Among the many institutions came out of this reform were: the ICAIC (Cuban Film Institute), UNEAC (the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba), Casa de las Américas, the National Theater, the National Art School, the Teatro de Arte Popular, two national dance companies, an Institute of Ethnology and Folklore, a national symphony orchestra, and a broad network of art schools and community exhibition galleries around the country.

This integrative model sought to promote high levels of participation in different spheres of life, so as to develop the cultural conditions necessary for the building of a new society in socialism.<sup>180</sup> Important for my analysis of the Bienal de La Habana is how this reform set the foundations for the democratic orientation of the cultural spheres in Cuba. According to Guevara,

“It is still necessary to deepen conscious participation, individual and collective, in all the mechanisms of management and production, and to link this to the idea of the need for technical and ideological education, so that it is clear how closely interdependent these processes are and how their advancement is parallel. In this way the individual will reach total consciousness as a social being, which is equivalent to the full realization as a human creature, once the chains of alienation are broken”.<sup>181</sup>

The practical versatility of this socialist humanist work ethos based in the redistribution of labor, voluntary participation, and moral incentives becomes however clear in the light of its interpretation by culture officials at different moments in time. For example, the two first Presidents of the Consejo Nacional de Cultura were Edith García Buchaca, a Stalinist, and Luis Pavón Tamayo, a member of the orthodox military cadres.<sup>182</sup> Both of them were responsible for

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<sup>179</sup> Ernesto Guevara, “El Socialismo y el Hombre en Cuba”, in *Marcha*, March 1965.

<sup>180</sup> Ernesto Guevara, “Una Actitud Nueva Frente al Trabajo”, August 1964 in David Deutschmann (ed.) *The Che Guevara Reader, Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics and Revolution* (New York, Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1977)

<sup>181</sup> Ernesto Guevara, “Socialism and man in Cuba”, in David Deutschmann (ed.) *The Che Guevara Reader, Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics and Revolution* (New York, Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1977) p.204

<sup>182</sup> Rachel Weiss, “To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture – but, Which Version?” *Art Margins*, 2017

the increasingly strict State vigilance of cultural production that saw its worst manifestations under the period of violent repression known as the *Quinquenio Gris* (disputably between 1972 and 1977). In 1976, however, the Ministry of Culture was founded, led by old-guard liberal Armando Hart Dávalos (who acted as Minister of Culture until 2003), a proponent of “democratic dialogue, self-reflection, and self-analysis” as signs of growth in the culture field.<sup>183</sup>

As a result of the 1960s institutional reform, the government created a national network of new art schools, neighborhood culture centers, and internationally oriented institutions and festivals that favored an integrated approach to the study, production, and exhibition of the literary, performance, and visual arts.<sup>184</sup> One early institutional product of these reforms was Casa de las Américas, spearhead of the Revolution's new cultural internationalist mission. Also important for this analysis, other institutions product of this reform were neighborhood art galleries and workshops, devoted to showing work by Cuban artists instead and led by members of the local chapters of the Assemblies of the Popular Power.

### **Cuba's internationalism: the USSR and the Third World.**

Chapter 1 of this dissertation reflected on the importance that late and post Cold War cosmopolitan discourses had for the emergence of art biennials. In this section I discuss the impact of Cuba's international solidarity doctrine in the formation of the Bienal de La Habana. This doctrine first materialized via military aid to other revolutionary processes, and later helped paved the way for international cultural cooperation networks in Latin America and the Non Aligned bloc.

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<sup>183</sup> Rachel Weiss, “To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture – but, Which Version?” *Art Margins*, 2017 p. 75.

<sup>184</sup> Among the many cultural institutions formed in the 1960s the following are worth listing: UNEAC (Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba), 1961; the National Theater opened its doors in 1979, but was active through the Theater Brigades around the island since 1962; National Art Schools, 1961; Casa de las Américas, 1959; ICAIC (Cuban Film Institute), 1959. In addition, many public libraries opened, and music labels and theater and dance groups were founded.

Since 1959, changing political orientations within the Cuban government has determined economic and foreign policies, alternating between developmental modernization perspectives and Marxist dependency theory approaches.<sup>185</sup> In the 1970s, the tightening of the U.S. embargo and its growing military threats on the island, plus the failure to export guerilla warfare in Latin America and Africa<sup>186</sup> and the rise of U.S. sponsored military governments in the region damaged Cuba's morale and its rising influence in Latin America. Seeking closure with the Soviet Union and the COMECON in the form of subsidized sugar exports and military defense, orthodox Marxist officials<sup>187</sup> reformed Cuban economic policy after the Soviet development model. As a consequence, 1960s attempts to institutionalize revolutionary humanism came to a halt in the 1970s: against initial efforts to involve the working classes in the economy through the Budgetary Finance System, the Cuban Communist Party introduced the hierarchical Soviet-style System of Economic Management and Planning.<sup>188</sup> This model sought to maximize all investments within the national economy, tangentially impacting the cultural industries by tightening control on some periods, like the *quinquenio gris* (disputably between 1971 and 1976).<sup>189</sup>

It was the combination of this economism, Castro's ambiguous definition of revolutionary culture as necessarily happening "within and for the Revolution," and the pragmatic interpretations of this framework by changing culture officials what has made the prosperity and

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<sup>185</sup> Development modernization theory defends that the economic and political problems of South nations would be solved with the implementation of models successful in the West. Within Marxism, proponents of this approach take as model the Soviet development trajectory. Marxist dependency theorists, however, claim that the current under-development of peripheral nations is the product of centuries of colonial exploitation of these regions human, natural, and cultural resources. Within Cuba, liberal sections of the PCC aligned with this last perspective, pushing for distance from the Soviet Union, perceived by them as a new imperial power.

<sup>186</sup> complete reference. The exportation of the guerrilla insurgency model to Latin America stopped with the assassination of Ernesto Guevara by CIA-recruited Bolivian mercenaries in October 10, 1967. Other forms of military and civil cooperation have been active since.

<sup>187</sup> Ideologically opposed to Guevara and other liberals in the government, orthodox Soviet-oriented members of the party advocated for a variation of Soviet-style social realism doctrine in Cuba.

<sup>188</sup> A decentralized planning system mirroring capitalist relations between enterprises, where value is determined by buying-selling relationships, therefore based in material rather than moral stimulus.

<sup>189</sup> Weppler-grogan, Doreen. "Cultural Policy , the Visual Arts , and the Advance of the Cuban Revolution in the Aftermath of the Gray Years." *Cuban Studies* 41, no. 2010 (2010): 143–65.

openness of Cuba's cultural field dependent on the nation's overall economic performance and its fluttering confidence on the strength of its national sovereignty.<sup>190</sup> As a consequence, times of low economic productivity have translated as increased repression and vigilance over the content of artworks. More significantly, the acute economic crisis that followed the dissolution of the USSR in the 1990s has led to government expectations that the cultural industries fit broader national economic goals, allowing for the appearance of “artistic public spheres”,<sup>191</sup> shaped, for example, by the approaching of the culture and the tourism industries since the mid 1990s.<sup>192</sup>

Foreign policy is driven by Cuba's reliance on its exports balance and its defense of national autonomy. However, sustained economic dependence on sugar exports to the Soviet Union (until 1991) jeopardized the Cuban state's decolonial goals. This led the nation to pursue tighter diplomatic relations with other countries engaged in decolonial or anti-imperialist struggle, and join the founding of the Nonaligned Bloc in 1961.<sup>193</sup> The rise of left-wing governments in Central America during the 1980s, and a general rapprochement with Cuba by most Latin American nations changed the course of Cuba's international relations, allowing the nation certain margin of action away from the economic doctrines of *glasnost* and *perestroika* of a weakened USSR in the mid 1980s. In fact, as a continuation of the nation's early socialist internationalism, Cuba's third-worldist agenda materialized since the mid 1960s in the island's

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<sup>190</sup> The mid 1970s experienced a significant raise of repression and persecution of artists, musicians, and writers. The Revolutionary Cuban intellectual class suffered in these years its first significant loss, as thousands stopped producing definitely or temporarily, many were sentenced to prison, and others exiled. Despite the persecution of those who personally or professionally practiced differently from the strict state interpretation of Socialism in that decade, those years, which came to be known as the *Quinquenio Gris*, never saw the actual implementation of socialist realism as cultural doctrine.

<sup>191</sup> Sujatha Fernandes uses the term 'artistic public spheres' to refer to instances of “overlapping with both state institutions and market forms”, as “sites of interaction and discussion among ordinary citizens generated through the medium of popular culture”. See Sujatha Fernandes, *Cuba Represents! Cuban Arts, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006)

<sup>192</sup> See my article “Global contemporary art tourism: engaging with Cuban authenticity through the Bienal de La Habana”, in *Tourism Planning and Development*, v. 15, 3 (2017)

<sup>193</sup> In 1979 Havana hosted the annual meeting of the Non-Aligned Bloc, and Fidel Castro occupied the group's chairmanship twice since 1970.

military and medical aid to nations fighting anti-imperialist wars, like Algeria, Angola, and Vietnam.<sup>194</sup> These new networks of cooperation were eventually helpful in providing of channels for artistic cooperation around the Bienal. Cuba's decolonial political solidarity first materialized in military and medical aid to nations such as Angola, Mozambique, Timor, El Salvador, Nicaragua, etc. The situated bonds of cooperation between Cuba and aid recipient nations became an important infrastructure for the cultural research undertaken by the Bienal. As I will explain in detail, Bienal 'specialists' relied in the existence of these on the ground forms of interpersonal, material, and epistemic reciprocity to produce the Third World avant-garde art object.

### **Cultural cooperation with Latin America before the Bienal.**

"It's just like the guerrilla. You first have small nuclei. Then one nucleus contacts the other, that contacts the other. In Casa it all started with literature. It was our way to establish those contacts. Some of them were already famous, although it wasn't the boom yet, but others... in the visual arts it all began through the popular arts".<sup>195</sup>

This quote from a conversation with the current President of Consejo Nacional de Artes Plásticas Lesbia Ves Dubois illustrates the rationale behind Cuba's model of cultural diplomacy since 1959. As earlier sections describe, the regime's investment in art as a key tool in the formation of a revolutionary consciousness in Cuba and throughout the continent preceded the

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<sup>194</sup> These efforts still continue today. As Richard L. Harris remarks, "As of 2006, there were Cuban humanitarian aid workers in 39 countries in the Américas, 29 African states, 18 countries in Asia and the Middle East, and 15 nations in Europe. More than 35 percent of these volunteer internationalists were doctors or health workers." Harris, Richard L. "Cuban Internationalism, Che Guevara, and the Survival of Cuba's Socialist Regime." *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 3 (2009): 27–42.

<sup>195</sup> In interview with Lesbia Vent Dubois, October 2017. The 'boom' that she refers to is the 'boom' that Latin American literature experienced in the 1960s-1970s and that propelled to the international sphere writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, and Mario Vargas Llosa. This phenomenon was an industry-lead attempt to market Latin American stylistic difference to Euro-American audiences that was galvanized around the formation and marketing of the genre 'realismo mágico'.



creation of the Bienal de La Habana. Since 1959, cultural relations with Latin America had been mainly practiced through la Casa de las Américas. This institution was established in 1959 by Haydée Santamaría, a 'liberal' and close ally to Guevara, and a fervent defender of non-state regulation of content in the arts.<sup>196</sup>

Casa's initial arts programming exhibited popular art and crafts from Latin America. This criteria reflected, on one hand, the imagined universality of crafts and their identification with the rural working classes all across the continent (the exemplary guerrilla revolutionary subject) and, on the other, the production models prevalent in the popular arts, which more often than not were organized in workshops or guilds of artisans, and were sometimes even unionized. These forms of structured collaboration were easier to trace by the young Cuban arts researchers sent in exploratory missions from Casa de las Américas to map art production in Latin America. Further, this focus on the popular arts avoided the U.S.'s new networks of influence in the avant-garde Latin American art circles. Chiefly, the choice to showcase artisanal production and trace the relations of production behind this form of cultural production opened doors to future attempts to redefine the categories and criteria of legitimization of art production on an international field. These advances were later continued by the Bienal de La Habana (see below).

However, Casa's explorations soon broadened to forge strong ties with Left-leaning members of those same avant-garde art circles that were being cultivated by US-based groups. As a result, the organization's exhibition program began including avant-garde art from the late 1960s on.

Like the quote above evokes, the forge of a Latin American revolutionary consciousness via research and curatorial travels mirrors the logic of *foquismo*, a model of guerrilla warfare

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<sup>196</sup> Note about Santamaría's purge in the 1970s.

based on small, mobile, and autonomous units to be deployed in rural regions. *Foquismo* emphasizes the rural peasant as the ideal subject for Latin American insurgency. This model benefited from the economization of resources and time and avoided the ideological compromises that come with the processes of urban politics and class-alliances.<sup>197</sup> However, unlike in armed struggle, art researchers and curators from Casa de las Americas combined in their expeditions visits to artisans and artists alike, and not just peasant cadres, in rural and urban areas. They pursued a trans-class alliance that informed a Latin American avant-garde first, and sought to form a Third World avant-garde later. In it, they included artisans – from the urban and rural working classes –, and left leaning avant-garde artists – from the urban bourgeoisie. The remaining sections of this chapter show how these tactical alliances took form at different levels of the curatorial practice, slowly informing an organic institutionality that was not singular, but sustained in multiple forms of relation, ideas, and subjects.<sup>198</sup>

When the Bienal was formed by state decree in 1983,<sup>199</sup> there were no funds, staff, curatorial team, or venue allocated for it.<sup>200</sup> In these ambiguous and materially precarious conditions, the Bienal came to be as an improvised institutionality, which final form and outcomes relied exclusively in the already-existing skills of those involved. Although the project

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<sup>197</sup> Ernesto Guevara, *La Guerra de Guerrillas* (La Habana: Talleres tipográficos del I.N.R.A., MINFAR., 1961) Grant Kester has explored the similarities between the revolutionary organizational model of *foquismo* and the rhetoric and practices of disruption of Latin American artists during the Cold War. My analysis discusses, instead, the on the ground tactical openness of revolutionary curatorial practice to form trans-national and trans-class alliances. See Grant Kester, "The Sound of Breaking Glass I: Spontaneity and Consciousness in Revolutionary Culture" in *e-Flux journal*, 30, December 2011, and Grant Kester, "The Sound of Breaking Glass II: Agonism and the Taming of Dissent" in *e-Flux journal*, 31, January 2012.

<sup>198</sup> Raymond Williams, "Traditions, Institutions, and Formations", in *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977)

<sup>199</sup> See Decree No. 113. Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers of 1983, March 30. Decree signed by Armando Hart Dávalos (Minister of Culture), Fidel Castro Ruz (President of the Council of Ministers) and Osmany Cienfuegos Gorriarán (Secretary of the Council of Ministers).

<sup>200</sup> In the 1960s, at times of institutional reform in the country's cultural industries, Paris-based Cuban painter Wifredo Lam reinstated his relationship with the island and declared his support to Castro's socialist program. Actively engaged in sponsoring artistic exchange between Cuba and Europe, Lam quickly became a symbol of Castro's international avant-garde aspirations. The son of a Chinese immigrant and a black Cuban peasant, Lam also embodied the nation's renovated will to overcome colonial race and class disparities. When Lam died in 1982, Castro and his widow, Swiss artist Lou Lam, envisioned the creation of the Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, a national center of contemporary art in his honor. The institution's first task was to organize an international exhibition of contemporary art in the Third World.

depended on the Ministry of Culture, National Plastic Arts Council's (CNAP) director Marcia Leiseca formed a team partially integrated with employees of the Ministry of Culture and of the Visual Arts department at Casa de las Américas.<sup>201</sup> If the first group brought skills such as curatorial experience and bureaucratic knowledge, the latter were a valuable resource as the only experts in contemporary art with a solid network of foreign contacts. This diverse provenance of experts and other kinds of resources granted the Bienal partial autonomy from the central state from its earliest stages. Although the initial directives were to celebrate a big exhibition of contemporary art production in the Third World, relationships between Cuba and the cultural fields in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East were almost non-existent at the time. However, after over two decades of curating exhibitions of contemporary art from Latin America, Casa de las Américas had developed a valuable network of contacts to help publicize the call for participation and circulate targeted invitations to artists and theorists in the region.

The current director of the National Plastic Arts Council, then curator in the Visual Arts department at Casa de las Américas, explained in an interview that “we often traveled to research the arts in Latin America, and so we brought the invitations on behalf of the [Bienal] team, [...] we relied on friends in those countries to distribute them”.<sup>202</sup> Moreover, the team from Casa de las Américas brought valuable knowledge on the shipping of artworks from Latin American nations to Cuba, a transport which, due to the harsh U.S. embargo on the island, often happened via Madrid or Paris. The hardships derived from Cuba's infrastructural precarity and the impact of the U.S. embargo on international communications drew an aura of sacrifice and shared struggle around the Bienal. As Ecuadorian painter Oswaldo Guayasamín explained,

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<sup>201</sup> The Casa de las Américas was founded in 1959 by Haydée Santamaría, a revolutionary hero and party organizer, originary from rural Eastern Cuba. The Casa's mission was to overcome the restrictions on communications that the U.S. embargo posed on the island, using cultural cooperation to spearhead the formation of an emancipated pan-American consciousness. Close to Che Guevara and his ideas, Santamaría was perceived as a liberal within the CCP and Casa remained a sanctuary for free-thought at times of hard political persecution in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

<sup>202</sup> In interview with Lesbia Vent Dubois, October 2017.

overcoming these obstacles turned the event into an “act of faith on the Cuban Revolution” and the role it played at the time in Latin America.<sup>203</sup>

The legacy of Casa de las Américas shows that networks of individual solidarity established between art workers and intellectuals throughout Cuba and Latin America proved to be instrumental for the opening of cultural cooperation channels between Cuba and other nations. In what Rachel Weiss calls “a symbolic re-designation of hemispheric solidarity”, the building where Casa was installed had originally been the venue for the Organization of American States in Havana.<sup>204</sup> Its curators' years-long personal explorations of the cultural fields of other Latin American nations between 1959-1982 consolidated a network of individual trust and material reliance, while contributing to the formation of a Latin American left intellectual class that viewed Havana as its ideological capital. The first Bienal de La Habana's reliance<sup>205</sup> on the redistribution of already existing groups of experts from other institutions and the piecemeal joining of budgetary efforts from different agencies oriented the exhibition's organizational foundations around practices of resource-sharing, voluntary participation, and the involvement of different levels of the administration into the production of the event. The next section analyzes this model and its implications for the production of art historical knowledge.

### **Specialist's labor.**

One evening, at a cultural event reception in the early 1990s, Bienal director Lillian Llanes chatted casually in a corner with a small group of colleagues. Suddenly, the hall went silent: Fidel Castro had entered the room. Dressed in his green military uniform, he walked towards

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<sup>203</sup> “La fiesta de la imagen”, ICAIC. Documentary, 1984.

<sup>204</sup> In private correspondence with Rachel Weiss.

<sup>205</sup> The first Bienal de La Habana, celebrated in the Pabellón Cuba in the district of Vedado, joined over 800 Latin American artists, and displayed more than 2300 artworks. A documentary by the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry shows hundreds of visitors on a line, zigzagging around the exhibition venue.

her and asked: “Are you the [Wifredo] Lam's [Center] director? I've been wanting to visit the center.” Some months later, the President's car arrived to the door at 9 o'clock. Together, they visited the facilities and the galleries, as Llanes recounted the work that the team carried out in preparation for the next iteration of the Bienal. Llanes explained that every specialist was involved in all parts of the curatorial process: traveling for research, discussing and planning the event, and actively participating in the production and installation of each exhibition. Curious about the process, Castro seemed to disagree. According to her, he believed that specialists should be distant from society so as to be autonomous. “Fidel wanted detached scientists and artists. I wanted to train specialists for whom theory and practice were the same thing,” Llanes told me.<sup>206</sup>

This anecdote, as filtered by Llanes's memory, mythologizes the Bienal's origins framed by the encounter between 'orthodox' (Castro) and 'liberal' (Llanes) Marxist understandings of labor. In theory, the latter reflected socialist humanism's program to overcome alienation and sought to transform workers' relation with their labor in all industries. This new culture of work was based on three main principles: “dialectical discipline” (versus discipline understood as submission to management), decision-making based on “collective discussion” and “democratic centralism”, and in the “increasing workers' participation through their organizations in the management” of the workplace.<sup>207</sup> Although I will take these three principles as backbones of the form of curatorial labor carried out in this institution given that they are the principles referred to by subjects during fieldwork, it is important to situate this model in the context of a growing rivalry between Lillian Llanes and Gerardo Mosquera, a member of the research team and a rising presence in the national art scene as an art critic. Such a structuring of labor would

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<sup>206</sup> From a conversation with Lillian Llanes. La Habana, September 21, 2017

<sup>207</sup> Ernesto Guevara, “A new culture of work”, in *Che Guevara Reader. Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics and Revolution*, David Deutschmann (ed.) (New York, Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997). p. 120. Speech pronounced in August 21, 1962 at the meeting of the Central Organization of Cuban Trade Unions.

potentially stop Mosquera, who ultimately emigrated and established himself as a respected international art curator and theorist, from gaining authority in the organization.

The following sections show how the three principles of 'dialectical discipline', 'collective discussion', and 'workers participation' materialized in the curatorial practice of the Bienal. I describe the main aspects of curatorial labor within the Bienal framed by the socialist humanist framework outlined above: research trips abroad, collective curatorial discussions, and a last stage of cumulative production. In so doing, this section provides an account of the relations and conditions for the production of art historical knowledge within the Bienal de La Habana in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The investigations leading to the production of each Bienal iteration faced multiple obstacles related to the limitations of Cuba's diplomatic reach, the precarity of communication infrastructures and the cultural industries in some regions, and, most importantly for this study, the difficulty for Cuban researchers to abandon their own Euro-American avant-garde epistemic framework and breach the high aesthetic diversity from areas without the same legacy of aesthetic colonization of Latin American nations.

This desire to ultimately decolonize the Euro-American aesthetic framework has been present in the discourse of Bienal organizers since its founding, albeit with different materializations through time. In this vein, Gerardo Mosquera explained in 1988 that the Bienal "represents a Third World effort -if not an entirely conscious one- at constructing a new international order of culture and a more universal perspective wherein the interests of all peoples converge, this being in opposition to the fabricated cosmopolitanism from the island of Manhattan"<sup>208</sup> (while he still keeps a home in Havana, Mosquera settled in New York in the early 1990s, leading curatorial projects in the New Museum).

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<sup>208</sup> Gerardo Mosquera, "Raíces en acción", *Revolución y Cultura*, (La Habana), no. 2, (February 1988), p. 32-39, Cited in David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America 1910-1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002)

## Section 2: Curators as organic intellectuals.

The scrutiny of these forms of labor demonstrates that an enterprise of such dimensions in late 1980s Cuba was only possible because it was sustained on extended practices of local and international solidarity that involved individuals and institutions alike. ‘Specialists’, as they were first called by Bienal director Lillian Llanes,<sup>209</sup> were organic intellectuals engaged in the production of a counter-hegemonic narrative of modern art. This was not the first time that Cuban government officials or Party-affiliated intellectuals articulated this idea. For example, Fornet spoke of intellectuals mission to forge a “new optic” (1971), Nicolás Guillén declared it imperative to “engage with those who inspire the vanguard’s work” (1987), and Osvaldo Dorticós spoke of “[intellectuals’] commitment to be one of the people” (1987).<sup>210</sup>

Organic intellectuals play for Gramsci the important function of “directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong”. In partial agreement with Lenin’s conception of intellectual work, the Gramscian organic intellectual, while belonging to the subaltern group and a natural conversant of their language, is propelled by the avant-garde, who links them to the traditional intelligentsia. This echoes Bienal specialists’ responsibility of channeling the aesthetic programs of the Third World to broader international art audiences while, at the same time, using these same discourses to organize consent within national publics. This contradiction between, on one hand, resisting to Euro-American epistemic dominance and, on the other, stimulating citizen participation in the Revolutionary state project, makes the Bienal de La Habana a singular art biennial. Rachel Weiss sees these tensions as

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<sup>209</sup> The organization substituted *specialists* for *curators*, in the mid 1990s, by then a designation already common in international art circles. This adoption signals to the increased welcoming of standards of practice in the global contemporary art industry in formation in the 1990s.

<sup>210</sup> Cited in Amaya, Hector. *Screening Cuba: Film Criticism as Political Performance during the Cold War*. Chicago: University of Illinois, 2010. p. 40

broader symptoms of decolonial projects: “on the one hand, it was informed about and participating in metropolitan debates about the trajectory of art and, on the other, it fully engaged in the intense and fraught relationships with tradition that were playing so many roles in postcolonial cultures”.<sup>211</sup>

While for both Lenin and Gramsci the avant-garde is the Communist Party in opposition to power,<sup>212</sup> in this case, the temporary pact signed to advance in the war of position was not with the PCC -an obvious and natural ally of the Third World emancipatory agenda-, but, dangerously, with particular elements of the Euro-American avant-garde art world.<sup>213</sup> Among these elements were artworks following the avant-garde traits of shock and novelty that were incorporated in the exhibition, and experts such as curators and critics invited to the Bienal from Europe and the United States, like Lucy Lippard, Dore Ashton, Carl André, Shifra Goldman, Jimmy Durham, etc. Some of these foreign curators and critics participated in the theoretical event organized alongside each Bienal iteration, and many published about the Bienal in their places of origin.

Like Bienal specialists, the organic intellectual is simultaneously invested in the production and the organization of labor, and plays a directive political role in their community of origin, “giving,” as Gramsci writes, “[their communities] homogeneity and an awareness of [their] own function, not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields”.<sup>214</sup> This resonates with Castro's mission for the Bienal: to provide the Third World emancipatory agenda with a legitimate artistic program of its own, potential useful leverage at times of redefinition of the relations of power in the international field. But crucial to understanding the Bienal de La

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<sup>211</sup> Rachel Weiss, *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall, 2011) p.44

<sup>212</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *What is to be Done?* Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, p. 4.

<sup>213</sup> See later section in this Chapter on the *Magiciens de la Terre* controversy.

<sup>214</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971, 2012), p. 5.



Habana as a counter-hegemonic epistemic device is an exploration of the dimensions of labor involved in it.

## Research travels

Specialist Jose Manuel Noceda remembers that, in the early years,

“Lilian always reserved funds that, once a Bienal iteration was over, would allow us to start curatorial [research] travels, to start exploring and researching for the next edition. But those funds were too meager and barely allowed us to pay for plane tickets and meals for specialists. And so Lilian or ourselves, through friends looked for people who would provide us with housing. Sometimes critics, artists, friends of an artist... they would let us a small room with a bathroom and there we stayed fifteen, twenty days... there were some who traveled for even longer”.<sup>215</sup>

Research travels by Bienal specialists<sup>216</sup> continued Cuba's Third-Worldist internationalism tracing the extent of the nation's diplomatic network and of Casa de las Américas' contacts. Due to the limited time allowed for the preparation of the first Bienal in 1984, all invitations relied on Casa de la Americas. Artworks in this edition came from 21 Latin American nations.<sup>217</sup> However, beginning in 1985, a new team of less than 18 employees worked exclusively in the preparation of the Bienal.<sup>218</sup> From that moment on, the specialists' scope of investigation extended to the whole of the Non-Aligned Bloc.<sup>219</sup> This second iteration included artworks from 61 nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>215</sup> From interview with Jose Manuel Noceda, November 17, 2016.

<sup>216</sup> In the initial years, 'specialist' was the title given to those in charge of researching, selecting, and organizing for exhibition the artworks in each iteration. Later on, this denomination was changed to 'curator', mirroring trends in the international art industry. See section about curatorial work as intellectual work for an evaluation of this transition.

<sup>217</sup> The list included México, Cuba, Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Brasil, Chile, Nicaragua, Uruguay, Bolivia, Ecuador, Perú, Panamá, Puerto rico, República Dominicana, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guadalupe, Guatemala, Jamaica, and Martinica.

<sup>218</sup> From interview with Jose Manuel Noceda, November 17, 2016.

<sup>219</sup> Each specialist had a region of expertise. For instance, at the beginning, Nelson Herrera Ysla was assigned the Arab world, and Gerardo Mosquera traveled across Africa. Margarita Sanchez has always worked South America; Jose Manuel Noceda, the Caribbean; and Ibis Fernandez Southern Asia. In most cases, curators have worked on their regions of expertise for decades now.

<sup>220</sup> The list of nations is long: Angola, Algeria, Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cambodia, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Etiopia, The Philippines, Ghana,

Like Noceda recalls, funds allocated by the Ministry of Culture to research travels covered airfares and meals. However, since the beginning of the Special Period budget for research travel dropped, and in some cases disappeared, making specialists increasingly reliant on invitations from third parties in other countries to assist to conferences, give talks, participate in expert gatherings, etc. Before each trip, every specialist would reach out to personal contacts in their areas of expertise, who would provide them with a place to sleep and connect them to other artists and theorists in their area. Individual hospitality solved material limitations while, most importantly, provided the legitimacy of being introduced into a local art scene by insider agents. Margarita González, specialist in art from Mexico, Chile, and Argentina, remembers that one time she had to be in Mexico City for a month, during which time she lived at a Mexican artist's home, who has since become a friend and an important provider of specialized literature and data about Mexico's contemporary art scene.<sup>221</sup> When individual contacts were not enough, Bienal director Lillian Llanes reached out to personal acquaintances in the Ministry of Foreign Relations, who would in turn connect her to Cuban ambassadors and their cultural attaches abroad. These high level official backings often helped legitimate researchers' presence in some regions for the first time, and were of special help outside of Latin America. Cuban diplomats abroad also provided material and travel support to specialists. Gerardo Mosquera, specialist in art from Africa, shared in an interview how, on a trip to Subsaharian Africa, officials at the Cuban embassy in Angola escorted him across the border with a neighboring nation, providing military protection at times of armed conflict.<sup>222</sup> Similarly, specialist Néilson Herrera Ysla retold how the introduction provided by a member of the Cuban diplomatic mission in a Middle-Eastern nation led him to visit a valuable art collection located at the guarded residence

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Guadalupe, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Irak, Jamaica, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mali, Morocco, Martinique, Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Panama, Pakistan, Peru, Puerto Rico, República Dominicana, Senegal, Seychelles, Syria, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Trinidad y Tobago, Tunisia, Uruguay, Venezuela, Zaire, Vietnam, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

<sup>221</sup> From an interview with Margarita González. November, 2016.

<sup>222</sup> From an interview with Gerardo Mosquera. June, 2015.

of a chief of state.<sup>223</sup> To most, support from the Cuban diplomatic body translated in board and shipping aid, as the big collections of catalogs, leaflets, photos, books, and other materials gathered in field work were too heavy to fly with them and were instead sent to Havana via diplomatic mail.

These trips were beneficial in several ways. First, they provided empirical grounding for their investigations. In words of Noceda: “curatorial travels allowed one to confirm on the ground what one had already studied in books and catalogs [...] all information that one had been reading here, sitting in this very same chair and desk”.<sup>224</sup> Second, they provided specialists from the Wifredo Lam center with first hand access to local art scenes in cases in which specialized literature on them was limited or non-existent. This was mostly the case in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. Third, they helped advertise the Bienal as both an opportunity for symbolic decolonial emancipation and a new space of art legitimization. Fourth, they strengthened the specialists' relations with their regions of expertise, informing years-long relationships with individual agents and art institutions. Lastly, they often provided specialists with the opportunity to earn supplementary incomes by participating in events in local art scenes.

The Bienal, in turn, gained exclusive data on art practices yet unseen in Euro-American art capitals. This material was later collectively processed, upon return, by the whole group of specialists crafting the next Bienal iteration, and archived in the Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam. The restricted nature of international travel in Cuba made these research trips especially attractive as few Cubans had the opportunity to travel abroad. They were a source of symbolic, social, and material capital for the researchers, and of cultural and social capital for the Bienal. Their coveted status has made them a point of particular contention between Bienal organizers, interested in protecting them, and Ministry of Culture officials, permanently lowering budgets

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<sup>223</sup> From an interview with Néilson Herrera Ysla. November, 2016.

<sup>224</sup> From interview with Jose Manuel Noceda, November 17, 2016.

allocated for travel. Looking at these trips, this study shows that the Bienal's programmatic Third World solidarity was in fact sustained through individual solidarity practices such as hosting, feeding, and connecting researchers with artists and theorists all through Third World nations by non-Cuban hosts. The Bienal's decolonial program relied exclusively practices of solidarity and mutual recognition between those belonging to the same abstract interest group in formation: Third World artists and culture officials seeking vessels of legitimization and circulation for their work of their own. This first stage of their work surveyed the field looking for potential phenomena to classify under the category of Third World art in the making.

### **Collective decision making.**

The second stage of curatorial work was joint group discussion of data gathered in research trips. During this stage, specialists held weekly three day-long meetings to discuss and evaluate the proposals made by each member regarding the artworks to be included in the exhibition. As Bienal director Lillian Llanes remembers, “the whole group voted [on each proposal]. We held collective discussions about each candidate. Each specialist had to explain their rational choices about artists, not so much artworks, but about how each artist saw the world”.<sup>225</sup> Several specialists have shared with me that the group valued artists' subjective interpretations of the exhibition's premise instead of discussing specific artworks.<sup>226</sup> This interest on the artist's consciousness over the objects produced in labor resonates with more general notions of labor within a humanist socialist framework, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Further, in cases where a consensus was not reached over a candidate, Llanes would trust in the specialist's proposal, making them personally accountable for overseeing the installation and conceptualization of that artist's inclusion in the exhibition. Once the selection was finalized,

<sup>225</sup> From an interview with Lillian Llanes. September, 2017.

<sup>226</sup> From interviews with Margarita González, Néilson Herrera Ysla, Manuel Noceda, Gerardo Mosquera, and Lillian Llanes. Held between June 2015 and September 2017.

the group of specialists arranged artists according to their personal statements, and not to the formal characteristics of their artworks, as the specific pieces to be included in the Bienal had yet not been produced..

These discussions behind close doors provided specialists with relative independence from other tasks involved in the preparation of the Bienal during a bracketed period of time. Llanes remembers that during the discussion stage she tried to “protect specialists from organizational headaches” such as budgetary limitations, the processing, of permits, and the coordination of available galleries for exhibitions.<sup>227</sup> However, as the next section shows, specialists were thrown into organizational duties soon after the selection of artists concluded. This second stage of collective decision making following research travels produced the categories that would articulate the Bienal's iteration in preparation. Avoiding formal affinities to arrange artworks, and grouping artists instead by the compatibility of their subjective positions, the exhibition ignored stylistic principles of the Western avant-garde such as formal affinity and technique, favoring instead the creation of a choral consciousness that was not dependent on an a priori written premise. For example, a newsreel about the 1984 Bienal's opening shows a series of stylistically different artworks juxtaposed: two big sized charcoal linear drawings of human figures, an oil side portrait of a child campesino with heavy brush-strokes in an almost impressionist materiality, two colorful schematic frontal portraits of black women wearing birds on their heads, and a big painting of a jungle human-like creature with serpent body.<sup>228</sup> Although this curatorial method that follows artists' subjectivity has become a standard practice today, at the time it was still more common that international exhibitions of Euro-American avant-garde art showed artworks arranged by author, style, technique, or origin. The choral displays that

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<sup>227</sup> In interview with Lillian Llanes. September 26, 2017.

<sup>228</sup> Noticiero ICAIC, 1986.

surged from collective decision-making led to wholesome representations of the state of art production in the Third World.<sup>229</sup>

Marking distance from what at the time was soon becoming a trend in other international exhibitions, the team at the Wilfredo Lam Center decided not to invite foreign curators to the Bienal de La Habana. Was this due to the fact that the exhibition was still perceived as an important tool for state diplomacy and Lillian Llanes, its director, was very trusted by the Government? Was it, instead, to keep the organization faithful to its commitment of developing a curatorial model of its own based in long-term team development of a shared discursive project?

### **Pedagogic mission.**

In the absence of any formal training on how to organize an international exhibition of art, Bienal specialists and other members of the Wilfredo Lam center developed their professional skills via ad hoc improvisation and informal apprenticeship. Working for the Bienal was an educational experience during which curators and other members of the staff developed the necessary skills during the process. The most senior members of the research team brought inherited knowledge from their previous fields of expertise: Lillian Llanes, a professor of Cuban architectural history, contributed to the Center her savviness on Cuban bureaucracy and event organization. Gerardo Mosquera, who had previously worked in the Dirección de Artes Plásticas and was already a prolific critic, provided a sophisticated theoretical and art historical framework. Fieldwork material shows how important this formative experience was for the younger members of the team. For example, specialist José Manuel Noceda remembers that

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<sup>229</sup> My use of the category 'organic' in this chapter follows the term as it appears Burger's reading of Lukacs's 'realistic' art. See, for example, Giorgi Lukacs, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin Press, 1962), and Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)

“when I joined the team, that is, in late November 1984, the Center were just Lillian [Llanes], Nelson [Herrera Ysla], and [Gerardo] Mosquera. One comrade and I joined, we were the first recently graduated students who began to work in the center”.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, in a conversation with Rachel Weiss, specialist Leticia Cordero recalls how every research process about a new geographic area entailed months of laborious learning about that region’s cultural and historical framework in addition to its art.<sup>231</sup> Thus, through years of improvisation and trial and error learning, the Bienal developed an organizational memory carried in the embodied expertise of its workers.

Yet the Bienal’s pedagogic mission also determined the organization’s projection into the city. In a city with limited – yet growing – access to international networks of artistic exchange, an event like the Bienal allowed young artists to engage in valuable opportunities for technical and theoretical learning, as well as with the chance to develop professional connections abroad and increase their social capital. For example, Jorge Fernández, current Director of the Museo de Nacional Bellas Artes and director of the 2012 and 2015 Bienales de La Habana, recalled how, working as a young reporter in a local radio gave him to access Bienal events at a formative stage, ultimately provoking in him an interest in art criticism and the arts more broadly.<sup>232</sup> Further, Cuban art critic Magaly Espinosa remembers how having the opportunity to be involved in different aspects of the Bienal was a formative experience for her. She and her peers could “encounter, first, the work and thought of the most advanced Latin American artists, art critics, curators, and visual theoreticians, and, second, contrast it with our Eastern Marxist-Leninist formation”.<sup>233</sup> This internal and external pedagogical mission continues to this day and is a valuable professionalizing platform for artists, curators, and art critics in the island.

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<sup>230</sup> From interview with Jose Manuel Noceda, November 17, 2016.

<sup>231</sup> Rachel Weiss, *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall, 2011)

<sup>232</sup> From an interview with Jorge Fernández, October 31st, 2016.

<sup>233</sup> In Rachel Weiss, *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall, 2011) p. 17.

### **Cumulative production.**

The third stage of work, which I call of *cumulative production*, comprised the actual production of the exhibition. During this stage, specialists, together with all members of Wifredo Lam's small staff, installed artworks in specific settings, organized peripheral events, and arranged for logistics such as housing and feeding guests. This last stage involved the multifaceted intervention in the institutional and spatial fabric of the city, grounding in practical technique all former abstract conceptions of art historical knowledge. This is a clear characteristic of the Gramscian organic intellectual who “[lives] in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, permanent persuader”.<sup>234</sup> It is also yet another instance of the ad hoc forms of cooperation that allowed for the Bienal to exist. For instance, the installation of artworks was often a complex duty where difficulties began with the hardships of international transports to and from Cuba. A Mexican curator involved in the shipping of an artwork in the 2001 Bienal recalled that “the tables required for the display [of the piece] were not available in Cuba, so we shipped them from Mexico but [custom officials] kept them indefinitely at customs”.<sup>235</sup> Scarcity of materials was an added problem that resulted either in their importation or the altering of the artwork's material specificities, as finally happened with the artwork from Mexico. Some other times, materials were shared from other agencies or enterprises in the city, often found after several personal phone calls asking for production remnants or the like. For instance, Lillian Llanes remembers how in 1991, at the beginning of the Special Period, artwork installation was often strictly dependent on inter-personal solidarity. One case was that of Chilean artist Eugenio Dittborn, who requested several tons of salt to fill a gallery room in the Castillo del Morro. Another case was that of Nury González, also from Chile, who needed several hundred fishing hooks for an installation at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. Given the acute food and goods scarcity in Cuba during the Special Period, these materials were hard

<sup>234</sup> Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 9.

<sup>235</sup> From interview with Carmen Cuenca. July 2016.



to find. After several days consulting with different agencies, a personal connection led Llanes to speak to a high rank official in the Armed Forces who, in turn, connected her with a military diner and a fishing boat restoration workshop outside Havana. Per request from this high rank official, these two places delivered the goods requested to the gallery space.<sup>236</sup> Further, while the specialized technical skills required for the installation of some artworks were available in Havana, the Bienal's limited budget did not include additional labor force. In these cases, voluntary labor from the Brigada Jose Marti came in aid.<sup>237</sup>

The organization of peripheral events, such as talks, presentations, and workshops, took place in a similar fashion: hosted temporarily at other venues, produced with shared or repurposed resources, and put together by voluntary labor. What may seem like an improvisational approach to exhibition production speaks, in fact, of a culture of resource sharing and worker participation in the maintenance and governance of their workplace common in Cuban socialism.<sup>238</sup> More specifically, this form of exhibition production shows Llanes's goal to form specialists in whom "theory and practice unite":<sup>239</sup> specialists in the research, planning, and production of exhibitions.

### **Inter-agency collaboration.**

Moreover, collaboration with multiple city agencies became vital as the scale of the exhibition grew through time. The Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam only has three small galleries, so new exhibition space needed to be found. In the first Bienal, the venues used were galleries at

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<sup>236</sup> From an interview with Lillian Llanes. September, 2017.

<sup>237</sup> The Brigada Jose Marti is Cuba's cultural brigade, in charge of contributing voluntary labor to assist in the production of cultural events.

<sup>238</sup> For this purpose, I consider voluntary labor both the kind of labor offered by members of the Jose Marti brigades and assistance by employees of other cultural enterprises and/or agencies, temporarily redirecting their labor to the production of the Bienal.

<sup>239</sup> From an interview with Lillian Llanes. September, 2017.

the National Museum of Fine Arts and the Pabellón Cuba. However, after the second iteration, the Museum was no longer available, and new exhibition spaces such as Castillo del Morro, Casa de las Américas, Museo de Artes Decorativas, Casa de Obrapía, and municipal galleries were temporarily loaned for the duration of the Bienal.

Of remarkable importance here is the collaboration between the Bienal and the Asambleas Municipales del Poder Popular (Municipal Assemblies of the Popular Power), municipal level government councils in charge of administering the economy, culture, health, and social needs of their district. Asambleas from the Havana region provided support in the form of materials, space, and housing for artists during the worst years of the Special Period. Representatives connected Bienal organizers with residents in their districts willing to voluntarily host a foreign artist, and mediated with directors of neighborhood culture centers for extra exhibition space. They also helped in the sourcing of materials needed for the production of artworks. Further, Lillian Llanes remembers how, in the absence of resources to organize receptions and dinners for foreign guests, local chapters of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) offered to welcome artists and theorists into their weekly community dinners with neighbors.<sup>240</sup> In addition to solving organizational and material needs, these community dinners connected foreign visitors with habaneros in encounters non-mediated by the Wifredo Lam center, often allowing for the exchange of narratives and goods brought from abroad.

With artworks meant to be installed in the public space, however, a particular relationship has proved especially beneficial: the symbiotic bond between the Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam

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<sup>240</sup> Community dinners at the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution were of vital importance during the Special Period, as they provided neighbors with access to food at times of extreme food scarcity in Cuba. CDRs have a mixed reputation in Cuba, as they are the PCC representatives at the neighborhood level, overseeing the rightful following of the Revolution's moral program, and often perceived as close vigilants of neighbors' lives on behalf of the state.

and the Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad (Office of the City Historian). This organization<sup>241</sup> has been a key agent in the structural renovation of Havana's colonial architectonic heritage since 1981, and is often taken as a model in responsible urban development.<sup>242</sup> A combination of friendship between its director, City Historian Eusebio Leal, and Lillian Llanes, director of the Bienal de la Habana, plus the two agencies' shared commitment to the promotion of culture, made the Oficina del Historiador a trusted comrade in the Bienal's permanent search for exhibition space since its early days. A document from 2000, entitled Preliminary Proposal for Project Emplacement. Historic Center, Old Havana, proves the collaboration between both entities. The seventeen page long document is the product of the work by different teams in the Oficina's Cultural Programs section in response to the Bienal's requests regarding the special locational needs of a series of public space-oriented artworks. The report provides detailed legal, structural, and aesthetic recommendations to the Bienal, either authorizing or disapproving the installation of artworks in façades, public squares, street corners, etc. For example, after the request to hang silk-screened banners from arches surrounding plazas, necessary for Honduran artist Regina Aguilar's piece, the report reads: "We agree with the proposal by C.W.L. We suggest using the Plaza Vieja so as to enhance this important public space of the Historic Center. You can only use the arches of restored buildings." This is followed by three recommendations, with addresses and apartment numbers. Formal recommendations

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<sup>241</sup> Although the Oficina del Historiador dates back from the 1930s, its present identity and mission was established in 1967, when Eusebio Leal became City Historian. The Office is directly financed with tourism revenue by its enterprise Habanaguex, owner of restaurants, souvenir shops, hotels, and other tourism services. The Office began a decades-long restoration project of the Old City following a Master Plan after UNESCO included the area in its World Heritage list. The Master Plan's main principles are: "To safeguard national identity with the research, promotion, and development of culture. To protect heritage, rehabilitating territory with legally bonding Integral Development Special Plan. To avoid the displacement of local population protecting it from the terciarization of economy. To grant territory with basic technical infrastructure and services according to contemporary needs. To achieve self-financed integral development of the restoration of heritage." Source: Oficina del Historiador. Master Plan. Havana, 1981.

<sup>242</sup> La Oficina del Historiador de La Habana has remained autonomous and independent from direct Government interference for years. It is directed by City Historian Eusebio Leal, and has achieved the beautification of fractions of the city's older areas. Like Rachel Weiss points out in our correspondence, in the evaluation of this model is often left unacknowledged the large amounts of Old Havana residents displaced to outer neighborhoods for the development of touristic facilities.

like this one were part of each Bienal's preparation, as they both authorized the use and alteration of public spaces and in some cases foresaw the preservation of those interventions through time.

The above sections describe a model of curatorial labor particularly rooted in a culture of resource redistribution and worker participation coherent with the ideology of socialist humanism. Specialists surveyed the field for phenomena for classification, held collective discussion of categories, and engaged resource sharing -including labor force- on the individual and institutional level. Most importantly, they show a model of curatorial work guided by moral commitment to a socialist decolonial agenda. This description historicizes curatorial practice within the specific conditions and social relations of late 1980s-early 1990s Havana. Although my analysis stops in 1991, this model is characteristic of how were things done until the 6 Bienal de la Habana in 1997, when to the change of direction Ministry of culture followed increased participation of foreign guest curators, presence of foreign capital in events organizing, and a significant change in aesthetic focus, increasingly tuned to global art trends.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> See section devoted to the *Magiciens de la Terre* controversy and chapter five of this dissertation.

### **Section 3: The Bienal, the crafts, and the arts.**

#### **The strategic pact with the avant-garde.**

The goal of the Bienal de La Habana was one of the formal public international recognition of the worth of Third World artistic production. In so doing, the Bienal was set to develop the organizational framework for sampling, gathering, and exhibiting art from the Third World -initially excluding European and U.S. artists.<sup>244</sup> This required the twofold projection of this struggle for recognition: externally, the Bienal worked to consolidate group consciousness, organizing a new consensuated image of what 'Third World art' looked like and ultimately hoping to alter the hegemonic meaning of 'contemporary art'. Involved in the making of this new art historical category were artists, art theorists, and audiences from Cuba, the Third World, and allies from the Euro-American art world. Internally, this big organizational effort required the solidarity of agencies and individuals of Havana's cultural and political spheres, who came to recognize the Bienal as a partner project in a shared decolonial socialist agenda. In words of Rachel Weiss, "it was clear that by developing credibility in precisely the arena that it existed to defy, the Bienal could amplify its importance to Third World artists".<sup>245</sup>

Not unlike InSITE and Manifesta, this simultaneous reliance on the Euro-American modernist canon and interpersonal trust shaped the Bienal from the beginning. Instead of contesting the Euro-American modernist canon's validity, the Bienal nourished it by problematizing its Eurocentrism and expanding it to include art from the Third World. Yet the Bienal's counter-hegemonic nature abroad did not correspond with its impact within Cuba, where the organization reproduced the interests of local elites and, after 1991 lost the margin of

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<sup>244</sup> I am developing a journal article about the progressive incorporation of U.S. and European artists into the Bienal.

<sup>245</sup> Rachel Weiss, *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London, Afterall, 2011) p. 26

autonomy that it had enjoyed until then and became more ingrained in the Cuban state's efforts to repress dissidence among artists. In this sense, as in other decolonial state projects, the Bienal ultimately helped consolidate state power on the national level. The first section of this chapter has focused on how these elements related with the labor of *specialists* (later *curators*) at the Bienal. This second section adopts the artwork as vantage point, analyzing it in the light of the temporary pacts signed with the Western avant-garde and their material translation in the city of Havana.

The Bienal's emphasis on displaying popular arts side by side avant-garde artworks has dual theoretical implications. As the first section of this chapter describes, within the internationalist socialist humanist exhibition program of Casa de las Américas, the popular arts, in the forms of textiles, printed media, and crafts provided a vantage point to access Latin American cultures for Cuban audiences. Popular art was a form of cultural production present in all regions of the continent that remained outside of the cultural spheres of interest to US cultural diplomacy, which at the time still favored avant-garde circles.

Further, as I have explained earlier in this chapter, socialist humanism attributed to artistic work the potential for individual self-recognition and emancipation from capitalist alienation, leading to the ideal figure of Guevara's 'hombre nuevo'. The emphasis on artistic labor as a pathway for consciousness transformation was already present in Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez's readings of Marx, that Mosquera considered of high influence for Cuban art labor. Historically, other socialist thinkers, such as William Morris, have held up the role of artistic labor in the total transformation of human beings from alienated individuals in capitalism to "complete men" in socialism.<sup>246</sup> According to Morris, in a society based on the exchange of activities, art work would be an expression of community life and cooperation rather than of individualism.<sup>247</sup> The

<sup>246</sup> William Morris, *The Collected Works of William Morris* (London, Calcutta: Longmans Green and Company, 1951)

<sup>247</sup> Paul Leduc Browne, "A Dream of William Morris: Communism, History, Revolution." In *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss*, edited by Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015)

Revolution's defense of popular art was not the first time that it was held up as promise of liberation on an international scale. For example, Alan Antliff reminds us of the emancipatory power attributed to craft work by anarchist historian of Indian art Ananda Coomaraswamy, who saw in the recuperation of medieval craft guilds a promise of resistance to British occupation in India.<sup>248</sup>

### **Latin American *indigenismo*.**

Within the Latin American tradition recourse to the popular arts as a channel towards authenticity has been a permanent gesture practiced by the dominant classes since the colonial period. This romantic recourse, known as *indigenismo*, has manifested differently in the art production of political elites through time. For Peruvian critic Mirko Lauer, indigenous popular arts have acted as “touchstone[s] of cultural identity (from within) or of exoticism (from without)”, aiding in 19<sup>th</sup> Century romantic nationalist projects and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century populisms. Lauer goes on to say that

“the central themes of the elite have until now made the Indian mysterious, turned him into folklore, accused him of the grotesque, and finally, sublimated him, reproducing images that focus on the Indian's feathers. His muscularity, his bucolic environment, his historic immobility as idol”.<sup>249</sup>

Similarly, Paraguayan art historian Ticio Escobar criticizes Latin American elites for promoting the myth of popular art as immutable and ahistorical. For Escobar, like other forms of cultural production, popular art is in process of permanent transformation, the parameters of which should be decided by indigenous communities. The myth of formal immobility through

<sup>248</sup> See Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art Politics and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). “Neither Pentz nor Coomaraswamy sought a wholesale resuscitation of medieval institutions in Europe or India; their program idealized medieval societies in those countries as alternative ‘models’ for the social organization of the future in which spiritual values would shape every aspect of daily life ... The most important feature of medieval society was the integration of spiritual idealism with the day-to-day activities of the population, primarily through art.”

<sup>249</sup> Mirko Lauer, *La Producción Artesanal En America Latina* (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1989) p82

time responds to elites' tendencies to either aestheticize popular art or emphasize its technical functionalism over creativity. For Escobar, the first attitude determines the value of objects purely by their formal features, “thus making [them] comparable to the uselessness of high-art”, and ridding them of their social and cultural value. This fetishization of the popular art object is what Bienal organizers wanted to avoid by emphasizing objects' social values in the exhibition.

Lauer and Escobar argue that the common mis-labelling of popular art as *pre-capitalist* by Latin American elites responds to the predominance in the region of developmentalist modernity projects sponsored by bourgeois criollas elites. Instead, Escobar proposes to see popular art as *acapitalist*, thus opening the way for its inscription in alternative modernity projects. On a similar vein Lauer proposes that indigenist ideology “must compete in the struggle to construct a socialist future” outside of capitalist relations of production that relegate indigenous subjects to the condition of candidates to integration into national (and now international) markets rather than agents of nation building projects. He explains that while pre-colombian popular art practiced near the centers of state power have historically been more receptive to European-style transformations, those practiced in the peripheries have been less impacted by capitalist production modes.<sup>250</sup>

In the Bienal, the decision to combine popular and avant-garde arts into the curatorial selection participated of a more general interest of government elites to connect with the working classes by encouraging identification with forms of popular art. It was also a direct implication of curator Gerardo Mosquera's interest in Afro-Cuban art practices (since before his involvement in the Bienal Mosquera had been a champion of artists such as Ricardo Brey and José Bedia). Other state-sponsored campaigns had pursued this recognition by supporting formal experimentation in popular music and film during the 1960s and 1970s (see, for instance,

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<sup>250</sup> Lauer, Mirko. *La Producción Artesanal En America Latina*. Lima: Mosca Azul, 1989.



the rich production of Grupo de Experimentación Sonora, the Teatro de Arte Popular, or the ICAIC mobile cinema campaigns).<sup>251</sup> (Formal and thematic experimentation that was not state overseen suffered from hard repression in the 1970s and, again, after 1990. See earlier in this chapter) Bienal organizers saw the popular arts as kernels for an *acapitalist* modernity project, as evidenced by the high presence of exhibitions of popular art in every Bienal before 1995.

Bienal exhibition catalogs provide many references to the importance of showing popular art today side by side pieces of geometric abstraction or conceptual art. For example, Ghanaese painter Emmanuel Anku-Golloh wrote in the 1986 Bienal catalog that:

“contemporary cultural life in Ghana is characterized by a duality between old and new. This is also the case in art. On one hand, there are traditional cultures from precolonial times. On the other, new cultural elements inspired in external sources, but that reflect modern ideas of inhabitants of our country”<sup>252</sup>

At the same time, Bienal organizers welcomed different political ideologies from Third World participating countries that shared similar emancipatory drives. For instance, a non-signed catalog essay about art in Iran titled “Art in Islam” stated that:

“Muslim Iranian artists, united with the rest of Muslim brothers, have based their artistic practice in transcendental experiences [because] they search for Transcendentalism in the Islamic Revolution. [...] This can be seen, for example, in graphic arts and sculpture of the symbolic-religious kind. In them, conventional symbols have been replaced. [...] Thus in drawing, revolutionary and religious practice has displaced individualism by negating that which is ephemeral and mundane”.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Nicola Miller, “A Revolutionary Modernity: The Cultural Policy of the Cuban Revolution.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 40, no. 4 (2008): 675–96.

<sup>252</sup> Emmanuel Anku-Golloh, “Introducción al arte y la cultura contemporánea de Ghana”, in *Segunda Bienal de La Habana, 1986* (La Habana: Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, 1986) p. 410. My translation from Spanish.

<sup>253</sup> Unknown author, “Art in Islam”, in *Segunda Bienal de La Habana, 1986* (La Habana: Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, 1986) p. 413. My translation from Spanish.

## Artist composition.

Regarding the exhibition's composition, the pact with the avant-garde translated in the planned combination of two main groups within the broader definition of 'artists from the Third World'. On one side were art practitioners from the Third World whose production had been legitimated by the Euro-American institutions of the avant-garde. This legitimization had in most cases followed the artist's migration to cities like Paris, London, New York or Madrid. Key names in this category are London-based Pakistani painter and writer Rasheed Araeen, Paris-based Argentinian Julio Leparc, New York-based Uruguayan Luis Camnitzer, and New York-based Argentinian Liliana Porter. In other cases, international validation came through US-powered networks of pan-American cultural exchange such as Standard Oil (ESSO) and PepsiCo art awards in Bogotá, Córdoba, Cartagena, Buenos Aires, or Mexico City, or the growth of private collections of Latin American art in the US (Hilton Hotels, PanAm airlines) which were partially facilitated by the Visual Arts section of the Pan American Union. Other forms of Euro-American legitimization came from participation in the Paris Biennial, or national representation in the Venice Biennale.<sup>254</sup> This category includes, for example, Oscar Niemeyer, Carlos Cruz Díez, Alejandro Otero, Antonio Frasconi, and members of the Mexican neo-avant-gardes Helen Escobedo, Felipe Ehrenberg, José Luis Cuevas, and Graciela Iturbide.

On the other side were art practitioners whose production had not entered those international avant-garde circuits, mostly because it escaped the classificatory criteria of Euro-American avant-garde art and remained, for such criteria, within the realm of popular arts, crafts, and artisanal labor. To this group belong the authors of Simon Bolivar toys and the Mexican drape dolls exhibited in the 1989 Bienal, as well as those of a series of Chienes kites

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<sup>254</sup> The deployment of cultural relations in the fight for U.S. international hegemony began in 1940 when Nelson Rockefeller took office as Coordinator of Commercial and Cultural relations with the American nations. See Claire A. Fox, *The Making of Pan-American Art. Cultural Policy and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013)

shown in 1986. This alliance between both interest groups was built on their shared investment in seeing culture from their regions being valued as art by Euro-American art world actors. The first point had to do with the elemental desire of seeing all cultural practices and ways of being in the world publicly recognized as equally legitimate and valuable in a shared sphere of circulation -such as the circuit of international art exhibitions in our case.

The second group included artists from all regions of the Third World. Given the presence of weaker national cultural institutional networks in Africa, Asia and the Middle East and some Central American nations,<sup>255</sup> artists in these regions had little or no access to the international networks of expertise involved in the production of 'contemporary art' (see chapter 1). Foreign art publications, formative events like workshops or symposia and, in some cases, national museums of art, did not exist as they did in most Latin American, European, and North American regions. Instead, most members of this group produced artworks using popular art techniques such as adiré traditional fabric dyeing from Nigeria, or folkloric paintings of nature and animals by a group of Tanzania painters. In other cases, artworks came from Socialist nations where the structures guiding cultural work produced art forms that, although shared European modernist roots, looked very different from other contemporary art forms. Examples in this group include a selection of paintings from North Korea, Vietnam, and the Solentiname Islands artist colony in Nicaragua.

Until their inclusion in the Bienal, these practices had remained outside the conversations and trends articulating the sphere of contemporary avant-garde art and its histories, not involved in them either as active agents nor as passive recipients. Participant artists from this broad group did not necessarily sympathize with Cuba's socialist program, although they all

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<sup>255</sup> This was specially characteristic of artists selected during the research trips of the first Bienal editions. Later on, as budget cuts reduced specialists' possibilities to do on the grounds research of the state of the art in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, curatorial selections began to include art practitioners who, despite having been born in those regions, pursued careers in Europe or the U.S..

shared a commitment to the thirdworldist emancipatory agenda.<sup>256</sup> The particular cultural characteristics of these sites made curatorial work especially challenging, yet provided the 'alliance' with an inherent creativity that was lacking in other European and American attempts to curate art from the Third World such as a *Magiciens de la Terre* and *Primitivism*. As Rachel Weiss states, "this meant that each site visited by the curators presented its own set of parameters and criteria through which the ideas of 'art', 'tradition', 'contemporaneity', and 'Third World' were encountered".<sup>257</sup>

The first interest group, however, composed of by avant-garde artists mostly from Latin America, had a more direct involvement in international art trends. While most of its members lived and worked in Latin America -mostly in capitals-, a fraction of them were based in Europe, mainly in Paris and Madrid. All of the latter and some of the former had been legitimated by Western art institutions, receiving awards and travel grants, participating at group or solo shows in galleries or museums and, in some cases, representing their countries at the Venice Biennale. All of the artists in this group had been valued by their respective national cultural industries, sometimes with promotional efforts sponsored by the U.S. via the Institute of the Américas,<sup>258</sup> and a large majority of them had been formally trained in European-style art academies either in their countries of origin, in Paris, or Madrid.<sup>259</sup> Due to a tighter network of state-sponsored cultural centers (and, since the 1950s, of foreign sponsorship too) all of these artists were aware of the conversations articulating the field of contemporary avant-garde art in Europe and the U.S., via modern art exhibitions in local museums, foreign journals, travel, grants, etc. Easier to locate due to Casa de las Américas's dense contact list, some of them had already participated in other art events in Cuba.<sup>260</sup> Their work was, generally, directly related to

<sup>256</sup> The Bienal's call for participation stated this agenda as the exhibition's narrative principle.

<sup>257</sup> Rachel Weiss, *Making Global Art (Part 1) The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall, 2011) p. 30

<sup>258</sup> Footnote describing the Institute of the America's reach in cultural missions all across Lat Am.

<sup>259</sup> Need note on the structure of art academies and national museums in Latin American. Colonial legacy plus nation building with 19 century standards.

<sup>260</sup> See the section devoted to Argentinian artist Julio Le Parc later on.

either historical or contemporary discussions in avant-garde art trends. A general sentiment among them was the support of the Cuban revolution.

This group, and especially those in it highly valued in the Western institutional circuit, played a key role in making the Bienal appealing to a Western avant-garde audience who, if not represented in the curatorial selection was actively invited to visit and participate in the theoretical peripheral events.<sup>261</sup> This group performed what Gramsci calls the 'Piedmont function' as it is described in Chapter 1.<sup>262</sup> The new formation that came to be from the joining of the above described groups unified what formerly were separate groups in leading the struggle for recognition and legitimacy in the international art world.

### **Popular arts in the Bienal.**

Popular art was very present in exhibitions and workshops since the beginning. Coexisting with avant-garde art works in the main exhibition, the presence of popular art in the selection played the double function of continuing early efforts by Casa de las Américas to exhibit popular arts from the continent, and of challenging Western avant-garde hierarchies of genres and techniques. For example, the catalog of the fourth Bienal (1991) explains that “the marginal condition to which popular culture has been relegated is, with no doubt, one of the contradictions that characterized historical processes in the Third World”, a contradiction product of colonialism first, and neocolonialism in the present.<sup>263</sup> In the second Bienal (1986), for instance, POPULARTE, a collateral exhibition of popular papier maché art, featured a diverse array of objects produced in rural community workshops with the joint sponsorship of local Committees for the Defense of the Revolution and agricultural communities, or DESAs. It

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<sup>261</sup> Footnote describing the formal process of invitations and, specially, the lists of foreign visitors in early editions.

<sup>262</sup> For a detailed description of the Piedmont function as tactical alliance, read corresponding section in Chapter 1.

<sup>263</sup> Cuarta Bienal de La Habana. Catalogo, p 21

showed work by “a disciplined but bizarre army, workers, housewives, students, elderly people, teenagers”, work whose only connective thread was the shared technique of papier maché modeling.<sup>264</sup>

Rachel Weiss recalls how Cuban art critic and theorist Desiderio Navarro shared with her that instructors in these workshops had received orders to not “show any images of ‘art’, or to give any historical background in their presentations, so that what was made in the workshops was not ‘contaminated’” by references to the Euro-American canon. In the absence of a tradition of papier maché crafts in Cuba, such a decision placed papier maché production in the workshops in an interesting position: it seems to imply that, in the absence of references to art from Europe or the Americas, individuals learning the papier maché technique would spontaneously produce objects *pure* of Northern aesthetic colonization.

Echoing the socialist humanist idealization of craft labor, Bienal organizers found artisanal production to be universal, which helped strengthen the exhibition's thirdworldist program. The catalog explained that the “do it yourself [methodology] implicit in the papier maché movement is rooted in primitive art, as it is practiced in nearby regions and far away; and it is through these techniques that different peoples hold hands with a common language that builds fraternity and coherent bonds”.<sup>265</sup> Moreover, this technique offered a transversal read on art production which overcame the distinction between artists and artisans: it proved the “social fact [of] the correct assimilation of the constructive process of a new society”.<sup>266</sup> Other events crossing the art versus craft divide in the 1986 Bienal were an exhibition of art along the national freeway, an exhibition of landscape painting by non-professional Cuban artists,<sup>267</sup> a textile techniques

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<sup>264</sup> II Bienal de La Habana. POPULARTE. Galería de art municipal San Miguel de Padron. Noviembre 1986.

<sup>265</sup> *Cuarta Bienal de La Habana* (La Habana: Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, 1991)

<sup>266</sup> II Bienal de La Habana. POPULARTE. Galería de art municipal San Miguel de Padron. Noviembre 1986.

<sup>267</sup> The distinction between professional and non-professional artists in Cuba is marked the latter's inclusion in the national register of artists and writers. Joining the register has professional advantages such as permission to travel, earn in foreign currency and, more recently, have internet access, that reinforces practitioners' joining. The tax rate for professional artists is significantly higher than for other workers, especially for foreign income.

workshop by Mexican Marta Palau, and a kinetic public sculpture workshop by Argentinian Julio Le Parc (see below). Later iterations continued this effort to bridge the modern separation between arts and crafts. The third Bienal (1989) organized workshops on Adire, a traditional fabric dyeing technique from Nigeria, ceramics, tapestry, paper production, photography, and new architecture. In addition, it featured six exhibitions dedicated to specific techniques of the popular arts in the Third World: a show of small handmade Simon Bolivar figurines from Venezuela, an exhibition of miniature Latin American textiles, a show of Mexican drape dolls, one of African wire toys, Makonde and Chokwe wood-carving practices from Mozambique, and an exhibition of calligraphy in the Arab world.

These dedicated shows were supplemented with a big presence of objects in the main exhibition that bridged between avant-garde expectations of shock and novelty of form and artisanal aesthetic traditions from Third World nations. To this group belonged, for example, fourteen pieces by Filipino artist Roberto Feleo. Bi-dimensional and three-dimensional pieces, they represented different moments of Filipino history. *The Blueprint of Man* combined text and image to render man's essential physical, mythological, and social traits. Over a landscape of dark purple mountains and celeste blue sky, a fine-line white drawing dissected a human body into muscles and energy points. Descriptive captions in Tagalo accompanied each part. Arranged in a circle around it were eight small scenes in which three-dimensional human and animal figurines danced, rode, and wrestled. Another piece by Feleo, *The Malay Entry to the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration*, was a wooden stand-alone piece, shaped like a sea vessel, with two prominent extensions on each end and hundreds of tiny wood sticks emerging from the center, reminiscent of a ship crowded with humans.

The fourth Bienal (1991), titled *Challenges to Colonization*, placed popular arts in the main focus, vindicating the value of forms of cultural production that had survived colonial and neocolonial aesthetic hegemony.<sup>268</sup> The catalog reads:

“The forms of exploitation used by colonialism and neocolonialism, based in their rapine politics, have historically been characterized by the supposed superiority of metropolitan culture over that of submitted territories. [...] To grasp the reach of this problem one must begin by accepting that no exclusion is valid and assuming with awareness the legitimacy of inputs made by all ethnic groups and cultures to nationalities”.<sup>269</sup>

This would be the last Bienal to foreground craft. In addition to the central selection, which featured work by over two-hundred artists showing the “contemporary appropriation of the most significant cultural traditions and the miscellaneous formal paths that they follow in their historical reformulation”,<sup>270</sup> there were other five exhibitions exclusively dedicated to popular art. These included Latin American and Caribbean crafts, feather art from Bolivia, Bogolan painting from Mali, art from Weifang (China),<sup>271</sup> and applied native textile arts from Brazil. A special emphasis was put into showcasing contemporary art by ethnic minorities in North America, broadening the Bienal's interpretation of 'Third World' to encompass all colonized peoples, regardless of geographic placement. *Amerindios del Canadá (Indian Americans from Canada)*, included works by Lance Belanger, Rebecca Belmore, Domingo Cisneros, Josep Tehwaron David, Richard Martel, Ronald Noganosh, and Edward Poitras, who also wrote the curatorial statement. Moreover, organizers included in the main show a selection of guest minority artists from the U.S., such as portorrican Cristina Emmanuel, African American Caryl Henry, Japanese

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<sup>268</sup> This iteration was also a response to the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*. See section devoted to this discussion.

<sup>269</sup> *Cuarta Bienal de La Habana* (La Habana: Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, 1991) p 21

<sup>270</sup> Referencia catalogo 4 Bienal.

<sup>271</sup> This was one of two times that art from China has been featured in the Bienal. The first time, in the 1989 Bienal, happened via a kite workshop taught by a Chinese kite artist to an audience mainly informed of children. In a conversation with first Bienal director, Lillian Llanes, she explained that these two representations of Chinese popular art were the curatorial team's ways of silencing the Chinese Government's attempts to feature some of the official artists of the time.



American Betty Kano, Cuban American Gloria Longval, African American Bisaj Washington, Korean American Yong Soon Min, and Filipino American Carlos Villa.<sup>272</sup>

### **Thematizing the popular.**

However, after the fifth iteration (1994) this emphasis on contemporary popular arts waned and curatorial attention began to follow 'global contemporary art' trends more explicitly. From that moment on, traditional art making techniques were only seen in the exhibition in the works of artists who had incorporated them into their avant-garde art production. This change was partly explained as a response to the gravitational force of a new global contemporary art industry in consolidation,<sup>273</sup> and partly due to Cuba's drastic economic crisis and the almost complete disappearance of resources for the Wifredo Lam art center. Yet the disappearance of the popular arts from the Bienal is a good sign of the organization's synchrony with global art trends of the period.

From this moment on began a growing tendency to include in the curatorial selection artworks that, instead of using techniques from the popular arts, thematized popular culture using aesthetic tropes from the Euro-American neo-avant-gardes, first, and, site-specific art and socially engaged art later. This new relationship of disconnection with the popular strata by biennial artists is, however, not unique to the Bienal de La Habana, but a common condition of biennial artists since the mid-1990s on (see discussion of 'global contemporary art' in chapter 1).<sup>274</sup> Among this group there is a trend to ground universalist gestures in their artworks to the

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<sup>272</sup> I am presently developing an article on the inclusion of US minority artists in the 1991 Bienal as the first effort to include US representation in the exhibition. A working version of this paper was presented in *New Voices in Cuban Studies* workshop, at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, November 30, 2018.

<sup>273</sup> See section devoted to the effect caused by the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*. Paris, Centre d'Art Georges Pompidou. Curator: Jean Paul Hubert.

<sup>274</sup> Chapters 3 and 4 show how this disconnection played out in the contexts of the US/Mexico borderlands and Rotterdam.

socio-cultural specificities of local spaces that are unknown to them. However, the connection with situated socio-cultural processes often happens only after superficial exposure to the new site, resulting, more than often in the reproduction of the already existing preconceptions about life and culture in the referenced context. This behavior was criticized under the popular label of the “parachute artist”.

A good example is Francis Alÿs’s performance for the fifth Bienal de La Habana, *Zapatos Magnéticos (Magnetic Shoes, 1994)*.<sup>275</sup> For this piece, the Belgian artist – who was by then a rising star in the biennial circuit and lived in Mexico City – walked the streets of Havana wearing shoes with magnets under their soles. As he toured the city’s neighborhoods of Vedado and Centro, his shoes attracted metallic objects from the ground. *Magnetic Shoes* worked as a poetic sampling of Havana’s public space, based on the aleatory collection of coins, pins, wires, tin, and other metallic objects. As he walked, Alÿs whistled, emulating the carefree persona of the urban wanderer. Although Alÿs is a fluent speaker of Spanish, he carried with him fliers with written explanations of his action. This embodiment of the detached foreign city wanderer references Baudelaire’s *flâneur*, and is a common trope in Alÿs’s repertoire that he has practiced with slight variations in Mexico City (*The Collector, 1991-2006; Cuentos Patrióticos, 1997; Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing, 1997*), Venice (*Duet, 1999*), Tijuana (*El ensayo, 1999-2001*), Lima (*When Faith Moves Mountains, 2002*), New York City (*The Modern Procession, 2002*), Wolfsburg (*VW Beetle, 2003*), and Jerusalem (*The Green Line, 2004*). In Havana, Alÿs gathered objectual documents of his urban wandering and produced a video of the experience. If the former reposition his wandering in direct reference to neo-avant-garde movements such as fluxus, conceptual art, and the International Situationiste, the video helps advertise a romanticized version of Alÿs’s presence in Havana as curious local children

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<sup>275</sup> Video documentation of this performance can be accessed at [francisalys.com](http://francisalys.com) Consulted on December 5, 2018

surround his eccentric gesture or he aimlessly walks the *malecón* Westwards, between a crumbling US Interest Section building and deserted soccer fields.

From this moment on, the Bienal's efforts to propose a legitimate alternative to Euro-American aesthetic categories had dissolved. Its organizers were caught between, on one hand, their desire to participate in the conversations articulating an international field of expertise in consolidation, and, on the other, state guidelines to continue a decades-long emphasis on popular culture over 'high-art' characteristic of cultural policies in the post-Revolutionary period. Chapter five of this dissertation reflects on this transition, and provides an analysis of the epistemic consequences of this change of model. The next sections look in detail at two instances in which the popular and the avant-garde arts joined, performing the Piedmont function described earlier in this chapter: Julio Le Parc's workshop and intervention in the public space (1986), and an exhibition of Mexican drape dolls (1989).

### **Julio Le Parc: art in the park.**

Argentinian Paris-based artist Julio Le Parc had been a frequent visitor to Cuba and a vocal advocate for the Revolución since the 1960s.<sup>276</sup> Le Parc had participated in the first Bienal (1984) with an artwork and won one of the awards. He was invited to return to the second Bienal (1986) to repeat an experience that he had directed in Madrid on November, 1985. This experience was a guest-artist workshop<sup>277</sup>, during which Le Parc and twenty-one young artists met for several days to discuss issues related to arts professionalization, the social impact of contemporary art, and the possibilities that it offered to provoke social change by subverting

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<sup>276</sup> For example, in 1981 he was a speaker at the Encuentro de Intelectuales por la soberanía de los pueblos de nuestra América (Encounter of Intellectuals for the Sovereignty of the Peoples of Our America), where he gave a talk titled *Value: a Weapon for Cultural Penetration*. See later sections for discussion of his thought.

<sup>277</sup> In Madrid, the workshop was held at the Circulo de Bellas Arts, an independent cultural institution that through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century played an important role in connecting international artists with the Madrillian cultural spheres.

passive spectatorship. Out of those conversations came the joint proposal to intervene in Madrid's biggest urban park with objects produced by the group, inviting the general public to interact with their surroundings in a different and playful way. While the workshop kept the avant-garde intention to disrupt supposedly passive audiences, it was inherently dialogical as the final formalization of that disruption relied heavily on collective discussion and decision making.<sup>278</sup>

The workshop in Havana was organized around four stages: an initial discussion stage, followed by design, fabrication, and installation of objects at the CODEMA park in Vedado. First, all participants met to “collectively reflect”<sup>279</sup> on topics such as the “interrelation of Latin American artistic creativity in the continent” and the “valuing of Latin American artistic creativity internationally”,<sup>280</sup> their current state, their hopeful realization, and what immediate practical initiatives to take. To these conversations followed the design and fabrication of the objects to be placed in the park.

While both workshops resulted in festive interventions in a city park mediated by interactive kinetic objects, there were some basic differences in their internal practices and desired outcomes. First, while in Madrid the idea to intervene in the park was a product of the discussions held in workshop that, “little by little gave birth to the idea of doing something collective on the street”,<sup>281</sup> in Havana intervention in the public space was a prerequisite since the beginning. This reduced the dialogical component of the project to the restrained space of the fabrication workshop, but allowed for more fabrication time, a better planning of material needs, government support of the activity, and significant media coverage.

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<sup>278</sup> Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces. Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, 2013)

<sup>279</sup> “Propuestas de Julio Le Parc”. Archivos Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>280</sup> “Propuestas de Julio Le Parc”. Archivos Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>281</sup> “Propuestas de Julio Le Parc”. Archivos Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba.

In addition, participation for the Madrid workshop happened by voluntary registration, while in Havana there was a mix of voluntary participation, mostly of Cuban art students, and directed invitation to foreign and Cuban Bienal artists.<sup>282</sup> The list of participants included thirteen “young Cuban artists”, seven “guest foreign artists”, and seven “guest Cuban artists” (all members of the last two groups had artworks in the Bienal). The artist remembers that:

“in Havana, I think that almost all participants needed to afford putting aside their habitual work or study activities so as to have disposition of their time [for the workshop]. This can be positive, but at the same time it can be considered as a provisional change of their work place [...], Cuban participants could have thought, at least at the beginning, that they were there to help me produce my own personal project.”

The apparent confusion about participants’ roles recovers earlier analysis on the forms of labor involved in the advance of the Revolución. Were Cuban art students engaged in the workshop as support personnel or were they perceived as artists, as well? Was their work a form of morally driven commitment with the goals of the Bienal, or part of a learning experience for artists in the making?<sup>283</sup> Participation of art students in the workshop certainly fit under the broader pedagogical purpose inclination of the Bienal (see earlier section on the Bienal’s pedagogic mission). Within my earlier analysis of moral labor incentives that ‘non-orthodox’ government factions proposed as path towards the realization of socialism in Cuba, all of the above options are compatible.

Within Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez’s notion of artistic work as a form of dealienated and inherently emancipatory labor outlined earlier in this chapter, student participants were involved in the workshop both as support personnel and co-authors of, on one hand, the large collaborative effort that the festival in the CODEMA park was while, on a broader sense, they were co-authors of the society-wide collaborative effort of socialism building. Further, instances

<sup>282</sup> The artist remembers that “ from Julio Le Parc, “Le Parc à La Havane”, 1986. <http://www.julioleparc.org>  
Translation by the author.

<sup>283</sup> “Propuestas de Julio Le Parc”. Archivos Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba.

of collaboration with foreign legitimized artists like Le Parc in the production of the festival shows how important were these mediated encounters within the Bienal for the formation of young artists in Havana, as the latter were recognized as equal participants in a “collective exchange about the conception, the decisions and the realization” of the event.<sup>284</sup>

Furthermore, the importance of participation in Le Parc’s workshop continues a long discussion present in his work since the 1960s (both his individual work and the one produced within the Groupe de Recherche Audiovisuel in Paris). For Le Parc audience participation formalizes the avant-garde impulse to disrupt the passive reception of artworks by art audiences. For him, the common state of submission characteristic of what he understood to be “passive viewers” within capitalist societies, serves as guarantee for the perpetuation of the values upheld by liberal elites. In his view, and the social imperative to sustain the moral regime of liberal elites in Europe and the US limits local forms of art production to a mimetic following of international trends.<sup>285</sup> As a consequence, since the 1960s Le Parc had encouraged audience participation in artworks so as to render art useful in the struggle against passive notions of citizenship in liberal Europe, and the perpetuation of Western hegemony in the Third World.

Among the many objects produced in the Havana workshop to be set in a public park were big canvases with combinations of abstract paintings, a climbing structure of metal and rubber, several wood carts decorated with geometric drawings, featuring balloons resembling floral motives. There were rotating wooden discs mounted on an abacus-like structure, placed at the height of toddlers; swings wrapped up in papier maché, hanging from trees, decorated with straight lines and basic colors. There was a net climbing structure for children, connecting trees and ground, covering a surface of approximately 200m<sup>2</sup>. And an articulated labyrinth,

<sup>284</sup> “Propuestas de Julio Le Parc”. Archivos Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>285</sup> Julio Le Parc, “La valorización, un arma clave para la penetración cultural”, 1981. In <http://www.julioleparc.org>  
Translation by the author.

made of wood and thread, which moved as children walked through. And a tunnel-like long empty object, painted in stripes, open for crawling. The list is long.

A small group of interactive objects merits closer analysis due to their implications for consciousness formation within the context of a revolutionary humanism,<sup>286</sup> since they represent Le Parc's belief in the public as “a social being who, together with other interested parties, can establish their own criteria, see problems and propose solutions” in a reality that needs to be transformed.<sup>287</sup> The first was a taller than human size object composed by three piled rotating cubes: each of them depicted four possibilities for a human's head, torso, and legs. The types were a medieval knight in armor, an office man, a woman posing in a bikini, and a fourth one that documentation does not register. This interactive combinatory portrait was a playful take on the renovated possibilities for identity formation that the Revolution brought about and their idealized promotion of this humanism by the state, and echoed the socialist, humanist Schillerian belief in the emancipatory potential of playful interaction with images. The second object was a sack (could have been a big sack of potatoes), filled with cut up newspaper to make bulk, and with a caricature of U.S. President Ronald Reagan painted on it. The object hung from a tree like a *piñata*, kids hit it with a stick, as they tore it and tiny pieces of newspaper fell to the floor. This performative attack against US official symbols was especially relevant in 1986, during the escalation of threats to the nation by the Reagan administration and the latter's increasing intervention in Latin American politics. The shared practice of violence against a portrait of Reagan did not just provoke positive feelings for participants, such as euphoria and pride; the cathartic nature of the activity rooted citizen participation in Julio Le Parc's artworks in the decades-long national program of anti-imperialist resistance.

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<sup>286</sup> See section on the *new man*.

<sup>287</sup> Julio Le Parc, “La valorizacion, un arma clave para la penetracion cultural”, 1981. In <http://www.julioleparc.org> Translation by the author.

The third object to consider is the papier-maché puppet of a painter, bigger than human scale, eyes and tongue detached from the head, popping in and out. His arms up in the air, a brush and a palette on each hand. Instead of legs, he rested on an ionic capitel. The sculpture was held up and moved in procession around the park. This ephemeral “anti-statue” was meant to be left at the park after the ritual and had human characteristics.<sup>288</sup> This “good-man” performed the double function of caricature and homage. It was the caricature of the myth of the bohemian artist, individualistic, detached from society, bound to the modern separation of aesthetic forms, heir of classic aesthetics, where value is the abstract translation of the author's labor in the market. As a Marxist, Le Parc considered the capitalist division of labor to be the root of social alienation.<sup>289</sup>

This piece was an homage to the vantage point of art to comment, critique, and unveil the contradictions of life. Again, value was here derived from objects' social purpose of simultaneously celebrating community production in the public space and attacking the symbols of US imperialism. In this case, the results of the workshop worked as a carnivalesque metaphor for avant-garde art's power to overcome modern types and helping history move forward. For Le Parc and Bienal organizers, avant-garde art was valuable if it produced social relations that contributed to the common good by improving social cohesion and the mutual recognition of all participants as agents of history. But its ultimate value lied in the ability of its

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<sup>288</sup> “if it shook its ears, it was to chase out false encouragements, un-founded criticisms, flattering; if it shook its eyes, it was to better perceive forms, colors, movements, changes; if it shook its tongue, it was to respond with arguments and to defend its ideas against conformism and, why not, to taste Cuban rum; if it shook its head, it was to see everything happening in its environment, to be informed of injustices, and to see the world in full convulsion and the peoples engaged in struggle; if it shook his brush, it was to underline that, in the arts like elsewhere, all advances come from hard work; if it shook its arm holding the palette, it was to invite everyone to participate in the act of creation, to not keep it egoistically for himself; if it made any noise it was to wake people up from their lethargy; if it had a big red heart it was to show that the creative act must be generous, towards the others, and not an individualistic search for sacralizing economic success.” Julio Le Parc, “Le Parc à La Havane”, 1986. <http://www.julioleparc.org>

<sup>289</sup> As a remedy to this damaging division of labor, Le Parc proposes changes in cultural policies, increasing the participation of artists, critics, and members of the general audience in the drafting of legislation. It is important to remember that Le Parc lives in Paris since 1958. These notes do not reference cultural policies in Cuba but, more generally, cultural policy trends in the West. Julio Le Parc, “La valorizacion. Arma clave para la penetracion cultural”, 1981, <http://www.julioleparc.org>



codes to present the specificities of cultural life in Havana in a new and playful way. Quotidianity in socialism was modern, then, if seen through the lens of avant-garde tropes.

### **An exhibition of Mexican drape dolls.**

Another event telling of the tactical pact between the codes of the popular arts and the avant-garde was the exhibition of Mexican drape dolls in the third Bienal (1989). In the wake of the deadly earthquake that shook Mexico City in September 19, 1985, during which between 3200 and 20000 people died, and between 250000 and 900000 lost their homes, the city's textile industry was drastically damaged. Located around the junction of Calzada de Tlalpan and San Antonio Abad avenues, in the city's center, many textile workshops collapsed, burying workers left unattended by factory owners and government-led rescue units. Workers in Mexico City's textile district, a predominantly women, indigenous, low-paid and low-skilled workforce, lost their future employment opportunities, coworkers, and work equipment. The failure of state and municipal authorities to address the crisis in this sector and others left workers' self-organization as the only plausible response to action. Of this need came the *Sindicato 19 de Septiembre*, a union of women textile workers constituted around shared interests of gender and social class.<sup>290</sup> There was a marked presence of feminists in the union, which practiced a direct action politics that proved effective both in their negotiation with factory owners, group identity cohesion, and the strengthening of internal and external solidarity. The exhibition of Mexican drape dolls at the 1989 Bienal was one ramification of this direct action strategy.

Amidst growing mistrust of the Mexican government, new identity forms based on feelings and actions of solidarity between groups with common interests came to the fore, replacing, in this case, former employer-mediated relations between textile workers. Solidarity with textile

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<sup>290</sup> Patricia Ravelo Blancas, "Protagonismo Y Poder: Sindicato de Costureras 19 de Septiembre." *Nueva Antropología* 15, no. 49 (1996).

workers in San Antonio Abad brought disparate sectors of Mexico City's population together, helping in rescue operations, fundraising for survivors and families, and workers' organizing for economic self-management. Citizens, intellectuals, political formations, unions, religious groups, associations of students, and others supported the textile workers' new political organization and their program.<sup>291</sup> Among the actions in the aftermath of the earthquake, textile workers gathered to produce drape dolls to sell for fundraising. Well-known Mexican artists joined the enterprise,<sup>292</sup> contributing with their designs and promoting the campaign to other sectors of Mexico City's cultural life. One hundred and thirty one of these dolls were shown in the third Bienal de La Habana in 1989, after the initiative of feminist curator Silvia Pandolfi, by then director of the Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil in Mexico City.<sup>293</sup>

Workers from the Sindicato 19 de Septiembre produced two doll types: *Lucha* (Struggle), a skinny, young, woman, and *Victoria* (Victory), who was older and rounder. Each doll's material qualities were different, as workers relied on donated fabrics and sewing material to produce them (they were approximately 30cm tall).<sup>294</sup> All of them were produced manually by the seamstresses. One of the dolls shown in the Bienal was an androgynous *Lucha* with mustache and beard, wearing jeans and white sneakers, and a yellow silky shirt. Long untamed dark hair, the figure had legs and arms wide open, as if dancing. Another was a nude woman, exposing her breasts and genitals to the viewer, one hand behind her head, the other hidden under her back. Reminder of Goya's naked *Maja* or Manet's *Olympia*, but with eyes that remind of

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<sup>291</sup> Ravelo Blancas, Patricia. Op. Cit.

<sup>292</sup> Collaborating artists included Rogelio Naranjo, Vicente Rojo, Ofelia Murrieta, Silvia de Icaza, Lourdes Almeida, Helen Escobedo, Alberto, Miguel y José Castro Leñero, Marta Palau, Carla Rippey, Magali Lara, Teresa Morán, Ismael Guardado, Olga Dondé and Beatriz Zamora.

<sup>293</sup> As director of Museo Carrillo Gil in Mexico City, Silvia Pandolfi played an important role in the early internationalization stage of Mexico's contemporary art scene in the early 1990s. Among the artists she showed in the museum were Lili Engel, Amelia Peláez, Felipe Ehrenberg, Joseph Beuys, Alejandro Prieto Posada, Jordi Boldo, Joan Duran, Perla Krauze, Masafumi Hasumi, Jorge Du Ban, Patricia Soriano, Joan Miró, Wolfgang Paalen, Ryuichi Yamabi, Gabriel Macotela, Silvia Gruner, Fernando García Correa, Miguel Chevalier, Patricia Londen, Tomás Emde.

<sup>294</sup> The production cycle began in late September 1985, and by December 1985 the union hosted their first big sale exhibition. Doll production went on for years until the union dissolved in the mid 1990s.

Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, she looks us straight in the eye. A third doll, cut in blue cotton, was a voluptuous woman kneeling to the side, naked as well, although her gaze looked to the left. She wore a polka dot tall head wrap, and had long black braids and red bright toe nails. Another of the figurines was not a woman but a jaguar, cut after traditional Aztec representations of the animal, bright yellow, green, white and red, its head looking over its back. In the catalog, Mexican curator Jaime Vázquez links the encounter between audiences and the dolls to that between pedestrians and dolls sold by Mazahua women in the streets of Mexico City.<sup>295</sup> He speaks of the acquisition of a doll as not a mere commercial transaction but an adoption, granting them the traits of personality and unicity, the *aura* of humans and avant-garde artworks.

The tactical joining of avant-garde Mexican artists and textile factory workers was a very profitable strategy. Locally, it helped raise awareness reaching Mexico City's high-culture spheres and wider audiences via extended media coverage; internationally, it appealed to the solidarity of international art audiences towards the Mexican working class.<sup>296</sup>

Further, the exhibition of Mexican drape dolls reinforced the Bienal de La Habana's defense of the universality of popular art techniques and their inherent potential to forge trans-national networks of solidarity between Mexico, Cuba, and other regions that received the dolls such as the U.S., Germany, and Sweden. , while appealing to the class sympathy of Cuban audiences and foreign Bienal visitors. It also exemplified the Marxist idealization of craft labor as a vehicle towards the subject's self-recognition. Lastly, the exhibition presented working class struggles as instances of creativity leading to new organizational and aesthetic forms (such as the production workshops, the dolls). This exhibition resonated with the wide-felt enthusiasm for potential of emancipatory decolonial programs, since it revisited Casa de las Américas's earlier

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<sup>295</sup> Cuarta Bienal de La Habana (La Habana: Centro de Arte Wifredo Lam, 1991)

<sup>296</sup> The exhibition toured to Cuba, the U.S., Germany, Sweden, and other parts of Mexico.

emphasis in exhibiting Latin American popular arts in Cuba as a way to subvert the moral hierarchies upholding the division between high and low art forms. Undoubtedly, this belief had strong ties to the socialist humanism of Government liberals discussed earlier in this chapter.

### **The *Magiciens de la Terre* effect.**

“I believe that [*Magiciens de la Terre*] changed the art world. I believe that there is a pre-*Magiciens* and an after-*Magiciens*. What makes it so significant is that for the first time it opened the doors to different cultures, to different modes of expression, to makers who were considered artisans rather than artists. It posed many questions: what is art? Why do we consider certain practices to be exotic, primitive, artisanal, and others, which seem to be doing the same thing, as conceptual?”<sup>297</sup>

In 1989, the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* opened in Paris, four months before the third Bienal de La Habana opened.<sup>298</sup> It was a one-hundred artist show, of which one half came from “developed, capitalist countries”, and the other from “the peripheries”.<sup>299</sup> It was, in words of its curator Jean-Hubert Martin, “the first worldwide exhibition of contemporary art”.<sup>300</sup> Other similar events joined soon after, in what seemed to be the curatorial trend of the time: to question the provincialism of the Western avant-garde canon by showing to art audiences the cultural production of non-European and non-U.S. artists. All of these, which came after the 1986 Bienal de La Habana, took place in European or U.S. cities. *Magiciens de la Terre* has been held by the contemporary art canon as initiator of the current decolonial trend in museology and keeps being referenced as the event that inaugurated “transnational” curating.<sup>301</sup> The exhibition hoped to mirror the multicultural feel of the time, as lived in Paris, by commissioning new pieces to

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<sup>297</sup> Alfredo Jaar, quoted in conversation with Francisco Godoy Vega. Lucy Steeds (ed), *Making Art Global (Part 2): Les Magiciens de la Terre 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013). p. 282

<sup>298</sup> The event occupied galleries at two venues, the Centre Georges Pompidou, and the Grande Halle de la Villette. It took place between May, 18 and August, 14, 1989.

<sup>299</sup> Lucy Steeds, “*Magiciens de la Terre* and the Development of Transnational Project-Based Curating”, in Lucy Steeds (ed) *Making Art Global (Part 2): Les Magiciens de La Terre 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013). p. 41

<sup>300</sup> In a curatorial statement from 1989. See Centre Georges Pompidou archives, box 95026/168.

<sup>301</sup> Lucy Steeds, “*Magiciens de la Terre* and the Development of Transnational Project-Based Curating”, in Lucy Steeds (ed) *Making Art Global (Part 2): Les Magiciens de La Terre 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013). p.

*magicians* (artists) from all over the world, and surveying for audiences in the French capital the state of creativity in different cultures. Although Jean-Hubert Martin and his curatorial advisers were no doubt aware of the existence of the Bienal de La Habana, the Euro-American contemporary art complex favored *Magiciens*. The show, ideated and produced from France, was from its inception inserted in the networks of expertise whose univocity the Bienal de La Habana sought to contest. The big sensation that *Magiciens* was left a big mark on the Bienal.

Conceptually, *Magiciens*'s inspiration came from the work of European avant-garde artists Joseph Beuys and Robert Filliou. From Beuys, curator Jean-Hubert Martin borrowed what he saw as the shamanistic character of artistic activities, ultimately moved by the pursue of access to the metaphysical. The search for universal communication formulas present in Filliou's work inspired Martin's problematic idealization of the exhibition format as an, in principle, non-hierarchical communicational sphere. But *Magiciens*'s roots in what seemed like a sort of post-War idealist transcendentalism as formulated in the practice of two canonical European artists compromised the decolonial revision of the art canon that it was set to fulfill from the beginning. The show's essentialist take on the faculty of *magicians* to access the metaphysical not just failed to avoid the modern myth of the genius artist upon which the possibility of an avant-garde is built, but erased all curatorial responsibility to address the colonial residues on the infrastructures and class dimensions behind such privileged social function.

Like the Bienal de La Habana, *Magiciens* sought to reconsider the modern division between arts and crafts, but it did so differently. While the Bienal based this effort on the socialist humanist belief that art labor led the way to individual self-recognition (and was hence closer to the socialist goal of overcoming alienation), *Magiciens* showed "objects with aura," regardless of their art or craft normative classification, according to their metaphysical or

“magical” attributes.<sup>302</sup> Curators in each region were set to “determine which artist had the most fantastic imagination to invent new formulas”.<sup>303</sup> These criteria reproduced the imperatives of formal innovation and auratic distinction of avant-garde artworks, which meant that the Magiciens operation was limited to a revision of art's formal alphabet which it sought to expand and was not, like the Bienal de La Habana, a counter-hegemonic aesthetic operation. In fact, the impact of Magiciens in the Bienal and the broader international art world might be judged in its service for the solidification of European hegemony in the international art world instead. Like other cases discussed in chapter 3 and 4 of this dissertation, Magiciens was an instance of the broader 'passive revolution'<sup>304</sup> taking place in the West at the end of the Cold War.

While la Bienal de La Habana's initial iterations were organic exhibitions where the goal was that Third World come to signify on its own terms, Magiciens treated artworks as separate itemized objects emptied of their contextual meaning only to be re-purposed under the curator's narrative. This difference might have made the Bienal feel like lacking on authorial strength by Euro-American avant-garde standards. However, in reality its non-interventionist curatorial choices favored respect for objects' original ways of being in the world. On the contrary, Magiciens, situated in a former international art capital struggling to recover its status, fragmented its objects' relations to their original worlds while seemingly setting a new *tabula rasa* for the equal presentation and evaluation of world cultures under the supposedly universal pursuing of magic. Another important difference was the coconceptualization of artists in both shows. If in Magiciens artists were attributed magic attributes, that is, the capacity of accessing metaphysical spaces via their culturally distinct practices, in la Bienal de La Habana artists had been, since the beginnings, seen as political actors or “citizens”, like Rachel Weiss writes.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Jean-Hubert Martin, “Preface” in Jean-Hubert Martin (ed) *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris: Centre d'Art Georges Pompidou, 1989)

<sup>303</sup> Jean-Hubert Martin, op. Cit.

<sup>304</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Gramsci's concept of 'passive revolution' and my use in the analysis.

<sup>305</sup> Rachel Weiss, *Making Art Global (Part 1) The Thrid Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall, 2011) p.32

Then, what consequences did such a curatorial endeavor have for the Bienal de La Habana? The strong media attention that *Magiciens* received, in addition to the numerous visits from members of the international art world and its automatic entry in the contemporary canon, displaced the Bienal from the international eye and forced it to change its direction. Director Lillian Llanes negated the originality of *Magiciens*.<sup>306</sup> For her, the Bienal had been “the first exhibition to show art from the Third World to international publics [...] the rest followed”.<sup>307</sup> Of special significance here is that Gerardo Mosquera, a key ‘specialist’ in the first three iterations, was recruited as curatorial adviser for *Magiciens* (Llanes and Mosquera have had a very confrontational relationship since he received a Guggenheim Fellowship and left Cuba in the early 1990s). In spite of the originality the Bienal’s decolonial program, the organization was unable to compete with the resources available for *Magiciens* and other exhibitions of Third World art to follow in the Euro-American centers of contemporary art. According to Llanes, from that iteration on the team of Bienal ‘specialists’ decided to curate following a theme.

However, Lesbia Vent Dubois, President of the Consejo Nacional de Artes Plásticas, believes that the Bienal took a “reactionary response” to avoid being taken as “delayed” by foreign audiences: instead of surveying the globe seeking to present the state of contemporary cultural production to the international public, the Bienal began to practice thematic curating, like other international art biennials.<sup>308</sup> Curating by statement turned the Bienal into an avant-garde operation, where objects acquired meaning under the all-encompassing world making gestures of curators. This change had a twofold effect: on one hand, it tamed the counter-hegemonic nature of the enterprise evident in earlier iterations of the Bienal; on the other, the Bienal entered into the global contemporary art world in formation. At times of extreme economic crisis

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<sup>306</sup> In interview with Lillian Llanes, 21 September 2017.

<sup>307</sup> In interview with Lillian Llanes, 26 September 2017.

<sup>308</sup> In interview with Lesbia Vent Dubois, October 3, 2017.

in Cuba, the Bienal's conversion into the codes of global contemporary art proved beneficial as this allowed for the entrance of capital in different forms (see Chapter 5).

Since then, before each iteration curators write a premise, travel to find artists who fit the theme, and later install objects in the Bienal venues. More and more Nonaligned bloc artists based in Europe and the U.S. have been featured in the show, in detriment of those practicing in their regions of origin outside the Euro-American neo-avant-garde legacy. In words of Lillian Llanes, "today the Bienal keeps including Africans and Asians, but most of them are subjects formed in the metropolis, in most cases they live there or are validated in their markets".<sup>309</sup> As a consequence, the unmediated organicity presumed of initial Bienal iterations was slowly replaced in the mid 1990s by an increasingly authorial theme-based curating, following the trends of global contemporary art. This process was mirrored by a significant transformation of art production in Cuba. Sustained economic crisis and a growing desire to engage in the discourses and production cycles of the international art world turned the attention of Cuban contemporary artists to artistic trends upheld in the global art complex in consolidation. The reception of global contemporary art forms in the island could be seen by international visitors in the Bienal de La Habana and peripheral art events since the late 1990s.

## **Conclusion.**

This chapter has provided an analysis of the Bienal de La Habana's first iterations (1984-1991) in the light of its efforts to propose a curatorial alternative to Euro-American international art exhibitions. At the beginning of the chapter I outlined a history of cultural institutions in Revolutionary Cuba. I discussed the Bienal de La Habana as a continuation of the cultural diplomacy developed by Casa de las Américas since 1959. In this first section I argue that these

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<sup>309</sup> In interview with Lillian Llanes, 26 September 2017.



two institutions were subsequent materializations of socialist humanist ideals, a non-orthodox Marxist program present in Cuba since before the Revolución and discrepant of Soviet-aligned sectors in the regime. I frame my analysis with an evaluation of 1960s debates about the possibility of an autonomous avant-garde in Cuba between representatives of these two distinct Marxisms.

Next, I discuss the Bienal de La Habana as a counter-hegemonic device designed to infiltrate and modify the aesthetic languages of the Euro-American art complex. I describe its organizational forms and curatorial practices, to later reflect on how these aided in the reproduction of local elites' interests in the island. With care, I describe the ad hoc solutions adopted by Bienal 'specialists' to carry out their curatorial labor. I discuss their research travels in the light of Cuba's extensive diplomatic network, and I portray their improvised learning from each other and their permanent collaboration as examples of Cuban socialism's belief in the pedagogical and transformative potential of cultural labor. In this section I show how, while the Bienal performed a counter hegemonic function abroad, it helped organize consent within Cuba.

In the last section of this chapter I describe what I call the Bienal's tactical pact with the avant-garde. This strategy joined art from the Third World, popular arts, crafts, and avant-garde art from all around the planet, with the exception of Europe and the U.S.. The pact's aim was to subvert the categories regulating the ordering of objects in Euro-American art history, creating an opening for the legitimization of other forms of cultural production from outside those two regions. To illustrate this pact, I analyze a workshop by Argentinian artist Julio Le Parc, an exhibition of Mexican drape dolls, and other objects that problematize the traditional separation between useful and disinterested objects in Western art history. In closing, I evaluate the impact that another exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris, 1989), had in the Bienal. To sum up, in

analyzing the conditions of existence of an art biennial within third-worldist socialism, this chapter has provided an important counterpoint for the two case studies to follow.

## CHAPTER 3. INSITE IN SAN DIEGO, TIJUANA, 1992 – 1997. NEW ART INSTITUTIONAL FORMS AND THE CHALLENGES OF CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION.

“The importance of InSITE94 lies in its being a bi-national cultural project, the first of this scale since the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement. It reinforces the idea that, beyond trade barriers that we are now almost ready to dismantle, there can exist cultural exchange”.

Gerardo Estrada, director of the Mexican National Fine Arts Institute, INBA, when he announced the list of activities included in InSITE94.<sup>310</sup>

San Diego, 1994. Artist-run organization Installation Gallery organized an art exhibition of installations and site-specific artworks between September 25 and October 30. The exhibition occupied different art venues in the cities of San Diego and Tijuana, and celebrated bi-national collaboration through contemporary art. That same year was implemented the North American Free Trade Agreement (henceforth NAFTA), signed on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1992, by U.S. President George H.W. Bush, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, and Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The treaty, effective January 1st, 1994, had as main objective the dissolution of obstacles for the free flow of capital and investments, the elimination of trade tariffs, and the redistribution of the sectors of the economy within the zone. Since the early 1980s Mexico's longstanding government party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, had been experiencing a solid shift towards an openly neoliberal agenda, proposed by orthodox ideologues<sup>311</sup> as

<sup>310</sup> María Luisa López, “InSITE94”, in *Reforma*, September 2, 1994.

<sup>311</sup> For a thorough historical analysis of the arrival, expansion, and institutionalization of the Austrian School's orthodox neoliberal philosophy in Mexico, read María Eugenia Romero Sotelo, *Los Orígenes del Neoliberalismo*

solution to the nation's economic stagnation and escalating inflation in the decade. To the same period relates Mexico's search for new foreign economic allies, first reaching out to members of the new European Economic Community, like U.K.'s Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and West Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl, but ultimately solidifying already existing ties with its North American neighbors<sup>312</sup> with the signature of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

The group of artists behind the Installation Gallery exhibition joined widespread international responses to the agreement: some of these reactions were condemnatory, like the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional uprisal beginning on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994; some others hopeful, like that of PRI-affiliated high cultural administrator Gerardo Estrada opening this chapter. As a consequence of NAFTA, U.S./Mexico international border came to occupy a place of high visibility for the international public. Although, as Installation Gallery board President Michael Kritchman explained, “[organizers] did not ask artists to focus on the subject of the border, inevitably some artists felt an attraction to the situation in Tijuana and San Diego”.<sup>313</sup> After the 1994 exhibition, InSITE would take place three more times: in 1997, 2000, and 2005. The exhibition began as a multi-part effort by diverse local art agencies. Through time, it would grow to become a bi-national art foundation and gather international attention, featuring hot names from the rosters of global contemporary art. Never directly acknowledging the U.S.-Mexico border as its official theme, InSITE's site-specific commissioned projects located themselves in the region's changing social, economic, and political landscape, as the borderlands gained protagonism in media front covers internationally because of the drastic economic and social impacts of NAFTA in Mexico and the U.S..

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*en México. La Escuela Austriaca* (Ciudad de México: Fondo de Cultural Económica, 2016).

<sup>312</sup> Maxwell A. Cameron, Brian W. Tomlin, *The Making of NAFTA. How the Deal was Done* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

<sup>313</sup> José Manuel Springler, “Entrevista a Michael Kritchman”, *Reforma*, October, 1994.

This chapter focuses on inSITE94, as the first big-scale festival of installation and site-specific art in San Diego and Tijuana. In it, I provide an analysis of InSITE94's role in imagining the borderlands in accordance with the ideology of a nascent neoliberal elite in the region. The genre of site-specific art worked to produce an image of the border as a land of collaboration and horizontality, obviating important sociopolitical conflicts in the region. I argue that InSITE94 staged the confluence of different avant-garde aesthetic programs: in it, the nascent global contemporary avant-garde shared exhibition venues with, on one hand, a generation of politicized neo-avant-garde Mexican artists and, on the other, a younger generation of artists rising in the Mexican alternative art scene of the 1990s. To close the chapter I study the mutating organizational form of InSITE, a boundary-spanning arts organization active between 1992 and 2005.

## Section 1: Securing sovereignty at the border.

### Before inSITE.

The San Diego/Tijuana border region has a long history of art production that anticipates the diversity of proposals found in the different iterations of inSITE. Historically, the area has been a crossroads for the California avant-garde, the Mexican modernist avant-garde, and Chicano art, first, and Border art later. Albeit the two last ones came to be out of a spirit of denunciation and protest against racial segregation and xenophobia in the region, inSITE's sponsorship of site-specific art made by non-local artists compromised the legacy of these inherently activist art movements in the regions.

Born out of the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, Chicano art was community-based, democratic, and activist in nature. In San Diego, the Chicano art movement originally galvanized in Barrio Logan around the neighborhood's political organizing to protest residents displacement and land expropriation by the state of California to build the Coronado Bridge and Interstate Freeway 5. Activism expanded to claim the lands under the bridge as neighborhood commons, a struggle that was eventually successful and resulted in the creation of Chicano Park (1970).<sup>314</sup> Members of the Chicano art movement, including the Congreso de Artistas Chicanos de Aztlán (CACA),<sup>315</sup> painted murals in the bridge's supports, imposing their symbolism of Mexican, Latin American, and Chicano emancipatory struggles over the utilitarian cement of urban segregation public works.

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<sup>314</sup> See, for example, Amy Sara Carroll, *REMEX. An Art History of the NAFTA Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

<sup>315</sup> The Congreso de Artistas Chicanos de Aztlán (CACA) was a Barrio Logan organization of artists active between the 1970s and the late 1980s. Among its members were Mario Torero, Pablo de la Rosa, Tomas Casteneda, Felipe Barboza.

After holding informal meetings in the Ford building of Balboa Park (today's San Diego Aerospace Museum) for six months, in 1970, a group of Chicano artists from the region were authorized to use an abandoned water tank in the Park as permanent venue for the Centro Cultural de la Raza, "a sacred space instrumental in Chicano, Latinx, and Indigenous art and culture" in San Diego.<sup>316</sup> This space continued the art and activist work of Chicano artists while turning their focus to the complexities of the Border region. Latinxs, Chicanxs, Indigenous artists and allies from other nationalities and origins gathered in the Centro to question the international border as a mark of state violence and international capitalism. Especially active in denouncing the international border were artist collectives like TAF/BAW (Taller de Arte Fronterizo/Border Art Workshop) in the 1980s to the mid-1990s, and the one formed by Elisabeth Sisco, Louis Hock, and David Avalos in early 1990s. Like art historian Amy Sarah Carroll remarks, Border art responded to the increasing cries for dominance upon the region that came from U.S., Mexican, and Chicano nationalisms.

Relationships between Border artists and San Diego's cultural institutional establishment were not smooth. A conflict involving TAF/BAW member and prominent performance artist Guillermo Gómez Peña and San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art Director Hugh Davies exemplifies the tensions between both communities. In 1989 the MCASD received a quarter million dollars from the National Endowment of the Arts to organize the curatorial project "Two Cities/Dos ciudades". Although this series of exhibitions explored the border region through art projects, almost none of the commissions went for local artists who had been long producing work about the border region. Instead, MCASD invited East coast and international artists such as Jeff Wall and Alfredo Jaar.

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<sup>316</sup> Among the original members were Salvador Torres, Viviana Zermeno, Delia Moreno, Leticia de Baca, Armida Valencia, Judith Baca, Guillermo Aranda, Tomas Castaneda, and Mario Acevedo.

Tensions between Chicana border artists, on the one hand, and the MCASD and its peripheral community, on the other, speak directly to the potential of art to aid in colonization processes described in Chapter 1. Scholar George Yúdice has characterized these tensions as a “struggle for ownership” of the border,<sup>317</sup> as members of the local Chicana art community accused MCASD curators of appropriating material from their publications to ground the discursive layers of this exhibition into a sense of authentic Chicana-ness. In this line, as Yúdice and Carroll point out, inSITE’s emphasis on community engaged art and participatory projects worked to appease potential claims of the organization’s disconnection from the broader local public. In words of Yúdice: “to show that its programs are relevant to nontraditional publics, inSITE accommodated an already existing bureaucratic rhetoric whereby ‘community’ functions as a code word for poor and racialized people”.<sup>318</sup>

These controversial claims to cultural authenticity foregrounded questions about who could claim to author border art. How ought one to understand the border? For most Chicano and Border artists, the border was site-specific, placed in the border region. This perspective favored a nativist understanding of an artist’s relationship with the region and attacked Border art made by foreign artists. For others, like Gómez-Peña and inSITE organizers, the border became a portable notion. Scholar Ila Nicole Shren argues that inSITE “reinforc[ed] the notion that anyone can be a border thinker, border dweller, or border subject”.<sup>319</sup> These competing claims to authority over symbolic interventions of the region are still present. They signify the competing interests at play between groups active in the symbolic enunciation of the U.S./Mexico borderlands. This chapter provides an analysis of inSITE94 and inSITE97 as a continuation of this struggle for symbolic dominance in the region.

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<sup>317</sup> George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture. Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) p. 289

<sup>318</sup> George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture. Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) p. 290

<sup>319</sup> Ila Nicole Shren, *Portable Borders. Performance Art and Politics in the U.S. Frontera since 1984* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015) p. 91



## The borderlands.

Since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) both U.S. and Mexican governments have understood, and effortfully tried to reinforce, the border line as a rigid yet selectively permeable limit between two nation states. A series of bilateral labor and trade treaties anticipated today's obsessive-compulsive control over the borderlands. To the Bracero program (1942-1964), that promoted the import of low-paid manual labor from Mexican indigenous communities to California's agricultural fields, followed PRONAF (Programa Nacional Fronterizo, 1960s), designed to change the mainstream image of Mexico's *frontera norte* from a land of moral diversion and backwardness to a land of modernized industrial productivity and progress. Under the auspice of the Programa de Industrialización de la Frontera (Border Industrialization Program), in 1966 opened the first *maquiladora* factories in Mexicali, Ciudad Juárez, and Tijuana.<sup>320</sup> These programs re-configured the relations of production around the borderlands: U.S. factory owners imported tax-free materials to Mexico that would be transformed into consumer goods by low-wage Mexican gendered assembly lines, and then returned to the U.S. consumer market through only partially taxed imports.

Recent art historical scholarship has evaluated the impact of the *maquiladora* model in the artistic and cultural production of the region. According to art historians Amy Sara Carroll and George F. Flaherty, these programs exemplify the "proto-neoliberalism" characteristic of Cold War U.S.'s foreign relations with Latin America.<sup>321</sup> Carroll and Flaherty situate the emergence of Chicano art in the 1960s and Border art later in the 1980s in this landscape of increasing gender and racial segregation around the fragmentation of labor. In addition,

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<sup>320</sup> In 1965, at the beginning of the Plan de Industrialización de la Frontera, 12 factories employed 3,000 workers. In 1990, 1920 factories employed around 460,000 workers. In 1995, one year since NAFTA was put in place, figures had doubled: 2267 factories employed around 648,000 workers; in 2000, 3251 factories employed an estimate of 1,090,000 workers. Data from Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística, México, 2004.

<sup>321</sup> Amy Sara Carroll, *REMEX. Toward an Art History of the NAFTA Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018). p. 211. George F. Flaherty (forthcoming).

sociologist George Yúdice compared inSITE to *maquiladoras* since both rely on racialized borderlands audiences/workers to generate surplus value for cultural/factory products.<sup>322</sup>

Since the 1980s, collateral free trade and tax exemption policies have made the borderlands an important destination for migrant labor from Mexican rural communities. The extreme economic disparities between North and South that these neoliberal policies produced have fueled a position of xenophobia from the U.S. Federal government and fractions of the U.S. civil society that Mize terms 'neoliberal nativism', where "the political economy of free trade ideology [meets] state-sanctioned violence against migrants and *maquiladora* workers".<sup>323</sup> Since the early 1990s, the escalating militarization of the area has led to the subsequent deployment of military technology and personnel to the Southern edge of San Diego and Imperial Counties. This context of militarization and "neoliberal nativism" of the borderlands was the grounds for inSITE, a festival of site-specific and installation art that, in contrast with the denunciatory nature of earlier art production in the region, was "designed to facilitate exchange, discovery, and dialogue among multiple audiences in this dynamic region".<sup>324</sup> Although some art works featured in the festival, like Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Tijuana Projection* (2000) did advertise the violent impact of the region's neoliberalization on the everyday lives of border residents, most projects favored an optimistic view on the region's renewed potential for conciliation.

Geopolitically contested, the integrity of the borderlands is also challenged from scholarship. Like Daniel Arreola and James R. Curtis record, the intellectual history of the 'border' terminology lacks a consensus. The area has been referred to most commonly as the "U.S.-Mexico borderlands", a "loosely defined geographic region or zone that straddles the

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<sup>322</sup> George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture. Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003)

<sup>323</sup> Ronald L. Mize, "Interrogating, Race, Class, Gender and Capitalism Along the U.S.- Mexico Border: Neoliberal Nativism and Maquila Modes of Production." *Race, Gender and Class*. 15 (2008)

<sup>324</sup> "InSITE94 Organization draft". InSITE Archives. UCSD Special Collections. MSS 707, Box 209, Folder 7. Last accessed on May 17, 2018.

borderline”, as different authors remark on the region's economy,<sup>325</sup> its conflicts,<sup>326</sup> or its specific culture<sup>327</sup>. Others, like Sparrow, question the region's supposedly “binational character”, scrutinizing both cities' “integrated labor market with trade flows, growing population, and infrastructure that can sustain the economic and social activity, a sense of cultural, social and historic integration, a growing understanding of environmental connectiveness and the lack of a single governing structure to regulate and service the region”.<sup>328</sup> Like I show later, InSITE organizers shared this optimism for the region's binational nature, as most of the organization's literature tells. For example, a mission statement for InSITE94 reads: “Insite94 is designed to represent the cross-cultural character of our border region and to invite an interchange between regional, national, and international artists and audiences.”<sup>329</sup>

Although the same social contradictions were in place at both cities during the different iterations of InSITE, most artists, critics, and curators involved in the organization privileged an image of collaboration and harmony between both cities that spoke of a sense of economic and cultural opportunity that the festival brought for them. For instance, an excerpt from an InSITE94 internal memo reads as follows:

“insite94 coincides with widespread and burgeoning re-examination of the meaning and function of the Mexico/U.S. border. An urban complex unique in terms of size and economic power, and the site of the most heavily traveled border in the world, this highly-charged environment is a meeting point for the so-called 'First' and 'Third' worlds. It is a climate electrified by the daily enactment and circumvention of immigration policies, the increasing bilingualism of public life, and the unfolding of NAFTA and other avenues of economic exchange”.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Fernandez, 1977. Sparrow, Glen. “San Diego-Tijuana : Not Quite a Binational City or Region.” *GeoJournal* 54, no. 1 (2001)

<sup>326</sup> Martinez, 1988.

<sup>327</sup> Carlos Monsiváis, *La cultura de la frontera* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología, 1975)

<sup>328</sup> Glen Sparrow, “San Diego-Tijuana : Not Quite a Binational City or Region.” *GeoJournal* 54, no. 1 (2001): 73–83.

<sup>329</sup> “InSITE94. Mission Statement.” InSITE Archives. UCSD Special Collections. MSS 707, box 210, folder 1. Last accessed on May 16, 2018.

<sup>330</sup> Untitled internal memo. InSITE Archives. UCSD Special Collections. MSS 707, Box 209, Folder 7. Last accessed on May 15, 2018.

Despite organizers' celebration of unity and inter-relatedness, common in beneficiaries of the economic integration between San Diego and Tijuana, it is important to acknowledge the multiple separations that distance both cities on the ground. What at first glance might look like an extensive and interconnected urban area is in fact a complex system of physical, behavioral, organizational, and politico-administrative exclusionary mechanisms<sup>331</sup> that work to reproduce the class, gender, and race divisions upholding San Diego's and Tijuana's co-dependency. I agree with border scholar Peter Andreas, who sees a contradiction in increased border control at times of celebration of mutual dependency and openness, like InSITE94. Andreas characterizes the U.S.-Mexico border region as a "borderless economy and barricaded border",<sup>332</sup> and questions the assumption held up by defenders of NAFTA that greater economic interdependence and less state intervention would lead to more social integration. Further sections of this chapter discuss in detail how these beliefs emphasized site-specific intervention as a precursor to regional development.

### **State interventionism in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.**

What we recognize today as the San Diego-Tijuana border region is an area that has been subject to repeated interventionist efforts through history. Industrial, military, policy, and symbolic interventions of different kinds have targeted the area since the Spanish colonizers arrived in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. But not until the signature of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo between Mexico and the United States in 1848 first, Probation era U.S. tourism to Tijuana later, and several post-WWII U.S. government programs to import Mexican labor, have the lands and the human population of this part of the world become such contested objects of control. Rachel St. John describes repeated efforts by both countries' federal administrations to act on and upon

<sup>331</sup> Glen Sparrow, "San Diego-Tijuana : Not Quite a Binational City or Region." *GeoJournal* 54, no. 1 (2001): 73–83.

<sup>332</sup> Peter Andreas, *Border Games. Policing the U.S./Mexico Divide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001)

the borderlands since 1848 as idealist plans to define and represent solid national sovereignty. Joint U.S. and Mexican federal support has also been key in the diversion of capitalist investment in the region since as early as the 1880s, when state-sponsored construction of both railroad infrastructures and private land exploitation enterprises in the form of mining, smelting, cattle farming, and irrigation aimed to colonize the region while facilitating private enclosure of territory and resources.<sup>333</sup> St. John marks the years of capitalist settlement in the region as the transition from a notion of the border as “site where the state proved its power through military defense of territory to one in which sovereignty was measured in customs collected, immigrants rejected, and bandits arrested”.<sup>334</sup>

Bi-national collaboration through art in the imagining of the border divide began in 1848<sup>335</sup> when, after the signature of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, a U.S.-Mexican commission of surveyors, engineers, and cartographers collaborated to survey and establish the boundary line. To the more numerous U.S. team joined artists and botanists, “gather[ing] extensive information about the people, animals, plants, and lands with which they came into contact and produced copious records, ranging from reports to oil paintings”.<sup>336</sup> First object-based interventions in the border relate to both nations' efforts to represent in situ the reach of their national sovereignty. From those years dates the joint Border Monument Commission, which set “standardized stone or iron monuments at intervals of no less than 8000 meters” between San Diego and Tijuana, in the West, and Brownsville and Matamoros in the East.<sup>337</sup> These actions are no different than other cases where art has been used to render visible the frontier-lands of expansionist powers, like the artworks in this chapter, Chapter 2, and Chapter 4 show.

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<sup>333</sup> Rachel S. John, *Line in the Sand*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011)

<sup>334</sup> Rachel S. John, *Line in the Sand*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011)

<sup>335</sup> Rachel S. John, *Line in the Sand*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011)

<sup>336</sup> Rachel S. John, *Line in the Sand*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) p. 25

<sup>337</sup> Rachel S. John, *Line in the Sand*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011)

In sum, imagining the border has been a permanent -yet uncompleted- preoccupation of both U.S. and Mexican authorities since 1848. With 1990s NAFTA's renewed regulations on the movement of goods, humans, and capital, our era of study is no exception. InSITE proves that the 1990s neoliberal trade policy framework for U.S./Mexico relations allowed for renovated forms of state presence in the region. On one side, Mexican federal cultural agencies like INBA and CONACULTA joined Tijuana's municipal arts organizations and its local business class. On the other, U.S. Foundations like the Rockefeller and the Andy Warhol Foundation supported efforts initiated by Southern California's new elite, formed by real-state developers, lawyers, and bio-tech entrepreneurs. Like I argue later in this chapter, the shared interest of these agents in fostering economic growth in the region participated of a new neoliberal belief in the role of the private sector as leader of cultural and economic development of sites.

### **The wall.**

Video documentation from InSITE94 shows artist and country singer Terry Allen setting up his piece *Cross the Razor/Cruza la navaja* (1994) at the border fence. He arrives on a white van with the inSITE94 logo to an obelisk border marker placed sectioning the wire fence. The van has a metal balcony on top. He hooks a speaker to one of its metal poles and places a standing mic facing South. Two posters read "WELCOME TO ALL PEOPLE. You are cordially invited to climb up on this van and speak, sing, play music, etc -FREELY- what is in your heart and your mind TO/AT/FOR the other side. CROSS THE RAZOR. This is offered with the hope that what happens here might encourage increased understanding and communication between the PEOPLE of the United States and Mexico".<sup>338</sup> Allen approaches the mic. "Test. One, two, three". On the other side, the same set up is being installed by inSITE staff, with twin posters in

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<sup>338</sup> From "Cross the Razor. Project documentation", InSite Archive. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 10, 2018.

Spanish. Near the vans, kids, adults, the ocean, and the beach, which is split by the metal fence reaching far west into the water. On a rock is Boundary Marker 258, a metal plaque commemorating the establishment of the first border markers between Mexico and the United States on October 10, 1849. A man climbs on the van in the Mexican side and approaches the mic. He takes his time, but finally says: "I want to get 'cross the border! Why can't I get through without having a job?" He addresses Terry Allen: "How did you get there?" Allen replies: "I started here". Then the man calls the Border Park ranger: "Hey there! Can I cross? Without being chased? My name is Fidel and this is all I have to say". He leaves the mic, climbs down, and leaves.

Allen remembers that the intense negotiations with the U.S. Parks Service and the U.S. Border Patrol required for the piece became the most interesting part of it, as they embodied the bureaucratic efforts necessary to navigate the complex degrees of governance over the international border. While initially Allen wanted a solid non-movable platform, him and the U.S. Parks Service compromised on movable platforms on vans. The rationale behind this was that, according to the U.S. Park Service, they posed less threats to border patrolling and could be easily moved in case of any altercations. The title of the piece, *Cross the razor/Cruza la navaja*, is a direct reference to the border metal fence, which at the time when Allen first visited the area, was being installed cutting through the open space of Friendship Park.

The construction of a border wall<sup>339</sup> is another type of interventionism that parallels NAFTA's increasing stratification of human border crossings and yet fails to stop migration to the US. A draft introduction for the InSITE97 catalog claims that "The expression of cleavage in this ungainly hemispheric conjunction has grown frenetically over-determined, as the steel membrane fabricated three years ago to secure the border has been redoubled, even tripled,

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<sup>339</sup> See Introduction to this dissertation about the current forms of state interventionism around the U.S./Mexico international border line.

here and there. A bulwark presumably against an unstaunchable permeability".<sup>340</sup> On a similar vein, authors such as Ronald Mize and Peter Andreas have studied the political apparatus activated with NAFTA, as well as its on-the-ground effects on the local fabric. Although both agree that the construction of a border wall between Mexico and the U.S. has been more a symbol of federal dominance of the region than an actual containment of human flows, they highlight the dramatic changes that NAFTA has brought about: increased precarity in industrial and agrarian labor conditions on both sides, criminalization of migrants, heightened racialization of the Mexican class structure, and an escalating migration from rural Mexico to Tijuana that continues to these days.<sup>341</sup> Some pieces included in InSITE directly engage with some these issues, as this chapter will later explore.

Border scholar Peter Andreas has also described more recent physical and symbolic interventions in the border as ritualized and performative acts, telling of rising political attention to the region.<sup>342</sup> He supports that "'successful' border management depends on successful image management", focusing in his study on the different governmental efforts at play in the rendering of the region to control public perception of it. In the post-NAFTA context the US/Mexico borderlands became a zone of transition<sup>343</sup> not just between economic models and political ideologies but, most importantly for our study, for the expansion of aesthetic programs and forms of artistic labor. Site-specific art, as a form of landscape art, was deployed to imagine the spaces of influence of the new political formations coming to be in the decade.

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<sup>340</sup> "Exhibition framework", InSITE97. Fax from Danielle Reo to Olivier Dubroise. August 4, 1997. Fondo Olivier Dubroise, Arkheia MUAC, Mexico City. Consulted in November 2016.

<sup>341</sup> Ronald L. Mize, "Interrogating, Race, Class, Gender and Capitalism Along the U.S.- Mexico Border: Neoliberal Nativism and Maquila Modes of Production." *Race, Gender and Class*. 15 (2008); Peter Andreas, *Border Games. Policing the U.S./Mexico Divide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001)

<sup>342</sup> Peter Andreas, *Border Games. Policing the U.S./Mexico Divide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001)

<sup>343</sup> Glen Sparrow, "San Diego-Tijuana : Not Quite a Binational City or Region." *GeoJournal* 54, no. 1 (2001): 73–83.



## Lived border life.

The belief in ‘trans-boundary interdependence’ framed the artworks and organizational forms of InSITE between 1992 and 2005. This ideal often came hand in hand with a belief in the exclusive opportunity to overcome historical conflicts in the border after NAFTA. For example, in an interview, InSITE94 artist Terry Allen declared that “[for] everything that we think of as bad about the border, there is something good about it, because it's really the first and last chance you have for people to get together and the irony is that now we have this wall, this fence, which is really obscene”.<sup>344</sup> Similarly, Mexican artist Felipe Ehrenberg declared that their work in 1994 “is one of the last chances we have to do something about [the frictions around the border]”.<sup>345</sup>

Despite changing regulations of human and goods traffic through the international border through history, local civil society has historically “challenged and adapted to state policies and structures”,<sup>346</sup> making federal control of the borderlands more of an idealist project than a successfully materialized enterprise. Fluctuating trans-border collaboration in trade policy does however not translate to the space of lived border life, which is characterized by the constant practice of forms of reciprocity between communities on both sides of the border. Border communities participate simultaneously of a rich and consistent diversity of cultural, economic, and political processes in Tijuana and San Diego, and make strategic use of the benefits of living on the international border: in the U.S. as in Mexico they participate in public festivities, shop for everyday supplies, attend school, and make use of medical facilities.<sup>347</sup> For example, at

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<sup>344</sup> Terry Allen interviewed by Patricia L. Tylor. “Conversations with Felipe Ehrenberg and Terry Allen”, 1994. InSite Archive. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 10, 2018.

<sup>345</sup> Felipe Ehrenberg interviewed by Patricia L. Tylor. “Conversations with Felipe Ehrenberg and Terry Allen”, 1994. InSite Archive. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 10, 2018.

<sup>346</sup> Rachel S. John, *Line in the Sand. A History of the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011)

<sup>347</sup> Germán Vega Briones, “Población Commuter de La Frontera Norte : El Caso de Mexicali-Calexico y Tijuana-San Diego.” *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos* 31, no. 1 (2017): 207–38.

the turn of the century 29,303 *tijuanaenses* of working age commuted everyday to work in San Diego.<sup>348</sup>

This back-and-forth everyday practice of border life takes place within the economic and social relations of global capitalism. Border scholar Lawrence Herzog calls San Diego and Tijuana a 'global metropolis' made of, on one hand, "spaces formed by global economic actors" such as factories or *maquilas*, shopping malls and tourist areas, and, on the other, "spaces that represent regional and local responses to globalizing forces" like neighborhoods, community spaces, and "invented connections".<sup>349</sup> Two points are worth keeping from Herzog's model. First, the importance of neighborhood life and community spaces as forms of resistance to globalizing forces. Second, his notion of 'invented connection', a concept that very well describes inSITE as a border-spanning venture, and that I will recover later in this chapter.

Most artists participating in inSITE94 and inSITE97 followed the organization's official stand to ignore the border as an exhibition topic. Since most of them were not familiar with the region before their engagement with inSITE94, most artworks failed to address the lived experience of the borderlands.<sup>350</sup> Yet a small number of participating artists focused instead on signaling the spaces that showed their impact of globalizing forces in the everyday lives of local communities. One of these artists was Tijuana artist Marcos Ramírez ERRE, who participated in the 1994 and 1997 iterations. For *Century 21* (inSITE94), Marcos Ramírez ERRE recreated outside of CECUT in Tijuana a precarious housing unit like the ones found in the informal

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<sup>348</sup> Data from "Muestra del 10% del Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010", INEGI. Cited in Vega Briones, Germán. "Población Commuter de La Frontera Norte: El Caso de Mexicali-Calexico y Tijuana-San Diego." *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos* 31, no. 1 (2017): 207–38.

<sup>349</sup> Lawrence Herzog, "Global Tijuana", in Michael Dear and Gustavo Leclerc, *Postborder City. Cultural Spaces of Baja California* (New York: routledge, 2001) p. 121

<sup>350</sup> Exceptions to this were cases like Mexican artist Silvia Gruner, discussed later in this chapter, who traveled repeatedly to Tijuana and San Diego during 1994 and rented an apartment for some time in Colonia Libertad, site of her intervention. Hopping to address the lack of familiarity of foreign artists with the region, in the 1997, 2000, and 2005 iterations amounts of the festival's budget devoted to artists residencies increased significantly. Since the incorporation of Osvaldo Sanchez to the curatorial team, inSITE explicitly favored processes leading up to the production of the artwork as their real focus of interest over the finalized artwork-product.

residential areas of Tijuana. Before CECUT was built in 1982, the area where it stands was part of *Cartolandia*, a settlement of cardboard and wood houses along the Tijuana river, mostly inhabited by Mixteca migrants from Central Mexico. The 1970-1976 high-end commercial redevelopment “Zona Río” displaced Cartolandia residents to build instead shopping malls, hotels, and nightlife commercial areas in this area close to the San Ysidro international border crossing.

ERRE's *Century 21* was built with discarded wood panels, cardboard, and corrugated metal sheets. Old tires fenced its periphery. Inside, miss-matched kitchen cabinets next to a mattress and a round table with four chairs offered a view of the spaces where the everyday lives of Tijuana's poorest residents took place. This recreation of everyday life in precarity reminds of Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis notion of ‘cultura de frontera’, the practiced forms of life that, envisioning a better future, reformulate the personal and national pasts of those whose lives are cut by the geopolitical border. For Monsiváis the ‘cultura de la frontera’ is characterized by, on one hand, “its resistance to isolation (from the forgetfulness or dismissal of [Mexican] centralism), and the precarious settlement before the contiguous reality of the *American Way of Life*”.<sup>351</sup> I find Monsiváis description of the double-faced conditions of isolation from one state and forbidden aspiration to access another very telling of the reality that ERRE wanted to recreate for inSITE94 visitors.

Other inSITE94 artworks addressed everyday lived border life. The Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo produced the installation *ESL: tonguetied/lenguatrabada*. The piece, set up at Boehm Gallery in Palomar College, recreated the space of a classroom where all walls had been turned into blackboards. In them, sentences interplated the audience: “SPEAK ENGLISH!”, “What language do you think in...?”, “Do you feel insulted?”. A television

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<sup>351</sup> Carlos Monsiváis, *La cultura de la frontera* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología, 1975). p. 44

showed the message “I learned my English on TV”. With this installation the important art collective from San Diego directed attention to the spaces of identity construction and the disciplinary nature of the state through its education system. In inSITE97 artworks by David Avalos, Patricia Patterson, and Louis Hock (discussed in this chapter) would also engage with the spaces of quotidian life in the region.

In sum, through the years, only a limited number of artworks echoed the quotidian practices of reciprocity and recognition that inform life at the U.S./Mexico border. Most, if not all, of these were by artists living in the borderlands, mostly in Tijuana, like ERRE, although some were from San Diego too, like Hock. Although some artists made explicit reference in their works to the economic unevenness and social contradictions of this relationship, the forms of critique welcomed into the curatorial selection proved the organization's increasing favoring of aesthetic codes at use in the nascent global contemporary art world (what I have called 'global neo-avant-gardes' in Chapter 1)<sup>352</sup> in detriment of those bred in the rich local history of art production, like Border art. The 'cultural leakage' that some scholars<sup>353</sup> identify vis-a-vis popular culture, ethnic diversity, and habitation modes in the region must also be scrutinized in the light of InSITE's impact in contemporary art production in Tijuana and, more generally, Mexico.

Later sections of this chapter show how, thanks to the curatorial efforts of inSITE, the U.S./Mexico borderlands were re-imagined through the aesthetics of the 'global neo-avant-gardes'. In this phenomenon, many participants in InSITE, most coming from Mexico City, solidified their access to the global contemporary art industry. Curators, administrators, and artists moved on to circulate in the industry's international circuits, while local agents from San Diego and Tijuana faced a hard decision: to either convert to the newly imported aesthetic codes, or to see their access to highly visible art institutions hinder.

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<sup>352</sup> See first chapter or intro.

<sup>353</sup> Glen Sparrow, “San Diego-Tijuana : Not Quite a Binational City or Region.” *GeoJournal* 54, no. 1 (2001): 73–83.

## **Section 2: Reimagining binational collaboration via culture.**

### **InSITE: from artist-run space to binational foundation.**

Before InSITE94 and InSITE97, there was IN/SITE92, an exhibition of installation art organized by Installation Gallery in Downtown San Diego. Installation Gallery was a non-profit organization founded in 1981. Itinerant among different venues, it was run by a group of artists, curators, and academics from the region, who came together in an attempt to make art production in the San Diego area more visible. Although the artistic community around Installation Gallery changed through time, it represented a wide array of San Diego's smaller art scenes, including members of the Galería de la Raza, San Diego University, SDSU, UCSD, local galleries and museums. In the spring of 1992, board members Mark Quint and Ernst Silva, gallery owner and UCSD Visual Arts professor respectively, invited artists from the region to exhibit their work during the months of September and October. IN/SITE92, which was "cooperatively curated", had as main venue the Mission Brewery building in Downtown San Diego, with smaller peripheral exhibition spaces in San Diego and Tijuana.<sup>354</sup> The show was funded via private donations and had an approximate budget of \$3,000.

Soon after IN/SITE92 ended planning for InSITE94 began. The exhibition's second iteration was more ambitious: it had an anticipated budget of \$600,000 and almost 24 months for preparations. Financial support came from a diversity of agents, including private donations from board members, grants from U.S. foundations (the Rockefeller Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the Lucille and Ron Neeley Foundation), and support from public organizations (the City of San Diego's

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<sup>354</sup> "'IN/SITE92' a Comeback for Installation Art: Installation Gallery makes a new showing with an innovative, multigallery exhibit concept", in *The LA Times*, September 5, 1992

Commission for Art and Culture, Tijuana's City Government, INBA, CONACULTA). Ten fund-raising events and one fund-raising gala provided supplemental financial support for InSITE94. In-kind support came from the Tijuana Chamber of Commerce, San Diego's Pan Pacific Hotel, Granger Associates, Ninteman Construction Company, and the Catellus Development Corporation. Lastly, exhibition space and additional preparation budget was provided by institutions such as the CECUT, the MCASD, UCSD, Southwestern College, the California Parks Commission, and the Casino Aguascalientes. At the time of InSITE94's preparation, Installation Gallery had a 31 member Board of Directors, and a 63 member Arts Advisory Board that reflected all participating institutions in the festival.

IN/SITE92's ethos of "synergy [and] collaboration" was, according to Ernst Silva, the "driving force behind inSITE94".<sup>355</sup> However, the larger scale of inSITE94 led the way to the differentiation of a hierarchical structure within it, the definition of professional roles within the six person staff, and the sophistication of the organization's founding and publicity functions. Further, the former cooperative curating model carried out by local art workers changed to incorporate a growing amount of recognizable international art world names. For inSITE94, curators Olivier Debroise, Walther Boelsterly, and Carmen Cuenca from Mexico City and Tijuana played an important role in the selection of artworks. Catalog essays were written by local USD professor Sally Yard, Olivier Debroise, rising Mexican curator Cuauhtémoc Medina, and US art critic Dave Hickey. This trend towards incorporating international expertise in the selection filters continued in inSITE97. This time, Installation Gallery invited four curators: Canadian Jessica Bradley, Israeli Mexico-based Olivier Debroise, Brazilian Ivo Mesquita, and USD professor Sally Yard. Catalog essays for this iteration were authored by philosopher Susan

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<sup>355</sup> "Installation Gallery", press clip from unknown source. InSite Archive. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 21, 2018.

Buck-Morss, sociologist Néstor García Canclini, sociologist José Manuel Valenzuela Arce, and musician and composer George E. Lewis.

InSITE's transformation from an artist-run low-cost exhibition to an organizationally sophisticated trans-national multi-year effort was motivated by the desire to compete with other art biennials of the time. In words of Installation Gallery president Michael Kritchman, "we are certain that the scale, quality, and uniqueness of inSITE94 will put us on par with other international art events".<sup>356</sup> Since 1994, inSITE would grow to be recognized internationally as the "border biennial" in 1997, 2000, and 2005. After this last iteration, inSITE went dormant for a time, until it re-surfaced as a neighborhood center in Santa María de la Ribera, a working class neighborhood in Downtown Mexico City. One could describe InSITE's organizational transformations as the progressive conventionalization of its internal division of labor, funding mechanisms, forms of expertise, and outreach modes. The diverse organizational forms that InSITE adopted between 1992 and 2005 also testify for a changing economic landscape of new possibilities of international cooperation in the post-NAFTA landscape.

### **InSITE: a boundary spanning organization.**

On May 14, 1993, the now-defunct business news publication the *San Diego Daily Transcript* published a story titled "A Border-Spanning Extravaganza". Announcing the celebration of InSITE94 the following year, it began: "It's 'hands across the border' with an artistic emphasis. 'inSITE94,' [...] gives a new and deeper meaning to 'cultural exchange'." After a brief description of the show and its bi-national collaborative model, the *Daily Transcript* cited CECUT's Director Pedro Ochoa: "While people on both sides of the border are well aware of

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<sup>356</sup> "Installation Gallery", press clip from unknown source. InSite Archive. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 21, 2018.

the importance of building business relationships between the United States and Mexico because of the NAFTA, I believe it is also a good time to take an approach through art and culture as well".<sup>357</sup> Ochoa's and the *Daily Transcript's* perspectives singled out inSITE94 as a translation to the cultural field of the regional business sector's enthusiasm about bilateral collaboration.

References in San Diego and Tijuana press to the sense of opportunity that the new free-trade relationship between both countries had opened for cultural enterprises were frequent. In addition to inSITE94 organizers, other San Diego cultural industries joined this enthusiasm. For instance, San Diego Opera general director Ian Campbell said "We consider Tijuana, and Baja California in general, are definitely part of our market [...] we have that very real thing –the border- that often limits one's thinking. It forces you to think of it (Baja California) as a foreign country rather than a geographic extension of the same area, so we're trying to ignore the border and look at this as a general catchment area for all the performing arts".<sup>358</sup> Similarly, San Diego Symphony Executive director Michael Tiknis said that "Baja is a natural, close market with all sorts of people who love good music. [...] We're going to make every effort to build as much interest (among Mexicans) as possible".<sup>359</sup>

This belief on cross-border collaboration held by San Diego's cultural elites was shared by local business elites who saw in NAFTA's free-trade legislative framework opportunities for economic profit. On the government level, the border was no longer determined by the rigid markings of national sovereignty that Rachel St. John describes. While control on human crossings intensified with the launch of the Operation Gatekeeper (1994), celebrations of the

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<sup>357</sup> "A Border-Spanning Extravaganza", *San Diego Daily Transcript*, Friday May 14, 1993. InSite Archive. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 25, 2018.

<sup>358</sup> Preston Turegano, "BORDER. Crossing the cultural frontier", *San Diego Union Tribune*, October 3, 1993. InSite Archive. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 25, 2018.

<sup>359</sup> Preston Turegano, "BORDER. Crossing the cultural frontier", *San Diego Union Tribune*, October 3, 1993. InSite Archive. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 25, 2018.



free flow of capital and goods between the two nations have filled the mouths of federal officials in Washington D.C. and Mexico City until very recently. Efforts to accelerate the flow of goods and capital inaugurated by the two federal governments, were celebrated by ten state governments and a multitude of county and city level governments, and were complemented by numerous public and private agencies on both sides of the border. For example, San Diego Major Susan Golding proclaimed March 19, 1994 to be “InSITE94 DAY”, acknowledging that “inSITE94 will be the first large-scale collaborative undertaking by non-profit visual arts institutions in Mexico and the United States since the adoption of NAFTA; and [...] [that] the collaborative structure of inSITE94 represents a new national model of resource sharing in a period of declining sources of funding for the arts; and [...] [that] inSITE94 will be promoted internationally and is expected to draw significant numbers of culturally oriented visitors and museum groups from both countries”.<sup>360</sup>

This scenario of market expansion opened by NAFTA invited the emergence of a multitude of boundary-spanning organizations in the area. Boundary-spanning organizations are extra-governmental institutions that produce “cooperation or coordination between the various branches, levels and forms of government” and external entities such as civil society organizations and the private sector.<sup>361</sup> InSITE94 was one of these. Although, like Glenn Sparrow explains, U.S.-Mexico border studies literature has focused mainly on the rapid emergence of these boundary-spanning institutions in the fields of environmental and labor regulations, this dissertation shows how inSITE94 formed around the cultural mission of promoting contemporary art at both sides of the border.

InSITE94 shared with many other boundary-spanning organizations of the time the enthusiasm for trans-border collaboration that NAFTA had opened for business elites in San

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<sup>360</sup> “Proclamation”, The Office of The Mayor, The City of San Diego, March 19, 1994. InSite Archive. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 24, 2018.

<sup>361</sup> Glen Sparrow, “San Diego-Tijuana : Not Quite a Binational City or Region.” *GeoJournal* 54, no. 1 (2001): 73–83.

Diego and Tijuana. inSITE94 organizers spoke of “unprecedented” levels of collaboration, “enlisting the active participation of every non-profit visual arts institution in the binational region”.<sup>362</sup> Simultaneously, business elites perceived inSITE94 as an opportunity for economic benefit. For instance, a spokesperson of Tijuana's Chamber of Commerce justified their support of inSITE94 stating that the exhibition “will project the Tijuana-San Diego region to the world [...], will notably improve the region's public image, will attract national and international tourism, [and] will generate economic flow with the arrival of national and international visitors”.<sup>363</sup>

It is not my intention to quantify inSITE94's impact in the regional economy. However, the repeated enthusiastic eulogies of inSITE94's singularity to foster binational economic growth signal to a wide held myth of progress attributed to the arrival of free-trade policies to the region like GATT first, and NAFTA later. This economic policy framework participates of planet-wide neoliberal reforms in the 1990s characterized by the deregulation of international trade, the privatization of state enterprises, and the relaxation of labor laws. Behind these policies lies a belief in the elimination of international borders and celebration of a business-led globalization: the creation of a “flat world”, after Milton Friedman's metaphor of the entrepreneurial ecumenical.<sup>364</sup>

In the absence of strong regulatory and distributive states, a new entrepreneurial class came to be in charge of stimulating growth in regional economies, like San Diego and Tijuana. Like this dissertation shows, culture played -and still does- a decisive role in fostering regional distinction (see Chapter 1). In words of Marxist geographer David Harvey, in this climate

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<sup>362</sup> Undated InSITE94 Internal document. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 21, 2018.

<sup>363</sup> “Cultura en Tijuana”, *El Herald*, July 10 1994. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 23, 2018.

<sup>364</sup> Cited in David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009)

“urban administrators seek to build up symbolic capital through the development of so-called cultural, knowledge-based, or simply spectacle-driven industries. The marketing and selling of a city’s reputation in itself becomes a big business”.<sup>365</sup>

Business elites from San Diego and Tijuana shared with inSITE04 organizers a belief in the conciliatory potential of a border-less region. As empirical material through this chapter shows, the insistence on bi-national collaboration is never presented under the light of migrant rights or environmental activism discussions. Instead, their narrative fits the myth that bi-national collaboration through an art exhibition would lead to economic growth that, in turn, would eventually pass on to other social classes, a notion that is popularly known as ‘trickle-down economics’.<sup>366</sup>

### **The myth of binational collaboration.**

Even if Mexican and U.S. Federal governments had no involvement in the formation of inSITE at any stage, the organization was permeable to the enthusiasm about binational collaboration of the time. Meyer and Rowan have explained how organizations incorporate external myths of efficiency and growth from their environments. According to them, organizations are porous to myths shaping their contexts. These myths are reflected in organizations' language, their rational goals, and their ceremonial criteria of worth. In the case of inSITE94, the regions' renewed belief in the potential of free-trade regulations to foster binational cooperation appear frequently in its institutional rhetoric, its explicit objectives, and its performances of success. One example among plenty of the way in which institutional language mirrored environmental myths of trans-border collaboration, is in inSITE94's catalog: “[inSITE94] took shape within the frame of San Diego/Tijuana's intertwined history, in a space defined by

<sup>365</sup> David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). p. 67

<sup>366</sup> In further revisions of this manuscript I will engage with recent discussions on cultural policy that base defenses of cultural developments on the presumption of their impacts in local economic growth.

both cartographic juncture and rift, amidst a political momentum marked by the conflicting signals of NAFTA and Proposition 187. [...] [Collaboration between artists] echoed the disparities and cohesion of this borderland terrain".<sup>367</sup>

inSITE94's organizational objectives also reflected the importance of trans-border collaboration. This shows with particular clarity in an internal organizational document that states the following programming guidelines for inSITE94:

5. "to plan and coordinate exhibitions related to inSITE94 in at least fifty places of the San Diego-Tijuana region,
6. to plan and coordinate work residencies for artists from the region and elsewhere in sites of San Diego-Tijuana,
7. to coordinate the installation of temporary work sites around the Tijuana-San Diego region, [...]
8. to plan and coordinate bilingual tours to sites participating in inSITE94 for Tijuana and San Diego residents, as well as for tourists who visit the region during the time of the exhibition,
9. to plan and coordinate at least five key public openings in 'key places' in the city of Tijuana and the city of San Diego".<sup>368</sup>

The document's emphasis on the two sites is present all through inSITE94's internal and public literature. The importance of representing the two cities was also present in the even distribution of artworks in Tijuana and San Diego, the careful selection of government, non-profit, and private sector participants from both cities, and the even attention to press outlets in California and Baja California. Moreover, all literature produced by inSITE94, for either internal or external circulation, was bilingual.

Like this chapter further details, public funding for InSITE came from both the U.S. and Mexican federal governments, the states of California and Baja California, and the municipalities of San Diego and Tijuana. Private contributors were cultural institutions like the

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<sup>367</sup> Sally Yard (ed), *inSITE94* (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 1994) p. 6

<sup>368</sup> "Declaración de principios de inSITE94. Installation Gallery". MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 21, 2018. My translation from Spanish.

Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego, universities, and individual donors. Affiliations with civil society organizations included, for example, temporary concessions of exhibition venues at cultural centers such as San Diego's Centro Cultural de la Raza and Tijuana's CECUT, collaborations with public universities to invite artists and lecturers into the exhibitions, and organizing workshops with a Tijuana Mental Health Institution for one of the projects commissioned, years later, by InSITE05.

The mid-1990s saw a multitude of pragmatic boundary-spanning agencies emerge that aimed to solve specific social, environmental, or cultural issues. Glenn Sparrow attributes this phenomenon to the failure of both federal governments to address the challenges of the post-NAFTA scenario. In this context, InSITE was the only agency promoting cooperation between San Diego and Tijuana through contemporary art, filling a vacuum not attended by neither federal, state, nor municipal authorities. The organization began in 1992 under the auspice of artist-run space Installation Gallery, and was by 2005 a powerful private foundation that influenced the ways in which everyday life at the borderlands was rendered visible in international art circuits with its commissioned projects of site-specific and socially engaged art.

### **Provincialism and the desire to be global.**

“It's about time San Diego's cultural community does something to get us on the map. Let's face it-- as the sixth largest city in the nation, San Diego should be one of the major 'artopolises' right up there with San Francisco, Chicago, or at least Santa Fe or Seattle. What has kept us back? What keeps us back? Will we always hold ourselves back? How will we change this?”<sup>369</sup>

These words opened a story on the local publication *The Arts Monthly* titled “Thank the Lord for inSITE94”. Their author, Sonja H. Johnson, hypothesized about the causes of the city's

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<sup>369</sup> Sonja H. Johnson, “Thank the Lord for inSITE94”, *The Arts monthly*, July 1994. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 23, 2018.

absence from the national cultural roster. On one hand, she blamed this isolationism on the military and the tourism industries. On the other, she thought, the “transient nature of our residents” did not allow for a solid cultural fabric to form. A third reason would be San Diego's old elite nostalgia for modern metropolises like New York, London, and Paris as centers of culture. Local gallery owner Scott White disagreed with Johnson. For him, the region had big potential which local media often failed to acknowledge. “Our bicultural strength, the quality of art in our museums is very progressive”, he said. White believed that the region's rich cultural diversity could be exploited better by fostering cultural tourism to the area. In White's words: “San Diego is perfectly poised to reap the benefits of recognition to our artists, museums, and galleries, to the border, to expanding other cultures via the art form medium. The financial wherewithal is here too. San Diego is a resort town. That attraction has pulled in lots of culture. People are coming in from New York, San Francisco, bringing growth to all businesses. This makes San Diego a prime site for a culturally awakened Mecca”.<sup>370</sup> Local media echoed Johnson's enthusiasm. References to inSITE94 as a chance for San Diego and Tijuana to access a cosmopolitan space were very frequent in the local press.

inSITE94 organizers did very much agree with White about the region's cultural richness. They even acknowledged Mexico as a legitimate international partner engaging with Mexican institutional partners in the organization of the exhibition. Further, for both White and inSITE94 organizers, the region's “bicultural strength” seemed like an un-exploited resource that, if translated to the laws of market, promised great benefits potential. The next sections of this chapter show how inSITE94's potential was represented to different sectors of San Diego's and Tijuana's political and economic elites. Here I argue that while in the case of San Diego the anxiety to catch international art tourists' eyes was explained by a century-long competition with

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<sup>370</sup> Sonja H. Johnson, “Thank the Lord for inSITE94”, *The Arts monthly*, July 1994. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 23, 2018.

Los Angeles and San Francisco, for Tijuana it mirrored important negotiations about Baja California's autonomy from Mexico's central state at the time. This desire to put the region in the map translated into a clash of different aesthetic avant-gardes in the exhibition's selection of artworks.

### **Tijuana vis-a-vis Mexico City.**

In the elections of 1988, Baja California elected a new state Governor: Ernesto Ruffo Appel, from pro-business Catholic liberal party Partido de Acción Nacional (henceforth PAN). This was the first time in Mexican history since 1921 that a state Governor was not affiliated with the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (henceforth PRI). This election announced what would be the end of the PRI's single-party political hegemony in Mexico. It also turned the central government's focus towards Baja California as a region that needed to be won back. But the *frontera norte* (the north frontier) had been source of anxiety for centralists for long. In February of 1985, Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid created the Programa Cultural de las Fronteras (Cultural Program for the Borders), which sought to “preserve and promote the different manifestations of our culture in the border lands, with the goal of strengthening consciousness about our national identity and sovereignty”. Actions inside the program would be “inspired by the concepts of sovereignty, solidarity, and nationalism”, with a special emphasis on “our artistic expressions, clothing, and language”.<sup>371</sup> While input about local cultural needs would be coordinated with local agencies, final oversight of actions in the program required approval by the central government. Finally, the program planned for the creation of new cultural institutions in the north and south borderlands that would follow these principles. One of

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<sup>371</sup> Acuerdo que crea la Unidad del Programa Cultural de las Fronteras, adscrita a la Subsecretaría de la Cultura de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, D. O. F, 14 de febrero de 1985. Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Presidencia de la República.

these was CECUT in Tijuana, a key organizational partner of inSITE94 and one of its main exhibition venues.

At the same time, Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (henceforth INBA) had been increasing efforts to promote Mexican contemporary art abroad. Although I have analyzed elsewhere<sup>372</sup> in detail the manifold institutional efforts at play in the atonement of Mexican contemporary art to the codes of a global avant-garde in formation, later sections of this chapter show how during the 1990s different avant-garde programs coexisted in the Mexican art scene. inSITE94 is a good example that shows how the close temptations of the international art market surrounded the work of young Mexican artists at the time. The appeal of the international art market was mirrored on the central government level. INBA increased its ties with Mexico's diplomatic network, sponsoring an increasing number of exhibitions of Mexican art abroad such as blockbuster exhibit Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries (1990-1991).<sup>373</sup> About this show, *LA Times* art critic Suzanne Muchnic said that "as well as being an art show, 'Splendors' is a campaign for a more positive national image, a push for prosperity, the latest evidence of an ongoing quest for national identity and an effort to inspire respect by educating North Americans about Mexico's cultural heritage".<sup>374</sup> Mexico: Splendor of Thirty Centuries was a touring museum exhibition. This format contrasted with inSITE's site-specificity. Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries relegated 'Mexican culture' to the status of museum artifact detached from its historical context, erasing its contemporary and lived status and, therefore, fabricating a museified distance between Mexico and the exhibition visitor. On the contrary, the

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<sup>372</sup> See Paloma Checa-Gismero, "Aesthetic concessions in the work of Teresa Margolles", (upcoming)

<sup>373</sup> *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* opened in the Metropolitan Museum of New York in 1990, and later toured to San Antonio, Los Angeles, Monterrey, and Mexico City. Featuring over 400 objects, spanning 3,000 years of Mexican history, in New York alone it attracted 585,000 visitors. *LA Times* critic Christopher Knight said that "The national character described by "Mexico: Splendors of 30 Centuries" is almost exclusively represented by the art of the ruling classes, from ancient to modern." See "'Perennial Illusions' fills in some modern gaps left by 'Splendors'", in *The LA Times*, September 29, 1991.

<sup>374</sup> Suzanne Muchnic, "Unmasking Mexico's many faces: 'Splendors of Thirty Centuries' arrives in LA next week; not just an art show, the exhibit is a national search for identity", in *The LA Times*, September 29, 1991



effectiveness of inSITE was its foregrounding of Mexican culture as a well-ingrained element in contemporary life at Southern California.

Mirroring NAFTA commercial ties, the United States and Canada became countries of special interests for INBA. InSITE94 would fit in this agenda. For example, a fax sent from the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at UCSD from August 25, 1994, explains that for INBA

“one important and vital initiative that will strengthen the cultural ties between Mexico and the United States will take place on the Tijuana-San Diego border. This initiative is insite94, which will bring together from both sides of the border artists and galleries dedicated to all facets of the visual arts. Insite94 will serve as a model to be emulated at other points of the border, and even in other areas of culture and art, through the support and participation of the private sectors of both countries”.

Like I have showed, in early 1990s Tijuana national, state, and municipal cultural agencies competed in the promotion of different programs of arts and culture. But despite this climate of competition, punctual collaboration between them was not uncommon. For inSITE94, for example, a shared belief on the internationalization potential that the show had for the local scene and Mexican arts more generally, eased the collaboration between members of PRI and PAN parties. For instance, a June 28, 1994, story in local newspaper *El Sol de Tijuana* titled “CECUT and the City will promote culture” reported that Tijuana City Council Secretary Rubén Fernández Aceves and CECUT’s General Director José Luis Pardo Aceves had signed a collaboration agreement to strengthen institutional relations. The agreement responded to the interest in promoting culture and local artists shared by CONACULTA (Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes) and Tijuana’s City Council.<sup>375</sup> Similarly, a story on *El Mexicano* sought to deny rumors of competition between different levels of government in cultural matters, and stated that the above-mentioned agreement had been signed in a climate of “cordiality and respect”. This second story signaled inSITE94 as good proof of this mutual interest to benefit

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<sup>375</sup> MSS 707, box 210, folder 5, “Promocionarán la cultura el CECUT y el Municipio”, in *El Sol de Tijuana*, June 28 1994.

local artists and intellectuals.<sup>376</sup> Later sections of this chapter map the conviviality in inSITE94 of different avant-garde genealogies among the selection of Mexican artists: while some actualized a Mexican bred modernism that was anti-imperialist and politically committed, others embraced the aesthetic codes of the global contemporary avant-garde in consolidation.

### **America's Finest City.**

A hand-drawn portrait of a stylish woman on a fedora opened a gossip column in 619 *Social Calendar*, a La Jolla society magazine. The column profiled glamorous Eloisa Haudenschild, an Argentinian jet-setter turned La Jolla arts patron. Eloisa was married to Chris Haudenschild, founder and CEO of Clinicomp, a Torrey Pines biotech computer systems company. The Haudenschilds were to host, on March 19, 1994, a fundraising gala for inSITE94, chaired by world-renown artists Christo and Jean-Claude. The column regretted San Diego's lack of "international events", and reduced these to "the America's [Golf] Cup" and "Blue, White & Red parties", with "handsome, charming Italians; hand-kissing Frenchmen; and Crocodile Dundee look-alikes from the land down under".<sup>377</sup> Things were about to change, "You are in for a wild international ride in 1994! [...] The San Diego-Tijuana region will be the bi-national location for InSITE94, a biennial exhibition of installation and site-specific art".<sup>378</sup> Urging La Jolla socialites to purchase \$125 dinner tickets for the inSITE94 fundraising gala, wondering "what to wear! Something colorful and artsy",<sup>379</sup> the column's author interpellated her readers sticking her finger in a wide-shared wound: local elites' anxiety about San Diego's provincialism. The quote

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<sup>376</sup> "Foro", *El Mexicano*, [undated] MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 23, 2018.

<sup>377</sup> Olga Krasnoff, "Style", 619 *Social Calendar*, p 6. March, 1994. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 23, 2018.

<sup>378</sup> Olga Krasnoff, "Style", 619 *Social Calendar*, p 6. March, 1994. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 23, 2018.

<sup>379</sup> Olga Krasnoff, "Style", 619 *Social Calendar*, p 6. March, 1994. MSS 707. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. Last consulted on May 23, 2018.

shows that moments of internationalization worthy of La Jolla readers were golf tournaments and visits from European and Australian charms. Remarkably, the piece ignored the high numbers of international residents in the area, mostly of Mexican origin, but also Africans and Asians. As Gangster and Buj show, Mexican-born population in San Diego County had grown an 85.6% in the 1980s, reaching 510,781 residents in 1990, 20.9% of the County's population.<sup>380</sup> San Diego County was in fact a very international region by the time of inSITE94.

Another insight that we gain from the gossip column is the rise of biotech elites in San Diego's politics since the 1980s. Geographer Mike Davis has described San Diego's political history as one driven by successive local elites' efforts to beautify the city hoping to attract national and international investment. The subsequent rise of the tourism, military, and biotech industries explain these efforts, and have translated into different beautification programs for its land.<sup>381</sup> Part of site-specific art's appeal was its believed faculty to highlight the essential treats of place and thus signify the region's physical and cultural space as a yet-to-be exploited resource.

A high number of press material from the years 1993 and 1994 shows the active re-development of San Diego's downtown as a cultural center. "Downtown Arts Rising", a two-page story in *San Diego Home/Garden* is particularly telling as it describes a "strong arts renewal" in Downtown San Diego, orchestrated by the newly formed Arts Downtown Council. Among the institutions contributing to this downtown renewal are the downtown branch of the MCASD (opened in 1993), the new Children's Museum, the New School of Arts and Architecture and the B Street Pier gallery. Tentative plans for UCSD Extension presence were, however, never materialized. Smaller art spaces participating in the momentum were art gallery Simayspace

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<sup>380</sup> Ganster, Paul, and Lili Buj. "Percepciones De La Migración Mexicana En El Condado De San Diego." *Revista Mexicana De Sociología* 53, no. 3 (1991). p. 262

<sup>381</sup> Mike Davis, Jim Miller and Kelly Mayhew, *Under the Perfect Sun: The San Diego Tourists Never See* (San Diego: The New Press, 2005)

Cafe Cinema, Taboo, Bravo Gallery, Sushi, Many Hands Gallery, and Installation Gallery, organizer of inSITE94.<sup>382</sup>

The story also quotes San Diego Major Susan Brown, who remarks on how rising “corporate response to art” has made art more visible in the public space, “pull[ing] the artists out of their studios to participate”. This overall celebratory tone of the potential of corporate capital to enliven the city clicks in the article with its author’s references to President Clinton’s declaration of October as National Arts and Humanities Month. The fact that this story was published three months before NAFTA was put in place signals to a generalized approval of Bill Clinton’s free trade framework among *San Diego Home/Garden* readers and similar groups. This story neatly closes a tight-knit bond between corporate capital, culture, and freedom.

Site-specific art would be then the aesthetic program to celebrate the new alliance between corporate capital, city development, and free trade. Part of inSITE’s success in gathering support from cultural institutional partners and the business and biotech elites in both San Diego and Tijuana speaks to the fact that these different groups had identified their shared economic interests in a region experiencing fundamental transformations. Although not yet consolidated as a ‘historic bloc’ in the Gramscian sense, the progressive coordination of these groups around inSITE94 and other cultural ventures points to the development of class solidarity between them. The image of the borderlands as a space of binational fluidity that inSITE94 and later iterations advertise amplifies the interests of dominant elites at both sides of the fence, yet occludes the lived experience of the border life characteristic of most inhabitants of the region and foregrounded by Chicano art first, and Border art later. Through time, and with the aid of several cultural initiatives like inSITE94, a hegemonic notion of the U.S.Mexico border as fluid, porous, and symbiotic would come to replace its subaltern representations as a space

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<sup>382</sup> MSS 707, box 210, folder 3. “Downtown Arts Rising” San Diego Home/Garden, October 1993. InSITE Archive, UCSD Special Collections Library. Accessed July 2017.

of violence, segregation, and economic disparity. In Chapter 1 I have already characterized the three-fold function of curatorial labor within global biennials: producing new historical narratives, constituting a new cosmopolitan elite, and forming the new analytic category of 'global contemporary art'. I will not repeat it here, but I would like to show now how the logic behind San Diego's history of urban beautification as urban redevelopment is not far from the rationale between inSITE94 and later iterations.

In his essay for the inSITE94 catalog French-Mexican art critic Olivier Debroye spoke of the exhibition as the latest iteration of San Diego's competition with Los Angeles and San Francisco. Debroye profiled inSITE94 as yet another product of the "'San Diego identity complex' and the city's need to reaffirm its territoriality through the claims of high culture". Like the construction of Balboa Park almost a century before, San Diego welcomed now "the megalomaniac virtuality of a biennial with no apparent core, that serves as a kind of hypertext, like a montage of invisible data that speak to one another, that reverberate off one another, and that we can only access through information networks".<sup>383</sup> His comparison of inSITE94 with flows of detached and abstract data seems at first contradictory with the belief in site-specific art as a situated form capable of rendering visible the essential features of place. However, for him, unlike other biennials, the public presence of inSITE94 "owe[d] less to the presence of the works than to their essence: they call out for comment". Debroye concluded that, regardless of their placement in specific sites, meaning for inSITE94 artworks was only produced through peripheral media such as the press, documentation of artworks, and institutional literature like, for example, the catalog. Debroye represented inSITE94 artworks as simultaneously placed onsite yet needing of commentary to be differentiated from the landscape. This contradiction raises a key question about the ontology of art and, chiefly, about the importance of its definition

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<sup>383</sup> Olivier Debroye, "By the Night Tide", in *InSITE94* (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 1994) p. 29

by a community constituted around a shared agreement on what art at the border region was in 1994.

### **Creative cosmopolitanism.**

The two poles in Debroise's depiction of the artwork as simultaneously situated and abstract, mirror the spatial aspirations of inSITE94. On one hand, the exhibition pursued its grounding in the region. Artworks were commissioned for specific enclaves of the local landscape. Educational and outreach programs were set in place to connect with local publics. On the other hand, the organization had strong international aspirations. As I have shown, San Diego's and Tijuana's local press welcomed it as a chance to bring international attention to the region. Further, the roster of artists included XXXXX who were neither Mexican nor American. And last, curators, critics, and artists of international relevance were invited to participate in diverse forms in the 1997, 2000/2001, and 2005 iterations.

This conceptualization of space as simultaneously urban and international yet in avoidance of the national aligns with the formation of a neoliberal cosmopolitan consciousness in the 1990s. Like I explain in Chapter 1, the rising phenomenon of art biennials in the 1990s responded to the renewed belief in cosmopolitan world orders. La Bienal de La Habana and Manifesta speak of visions of cosmopolitanism that build, on one hand, from socialist international solidarity and, on the other, from liberal European hegemony. InSITE, in its multiple iterations, reflects the rising importance of a neoliberal cosmopolitanism that believed that world stability would be ultimately delivered by the export of free-trade reforms and U.S.-shaped democratic institutions.

Neoliberal cosmopolitanism defended the potential of the aesthetic to stimulate economic development of regions. A popular celebrator of this belief was Richard Florida, whose concept of the 'Creative Class' was quickly adopted as self-identifier by many members of the 1990s-2000s high-tech and financial elites. The Creative Class, according to Florida, "consists of people who add economic value [to space] through their creativity". The Creative Core of this group includes, among others, artists, cultural figures, and opinion makers, such as those involved in inSITE94 and, more generally, 1990s culture-led re-development ventures of Downtown San Diego. Their values differ from modern cultural elites in that they cherish individuality, meritocracy, diversity, and openness. Their work is transmutable between different sites, because they themselves are movable and uprooted. What is key in Florida's model is the power that he attributes to the Creative Class: in his eyes, these professionals conglomerate in cities and help develop their economy. In his model, cities with a high density of 'creatives' receive the name of 'Creative Centers'. These are characterized by the presence of high-tech industries and regional vitality. They are diverse, their population grows. "Creative centers provide the integrated ecosystem or habitat where all forms of creativity -artistic and cultural, technological and economic- can take root and flourish", he explains.<sup>384</sup>

Why would cities be interested in fostering the growth of their Creative Class population? For Florida, a growing Creative Class increases the overall quality of place: creatives bring diversity and 'better' lifestyle to cities, they increase the amount and quality of social interactions. While I disagree with the forms of agency and empowerment that Florida's model implies –not mentioning its impact in increasing class, racial, and gender inequality–, its belief in the power of the Creative Class to enact meaningful urban change helps us understand the motives behind inSITE and other cultural ventures in mid-1990s San Diego and Tijuana.

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<sup>384</sup> Richard Florida, *the Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) p. 218

Florida's model makes the major mistake of celebrating human diversity only because of its economic value.

Also celebratory of the potentials for economic growth that come with globalization's increased interconnectedness of cities and human groups, sociologist Saskia Sassen has spoken of the relevance that what she calls 'global cities' has for the growth of a global contemporary art complex. In her words,

"We also see greater cross-border networks for cultural purposes, as in the growth of international markets for art and a transnational class of curators; and for non-formal political purposes, as in the growth of transnational networks of activists around environmental causes, human rights, and so on. These are largely city-to-city cross-border networks, or, at least, it appears at this time to be simpler to capture the existence and modalities of these networks at the city level".<sup>385</sup>

Florida's and Sassen's optimism and the creative ventures happening at Downtown San Diego are indicative of the beliefs and social alliances mobilizing change at the urban level. Most importantly, they also speak of a particular form of urban boosterism endemic of U.S. cities in this period. Unlike Rotterdam (Chapter 4) and Havana (Chapter 2), actions by the San Diego public sector were limited to official endorsements such as the declaration of March 19, 1994 as "InSITE94 DAY" (see elsewhere in this chapter). Instead, funding and organization of inSITE came, mostly, from the private sector. Here I must remind geographer David Harvey's diagnosis of the transition from a management model to an entrepreneurial model in U.S. late capitalist urban enclaves. While during the former stage government and the public sector were responsible for resources and organization efforts, late capitalist entrepreneurialism is characterized by "'private-public partnerships' in which a traditional local boosterism is integrated with the use of local governmental powers to try and attract external sources of funding".<sup>386</sup> Under this new form of boosterism, urban transformation is motivated no longer by

<sup>385</sup> Sassen, Saskia. "The Global City: Introducing a Concept." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* XI, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>386</sup> Harvey, David. "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B. Human Geography. The Roots of Geographical Change: 1973 to the*



the social, political, and economic interests of the state. In this model, urban capitalist elites seek return in their investments in the forms of tourism, property value, or indirect benefits.

Although I have engaged elsewhere with the complicity of art biennials in the production of local authenticity<sup>387</sup>, it is important to note here the parallels between Florida's model and Downtown San Diego's culture-led re-development of the early 1990s. Most importantly for this study, the Creative Class is both attracted by and helps produce a new authenticity of site. For Florida, authenticity is the product of both the site's material aspects (its natural features and its built landscape), and the co-habitation of diverse population groups. According to him, authentic place is the opposite of 'generic place', it is 'real'. InSITE94 was just one project among many motivated by the belief that cultural events connecting the region with international audiences and markets would translate in economic growth for the area, a phenomenon that Sharon Zukin has labeled "artistic mode of production" and that resonates with the value implications of curatorial labor that I outline in Chapter 1.<sup>388</sup> Like a story from a local newspaper reads: "More is already in the way on a more domestic scale through the City of San Diego's Public Art Master Plan and also through its new policy to integrate artists into the design process for capital improvement projects".<sup>389</sup> But, *what* was on the way?

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*Present* (1989) 71, no. 1 (1989): 3–17.

<sup>387</sup> See Paloma Checa-Gismero (2017) Global Contemporary Art Tourism: Engaging with Cuban Authenticity Through the Bienal de La Habana, *Tourism Planning & Development*, 15:3, 313-328

<sup>388</sup> Sharon Zukin, "How to Create a Culture Capital: Reflections on Urban Markets and Places", in I. Blazwick (ed.), *Century City: Art and culture in the Modern Metropolis* (London: Tate Gallery, 2001), p. 260

<sup>389</sup> Leah Olman, "Art Ahead", MSS 707 box 210 folder 4 InSITE Archive, UCSD Special Collections Library. Accessed July 2017.

### Section 3: Avant-garde clashes.

#### Site-specific art.

inSITE's programmatic interest in commissioning works of site-specific art followed international trends of the time. In the early 1990s, several big-scale exhibitions used site-specific art to question wide-held representations about specific urban enclaves. In 1987, curators Kaspar König and Klaus Bussman organized the *Skulptur Projekte Münster*, asking fifty artists to respond in their work to the built environment of the German city. In 1992, U.S. curator Mary Jane Jacob curated *Places with a Past* for the Spoleto Festival, in Charleston, North Carolina. This exhibition of site-specific art worked to visibilize hidden collective histories of Charleston, like the city's history as slave trade hub and its plantation economy. InSITE organizers found direct inspiration in these festivals.

These site-specific exhibitions, and many other similar ones to come, perform the function of attributing meaning to place. They intervene in an enclave's historical narratives, its perceived identity, and sense of place as experienced by locals and tourists. Performance scholar Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett places site-specific exhibitions in the conflicted middle-grounds between "real environments of memory", where historical memory is shared and sustained through everyday life, and "official sites of memory", such as museums and monuments, which uphold a fixed historical narrative.<sup>390</sup> inSITE's five iterations between 1992 and 2005 actualized this tension: while multiple emphasis were put into connecting guest artists with everyday lived experience of the borderlands, many of its site-specific artworks failed to acknowledge them

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<sup>390</sup> Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, "Reflecting on Spoleto's 'Evoking History' June 2001", in Mary Jane Jacobs and Tumelo Mosaka (eds.), *Evoking History* (Charleston: Spoleto Festival, 2002)

and instead worked as new monuments marking the presence in San Diego and Tijuana of a new business class.

Heirs of Heidegger's concept of authentic life as self-owned,<sup>391</sup> 1990's celebrators of site-specific art were moved by an idealistic belief in the potential of this art form to convey isomorphic representations of a place's essential traits –including its physical features, social relations, and myths informing it. More specifically, since the 1980s practitioners and commissioners of site-specific art have celebrated it as an art form capable of unveiling the true essence of places. This type of art takes its site as object of analysis and intervenes on it addressing its physical, institutional, or human characteristics. Underlying these defenses is a broadly held belief in its truth-telling potential built on the grounds of an objective notion of authenticity. For example, Kwon defends that site-oriented art has the ability to “extract the social and historical dimensions out of places to variously serve the thematic drive of an artist, satisfy institutional demographic profiles, or fulfill the fiscal needs of a city”,<sup>392</sup> and Kaye states that “site-specific work might even assert a ‘proper’ relationship with its location, claiming an “original and fixed position” associated with what it is”.<sup>393</sup> These scholars, as well as those who practiced or curated site-specific art sharing similar beliefs, saw in their acts the transparent and non-interventionist presentation of what already existed, enhanced to the public through their work.

On the other hand, critics of this category warn against site-oriented art's problematic relation with the spaces and individuals that it seeks to engage with. For example, in her assessment of public art in 1980s Manhattan gentrification, Rosalynd Deutsche remarked that “paramount among the issues confronting all urban practices is the present appropriation of

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<sup>391</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *Being and time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996)

<sup>392</sup> Kwon, M.(1997). *One place after another: Notes onsite specificity oneplace after another: Notes on site specificity*. *October*, 80, p. 87

<sup>393</sup> Kaye, Nick. *Site-specific art. Performance, place and documentation*. (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 1

public space and of the city itself for use by the forces of redevelopment”,<sup>394</sup> a danger that was also present in inSITE’s involvement in Downtown San Diego’s redevelopment. While seminal site-specific art formally responded to the architectural aspects of sites, most recent practices seek to engage also with the human component of place. These forms receive labels such as “new genre public art”,<sup>395</sup> “new public art”,<sup>396</sup> “new community art”,<sup>397</sup> and “socially engaged art”.<sup>398</sup> In them, individuals from a chosen context become participants or collaborators in pieces orchestrated by an artist or cultural producer -more than often not familiar with emic cultural codes-, often with the aim of provoking social change. Kester warns that

“there is a tendency in community-based public works to define the participants who make up a given project’s community serially, as socially isolated individuals whose ground of interconnection and identification as a group is provided by an aesthetically ameliorative experience administered by the artist”.<sup>399</sup>

falling in paternalistic notions of political representation. I extend this warning to the complete inSITE intervention. By granting access to a site’s human or physical features, this site-specific festival more than often assumed its intervention was an apolitical one: it failed to reflect on the power distribution of the encounter between exhibition visitors and local residents in the region facilitated by many of its artworks.

However, organizers of InSITE were aware of the power of site-specific art to construct place. In a draft for the InSITE97 catalog they wrote: “The works included in inSITE97 investigate the ways in which the meanings of public space are constructed and construed.

Artists have proceeded with passionate engagement, utopian idealism, self-conscious

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<sup>394</sup> Deutsche, Rosalynd. “Uneven development: Public art in New York City”, *October*. 47, (1988) p. 12

<sup>395</sup> Lacy, Suzanne. *Mapping the terrain: New genre public art* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1994)

<sup>396</sup> Gablik, Suzi. “Connective aesthetics: Art after individualism”. In S. Lacy (Ed.), *Mapping the terrain: New genre public art*. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994)

<sup>397</sup> Kester, Grant. “Aesthetic evangelists. Conversion and empowerment in contemporary community art”. *Afterimage*, 22(January, 1995), 5–11.

<sup>398</sup> Kester, Grant. *The one and the many: Contemporary collaborative art in a global context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011)

<sup>399</sup> Kester, Grant. “Aesthetic evangelists. Conversion and empowerment in contemporary community art”. *Afterimage*, 22(January, 1995) p. 10

detachment, irony, humor – adopting strategies ranging from subtle subversion to willful spectacle. In choosing a site each artist has implicitly identified a specifically configured 'public' who will happen upon the work in the course of daily routine".<sup>400</sup> As curator Olivier Dubroise said, already implicit in the InSITE exhibition project was the notion of site-specificity and it was up to curators to best mediate between the tendencies of "most of the artists to hide [from the context], and even 'clean' rough areas, giving them a 'white cube' appearance.

### **The co-existence of different aesthetic codes.**

For inSITE94 Mexican artist Silvia Gruner produced *La mitad del camino / The Middle of the Road*, one-hundred and twenty copies of a sculpture of Aztec goddess Tlazolteotl squatting on little shelves hooked to the southern side of the metal border fence, in the Tijuana working class neighborhood of Colonia Libertad. Photographs show the replicas of the goddess running along the fence, squatting on tiny benches, birthing new life. The objects were placed near an uncompleted section of the fence through which migrants often crossed North. According to a sign written by Gruner that accompanied the figures, Tlazolteotl "protected women in labor, and those involved in lost causes, she recycled the world's filth, and pardoned the bad loves of men. The work placed in this site, a crossroads, is dedicated to those who live here and those who cross through".<sup>401</sup> Colonia Libertad is home to migrants from all over Mexico who moved to Tijuana and either stayed to be employed in the regional maquiladora sector or plan to cross to the U.S.. The one-hundred and twenty Tlazolteotl copies marked migrants' transition to a new life. Coincidentally, Gruner installed these objects weeks before Proposition 187 passed in the November 8, 1994 California general election. This measure denied access to public services

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<sup>400</sup> "Exhibition framework", InSITE97. Fax from Danielle Reo to Olivier Dubroise. August 4, 1997. Fondo Olivier Dubroise, Arkheia MUAC, Mexico City. Consulted in November 2016.

<sup>401</sup> Fax from Silvia Fruner to Sara Maarchick, Installation Gallery. Undated. My translation.

such as education and public health care to immigrants living in California without legal permission. Although Proposition 187 was ultimately declared un-constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court, in 1994 as today, migrant lives in Southern California are permanently subject to the violence of the state and individuals through their exclusion from regulated labor, systematic police violence, and other forms of discrimination. In words of border scholar Robert DeChaine, “the transgressive act of unauthorized border crossing produces a double exclusion: it renders migrant persons both legally and morally abject”.<sup>402</sup> The sculptures hence marked the fence as a gate between different ontological states: they were talismans accompanying migrants in their transition from being citizens of the Mexican state into another form of being human, that of the sub-ordinated un-authorized migrant in California.

Silvia Gruner's work situated the one hundred and twenty pre-Hispanic copies in the specificity of the U.S./Mexico border fence. Gruner's piece equally spoke to the social specificities of Colonia Libertad and to codes of the Mexican avant-garde. Inserting pre-Hispanic symbolism in contemporary art had been a recurrent gesture in Mexico since the Revolution, with most significance in the work of artists like Rufino Tamayo, Miguel Covarrubias, and Helen Escobedo (also in inSITE94 and discussed later on). Yet Gruner bridged as well with the rich history of Mexican feminist performance and action art since the 1960s, claiming the legacy of artists like Magali Lara, Maris Bustamante, Pola Weiss, and collectives such as La Revuelta. Her piece *La mitad del camino / The Middle of the Road* professed the relevance of a feminist art tradition characterized, according to Karen Cordero Reiman, by “the development of iconographic, material, and conceptual vehicles to express women's corporeal experience and subjectivity; experimentation with artistic strategies to counter patriarchal constructions of the female body [...]; critique of patriarchal relationships with nature and the nation [...]; the

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<sup>402</sup> D. Robert DeChaine, “Bordering the Civic Imaginary: Alienization, Fence Logic, and the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95 (2009): 43.

frequent recourse to series as a way to of advancing distinct narrations and modes of experiencing time and the body; [and] the creation and reactivation of archives with reference to the representation of women”.<sup>403</sup>

The liminal line that is the border fence marks other transmutations too. According to filmmaker and critic Jesse Lerner, Gruner's piece “completes a circuitous migration that corresponds to imperial claims on Latin America, first from the Old World, then from the Yankees”.<sup>404</sup> The one-hundred and twenty figures are replicas of a sculpture of Tlazolteotl of disputed authenticity that is housed today in Harvard's Dumbarton Oaks collection. Archaeological research carried out since the 1980s shows the use of modern stone carving techniques all around the statue. It also highlights strong aesthetic dissonances between it and other artifacts from pre-Columbian Mexican art, chiefly the figure's unique facial expression, the absence of dressing and ornaments, and its straight hair lines, dissimilar from other Aztec carving examples.<sup>405</sup> Scientific consensus today defends that the artifact was most likely produced in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century and that a Parisian dealer introduced it into the pre-Columbian artifacts market. What for decades had been upheld as a fine authentic representation of the Aztec goddess of motherhood and transitions, represents today a different sort of traffic. Dumbarton Oaks' Tlazolteotl specialist Jane MacLaren Walsh argues that museum objects are in fact documents of the processes of fabrication and circulation of specific interests and aesthetic sensibilities. In this case, the object that served as model for Gruner's one-hundred and twenty copies was itself a modern Western fabrication of an idealized 'pre-contact' Mexican past, shaped to fit the stylistic demands of turn of the century trans-national art collectors. If site-specific artworks included in inSITE94 claimed to display the borderlands' essential nature in

<sup>403</sup> Karen Cordero Reiman, “Mexico: Corporeal Apparitions / Beyond Appearances”, in Andrea Giunta, Cecilia Fajardo-Hill (eds.) *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985* (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2017). p. 271-272

<sup>404</sup> Lerner, Jesse. “Borderline Architecture.” *Cabinet*, no. 13 / Future (2004): 1–8.

<sup>405</sup> See, for example, Walsh, Jane Maclaren. “The Dumbarton Oaks Tlazolteotl: Looking Beneath the Surface.” *Journal de La Societe Des Americanistes* 94, no. 1 (2008): 7–43.

unique ways, how is 19<sup>th</sup> Century Tlazolteotl different from other art objects found in inSITE94, over a century after?

In order to answer this question I first need to show how *La mitad del camino / The Middle of the Road* also signaled inSITE as stage for the convergence of different aesthetic programs in the Mexican art scene of the 1990s. Staging this generational renewal was, for inSITE Director Michal Krichman, “a desired outcome”<sup>406</sup>. Like I explain in this chapter, in this period Mexico experienced a process of deep questioning of its state structure and ideology. A time of competing common senses, several generations of artists coexisted in the early 1990s Mexico City’s art scene, yet spoke in different aesthetic registers. On the mainstream scene were the ‘neo-Mexicanistas’, a group of mostly painters who came to the fore in the 1980s. Responding to them were, on one hand, a generation of mid-career artists attuned to the feminist and political neo-avant-gardes of the Mexican 1960s and 1970s. On the other, a much younger generation played with the aesthetic codes of a nascent global contemporary avant-garde in - only initially- marginal artist-run spaces.

### **The legacy of the Mexican modernist avant-garde.**

These three aesthetic tendencies responded, albeit differently, to the legacy of the Mexican modernist avant-garde, a genealogy that bred from the aesthetic developments that followed the Mexican Revolution and is most familiar through the work of Diego Rivera, Clemente Orozco, Jose Alfaro Siqueiros, Dr. Atl, among others. Art historians like David Craver and Harper Montgomery have described this tradition as essentially anti-colonial, democratic, and of transnational reach, blending urban and indigenous motives for emancipatory

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<sup>406</sup> From interview with Michael Krichman. San Diego, August 15, 2018.



purposes.<sup>407</sup> This modernism made claims to universality through the juxtaposition of pre-Hispanic and avant-garde elements.<sup>408</sup> Formally, they applied elements from Cubism, Neoclassicism, Expressionism, and even Italian Renaissance landscape painting and murals; thematically, however, they favored Mexico's indigenous culture and heroic narratives of post-independence nation-making. A tradition closely-bound to state making, Mexican modernism revisited European turn-of-the-century avant-gardes yet filtered them through the decolonial lens of the post-Revolutionary Mexican state.

Images and objects helped sustain the state. While epic murals brought the indigenous subject into the new state buildings, archaeological artifacts from pre-Hispanic cultures were gathered in the new spaces of national representation as ties between the new state and a mystified Aztec imperial past. Francisco Reyes Palma (1990) has called this process “the nationalization of the avant-garde”. To this state-bound aesthetic program joined wide production of images tied to workers unions and other civil society organizations. Foremost among these was print making, mostly in the form of political publications, but also as educational objects. With a focus on labor, pre-Hispanic Mexico, and its indigenous peoples, murals, monuments, and prints questioned the foundations of European modern aesthetics at the same time that the new nation questioned the foundations of post-Enlightenment political theory with the formation of the post-Revolutionary state.

Yet beginning in the 1960s with the rise of alternative scenes in Mexico City, a slow process of incorporation of international avant-garde codes affected the capital's art scene. This opening was possible by the emergence of private art galleries and new forms of public art sponsorship, chiefly via the Universidad Autónoma Nacional de México (UNAM). Further, a

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<sup>407</sup> See David Craver, *Art and Revolution in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) and Harper Montgomery, *The Mobility of Modernism: Art and Criticism in 1920s Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017)

<sup>408</sup> Debroise, Olivier. “Mexican Art on Display.” In *Effects of the Nation. Mexican Art in the Age of Globalization*, edited by Carl Good and John V. Waldron. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.

growing student movement that included artists expressed discontent with the institutions of the art world. This neo-avant-garde art scene galvanized around exhibition spaces such as Salón de Arte Independiente (1969, 1970, 1971), MUCA (1970s), and the emerging “grupos”, artist collectives who worked in immediate response to the specifics of urban life. To these trends contributed as well Mexico’s increasing involvement in the broader Latin American art scene. For instance, the city hosted international exhibitions such as the Bienal Interamericana (1958), an itinerant exhibition of drawing and prints which began in Mexico City, and the Ruta de la Amistad (1968), a festival of permanent public sculptures coincident with the 1968 Olympics. A big selection of artists from this generation showed their work in the X Biennial of Young Artists in Paris (1977).

One of the names growing in visibility in the 1960s and 1970s Mexico City art scene was that of sculptor and curator Helen Escobedo, whose work was present in the Ruta de la Amistad (1968) and then in InSITE94 twenty-six years after. Her sculptures, of monumental nature, have been characterized as “anti-realist” and “functionalist” by art historian Rita Eder,<sup>409</sup> and were deeply influenced by Bauhaus notions of integrative design through her collaborations with German architect Mathias Goeritz. ‘Integrative design’ was Walter Gropius’s approach for reaching what he called ‘total architecture’, a principle of balanced organicity between man and machine, where “individual variety, and a common denominator expressed by creating form symbols of human fellowship” would lead to better democratic societies.<sup>410</sup> In her monumental sculptures, Escobedo shared this interest in transforming urban life through the integration and subjugation of structures with their natural environment.

These ideas were still present in her piece for inSITE94, an installation of three wire boat-shaped structures with coconut-loaded catapults aiming north, right south of the fence, at the

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<sup>409</sup> Rita Eder, *Helen Escobedo* (Ciudad de Mexico: UNAM, 1982). p.16

<sup>410</sup> Walter Gropius, “Architecture at Harvard University”, in *Architectural Record*, March 1956

shore of Playas de Tijuana. The boats were named *El Topo* (the Mole), *El Sapo* (the Toad), and *El Pollo* (the Chicken). According to Sally Yard, the structures were symbolic attacks on the “barricade” that was the international border fence.<sup>411</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina remembers in his catalog essay how, in one of his visits, “someone had replaced the coconuts with stones”, stressing Escobedo’s symbolism, her “desperately Latin American war game”.<sup>412</sup>

Other name from Escobedo’s circles in Mexico City who was featured in inSITE94 was Felipe Ehrenbergh, artist and diplomat. Ehrenberg’s piece, *Curtain Call / Tercera Llamada*, was a double installation, placed at Santa Fe Depot (San Diego) and CECUT (Tijuana), of five clothes drying ropes from which hung a series of human-shaped figures, made out of white cotton and filled with pillow material. These forms, caught in the ropes, resembled humans caught jumping a fence. Escobedo’s and Ehrenberg’s presence in inSITE94 signified the exhibition’s acknowledgment of a Mexican neo-avant-garde that did not share the state affiliation of Mexican modernism, and was tuned to the European and Latin American politically-conscious neo-avant-gardes of the 1960s. By the mid 1990s, Escobedo had worked as a museum director in Mexico City for two decades, and Ehrenberg would be soon sent as cultural attaché of Mexico to Brazil. Although their inclusion no doubt testifies for the coexistence of different aesthetic programs at the time in Mexico City’s art scene, these names were at the time markers of Mexico’s art establishment, and hence probably proved the organization’s proximity to public cultural agencies of the Mexican state.

Escobedo, Ehrenberg, and Gruner passed the torch to a new generation of artists before international eyes. The site for this takeover was inSITE. Its architects: Gerardo Estrada (Director of INBA), Carmen Cuenca (Cultural Attaché of the Mexican Consulate in San Diego,

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<sup>411</sup> Sally Yard, “Tagged Turf in the Public Sphere”, in *inSITE94. A Binational Exhibition of installation and Site-Specific Art* (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 1995). p.50

<sup>412</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, “Una línea es un centro que tiene dos lados”, in *inSITE94. A Binational Exhibition of Installation and Site-Specific Art* (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 1995). p. 62

later inSITE co-Director), Walter Boesterly (Curator at INBA). In the next section I describe the broader conditions for this change.

### **Transformation of the Mexican cultural institutional landscape: a new generation**

An institutional change was imminent in late 1980s Mexico as the nation actively sought stronger international trade and cultural ties and welcomed the private sector into the field of culture. The end of what has been called the 'Mexican miracle' (a period of autocracy and sustained economic growth between 1940s-1960s) was a time of weakening of the single-party system and plummeting credibility of government institutions. State disapproval had been growing since the subsequent crises of the Tlatelolco massacre (1968) and the Mexico City earthquake (1985).<sup>413</sup> In response to the 1980s financial crisis, until the end of the century the Mexican state experienced a series of important market-oriented policy reforms, as an orthodox neoliberal agenda gained power among part of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional's representatives.<sup>414</sup> Aguilar Camín and Meyer identify a series of important changes during the de la Madrid and Salinas de Gortari administrations in the 1980s and early 1990s that affected the structure of the nation: "new forms of state interventionism in growing alignment with U.S. interests in the region, [...] growing integration of the Mexican economy with the U.S. economy", and the reinforcement of the presidency and state centralism.<sup>415</sup>

In the arts, rising private donations seeking tax deductions fueled an effervescent state-run network of museums and art centers, production grants, and distribution networks. This

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<sup>413</sup> Héctor Aguilar Camín; Meyer, Lorenzo, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History 1910-1989* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

<sup>414</sup> Mexico entered the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986, under the Presidency of Miguel de La Madrid. As the introduction to this chapter accounts for, in 1992 Mexico, Canada, and the United States signed the North American Free Trade Agreement. See María Eugenia Romero Sotelo, *Los orígenes del neoliberalismo en México* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2016)

<sup>415</sup> See Daniel Montero Fayad, *El cubo de Rubik, arte mexicano en los años 90* (México: Fundación JUMEX, 2013)

increase in public patronage and exhibition venues mirrored the nascent private arts sector in the late 1990s on.<sup>416</sup> This institutional reform was triggered by the state's belief in the core role that institutions could play in the reinforcement of a renewed centralist narrative of modernization. The new discourse comprised wide-spread market oriented reforms result of GATT and NAFTA, was held up by the nascent economic elites of the nation's economic centers (Mexico City, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Tijuana), and had a direct impact on the sphere of culture with the creation of new public and private ventures.<sup>417</sup> Key new organizations of the time were CONACULTA (National Council for Culture and Arts, established in 1988), governing over national public art institutions such as museums, libraries, and publishers, and FONCA (National Fund for Culture and Arts, created in 1989), a private-public partnership to support, promote, and disseminate Mexican art production and the nation's heritage.<sup>418</sup> Art historian Daniel Montero argues that the Mexican private sector saw a double potential for investing in culture: private investors gained symbolic capital while simultaneously benefiting from new tax exemption stimuli.<sup>419</sup>

What were the direct impacts of these reforms in the actual work of Mexican artists? For Montero, with these policy transformations came as well a change in the understanding of what constituted 'culture': from a national culture understood as national identity, to culture understood as the production of the cultural industries instead.<sup>420</sup> While I agree that this was a

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<sup>416</sup> See, for example, Héctor Antonio Sánchez, "SEMEFO: la hermosura de cuanto es mortal", *Casa del Tiempo V* (2012), p. 57.

<sup>417</sup> Yudice, George (2003). *The Expediency of Culture: Use of Culture in the Global Era*. Durham: Duke University Press.

<sup>418</sup> A CONACULTA report from 1994 describes FONCA as a "financial mechanism where the State, the private sector, and the art community voluntarily come together [moved] by, on one hand, their support to artistic freedom, and, on the other, the preservation and growth of [our] cultural heritage. [...] FONCA received a first sum of 5,000,000 new pesos from the Federal Government, amount to which were added tax deductible contributions from the private sector". In *Memoria, 1988-1994*, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Dirección General de Publicaciones, México, 1994. p. 159.

<sup>419</sup> Daniel Montero, *El cubo de Rubik, arte mexicano en los años 90* (México: Fundación JUMEX de Arte Contemporáneo, 2013)

<sup>420</sup> Daniel Montero, *El cubo de Rubik, arte mexicano en los años 90* (México: Fundación JUMEX de Arte Contemporáneo, 2013), p. 81

general trend in the Mexican art world of the 1990s, the situation is more complex. The new market logic fostering cultural production plus INBA's new internationalist mission allowed younger artists to access new global contemporary art trends of the time. This changed the relationship between 'high' and 'low' culture, and shifted avant-garde art's focus from a previously dominant posture of state criticism (1980s) outwards, towards the conversations taking place in the nascent global contemporary art industry. Although in different ways, these changes are obvious in the work of artists who lived that institutional transition like Teresa Margolles, Rubén Ortiz Torres, or Yoshua Okón, for example. However, far from distancing contemporary art from the notion of 'national identity', 1990s rising partnerships between private and public arts sponsorship opened new avenues for representing Mexico's new state project abroad via the visual arts. These new avenues ultimately secured the presence of Mexican artists in the global contemporary art industry in consolidation, accessing representation venues such as the Venice Biennale in 2009.<sup>421</sup> InSITE strongly benefitted from public and private internationalist promotion efforts, especially for the 1994 and 1997 iterations, years when Gerardo Estrada was President of INBA.<sup>422</sup>

Parallel to the strengthening of the official art institutional sector Mexico City saw the effervescence of a rich network of alternative artist-run spaces, such as Temístocles 44, La Panadería, Curare, and La Quiñonera. In them, artists born in the late 1960s and 1970s exhibited work mainly produced with subsidies from FONCA, as they gained visibility and ultimately lived what Magalí Arriola describes as a move from alternative scenes to the institution.<sup>423</sup> This alternative scene was characterized by a tight-knit network of young artists, critics, and curators who constituted their own audience. The combination of, on one hand,

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<sup>421</sup> See Paloma Checa-Gismero, "Aesthetic concessions in the work of Teresa Margolles". (forthcoming)

<sup>422</sup> From interview with Michael Krichman. San Diego, August 15, 2018.

<sup>423</sup> Magalí Arriola, "¿A qué le tiras cuando curas mexicano?", in *Los museos de cara al futuro* (British Council; CONACULTA: Mexico, 2003)

reliance on public FONCA funding for production and, on the other, wider access to international spaces of circulation due to INBA's efforts, allowed these younger practitioners to produce work not bound to the demands of the Mexican art market yet increasingly responding to international art market trends. This generation constituted a new Mexican avant-garde that featured a high degree of experimentality and playfulness in their works, and soon became staple participants in the global contemporary art world in consolidation.

inSITE94 and inSITE97 commissioned projects to many artists from this younger generation bred in Mexico City's alternative scene. While most of them were Mexican, like Abraham Cruzvillegas, Sofía Táboas, Diego Gutiérrez Coppe, José Miguel González Casanova, Eloy Tarcisio, Gabriela López Portillo (inSITE94), Rubén Ortiz Torres, Yolanda Gutiérrez, Eduardo Abaroa, and Miguel Calderón (inSITE97), two Mexico City-based foreign names made it in the 1997 roster: Belgian artist Francis Alÿs, and British artist Melanie Smith. The inclusion of this younger generation was facilitated by Kathleen Stoughton, Director at the time of the Mesa College gallery, and Mexican artist Silvia Gruner.<sup>424</sup> The first, interested in showing art by young Mexican artists for inSITE94, contacted Gruner, who introduced her and Michael Krichman to the group who was at the time working at Temístocles 44, an independent artist-run space in Mexico City. According to Krichman, Gruner served as an intermediary - personally and aesthetically-, between an older generation, represented in inSITE94 by Helen Escobedo and Felipe Ehrenberg, and the younger group from Temístocles 44.<sup>425</sup> Gruner's *La mitad del camino / The Middle of the Road*, again, marked the generational renewal of the Mexican avant-garde.

As I mention in this chapter, while the older generation grew from 1960s-1970s political disenchantment with the Mexican state, this younger group for most part avoided references to

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<sup>424</sup> Merry Mac Masters, "Fuerte participación mexicana en inSITE94", in *El Nacional*, March 16, 1994

<sup>425</sup> From interview with Michael Krichman. San Diego, August 15, 2018.

politics and participated of the broader nihilism characteristic of the global-neo-avant-gardes of the decade. Sofía Táboa's piece *Double Take / Doble turno*, blocked a hallway inside Tijuana's Casa de la Cultura Municipal. Four curtains of blue plastic beads traced the projection of a sky-light on the hallway's ceiling perpendicularly to the floor. Cuauhtémoc Medina writes in the catalog that Táboas's architectural intervention, rendering visible sunlight window projection, meant to highlight the predominance of the art exhibition as a medium over its often overlooked artworks – the messages. For him, Táboas's use of beads from hair-bands was an indirect reference to woman bodies through their hair. Medina's watered-down feminist reading is no doubt forced, yet it signs to a gesture common in the rhetoric of this curator –who was very important in the Mexican alternative scene of the time. His analysis places Táboas's work in the genealogy of minimalist sculpture, in direct reference to the American neo-avant-gardes of the 1960s. Táboas's piece could very well make us think of one of Donald Judd's cubes or, even, of James Turrell's light pieces.

Another case that helps evidence this embrace is Eloy Tarcisio's work for inSITE94, *The Line / La línea*. Placed in three different locations – Playas de Tijuana, CECUT, and Santa Fe Depot-, Tarcisio brought to the region a series of long copper pipes, cut longitudinally showing seeds. To complement, a wood vertical pole, with *nopales* branches nailed to it. In their use of raw natural materials and rudimentary building solutions, these objects are a direct reference to arte povera and minimalism.

European artists Melanie Smith's and Francis Alÿs's presence in inSITE97 showed Mexico City's increasing importance in the international art scene. Although they both moved to Mexico City before the capital gained its present visibility, Smith –British- and Alÿs –Belgian- were very active within the younger generation of Mexican artists bred in alternativity and



served as links between them and young European artists who were, as well, tuned to the global neo-avant-garde in formation (see Chapter 4).

Melanie Smith's piece *The Tourist' Guide to San Diego and Tijuana / La guía turística de San Diego y Tijuana* was an institutional critique project commenting on the region's self-branding as a tourist destination. Her piece comprised a tourist guide, a series of post cards, posters, leaflets, t-shirts, and other publicity materials. A storefront on Fifth Avenue in Downtown San Diego served as tourist office for her project, where she stayed for most of the time, educating tourists and passersby about the touristic values of the region. In the guide book, Smith instructs on how to make a *margarita* cocktail, on why is Horton Plaza "the Disneyland of shopping", and why Mission Beach is "the ideal place for the family".

*The Tourist' Guide to San Diego and Tijuana / La guía turística de San Diego y Tijuana* hoped to water-down the aura of exclusivity and luxury that most often accompanies tourism publicity material in the region. Instead, it documented not-staged scenes of beach life and other tourism photography tropes. It was, itself, an enactment of the long history of fictionalizing San Diego, except this time lacking of tourism promotional materials' beautification effect. The piece worked in awareness of her role in the art tourism industry, an escalating phenomenon parallel to the rise of global contemporary art biennials.<sup>426</sup> During an interview, Smith, who was well aware of her position in the industry, declared her piece to be purposeless.<sup>427</sup> Was it really purposeless? For normative tourism standards, yes. It probably did not help increase the number of beach tourists to the region. But like others around it, Smith's project was instrumental in the broader operation of making the San Diego-Tijuana region a

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<sup>426</sup> See Chapter 1 for an analytical framework on the rise of biennial tourism in the 1990s. Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 provide insights on how art was put in the service of re-imagining La Habana and Rotterdam in the same period. For a more detailed analysis of how site-specific and socially engaged art intertwine with the tourism industry in recent iterations of the Bienal de La Habana, see Paloma Checa-Gismero, "Global contemporary art tourism: engaging with Cuban authenticity through the Bienal de La Habana", in *Tourism and Development journal*, vol. 15, issue 3 (2017)

<sup>427</sup> In conversation with Melanie Smith. Mexico City, August 27, 2016.

required stop in the global biennial tourism scene. Whether the venture ultimately failed or not doesn't matter here.

Francis Alys's piece showed a different facet of global art tourism, one experienced by the increasingly omnipresent contemporary artist. A permanent face in mid to late 1990s global art biennials, Alys represents well what has come to be known as the 'parachute artist'. This figure is characterized by carrying out projects in contexts that they are unfamiliar with. Parachute artists move in for a limited amount of time, produce their project, and then leave to the next art biennial. For inSITE97 Alys performed *The Loop / La vuelta*, a tour around the world departing from Tijuana and arriving in San Diego five weeks later. During the different stops, in Mexico City, Lima, Australia, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Canada, and the U.S., Alys sent postcards to inSITE97 curator Olivier Debrouse, in Mexico City.<sup>428</sup>

Alys had already explored the parallels between contemporary artists and tourists in his work. A Belgian settled in Mexico City, his early works were performative efforts that mimicked social practices already taking place in the city. For instance, in *Turista (Tourist, 1994)* Alys joined a group of daily laborers in Mexico City Zócalo square. Like them, he advertised his profession on a handwritten cardboard sign. "Electrician", "Plumber", and "Painter" accompanied his sign "Tourist". A color photograph documenting the action shows Alys, wearing a white cotton shirt, loose caqui pants, and a light brown jacket, casually smoking leaning against the fence around Mexico's Cathedral, chatting with the man offering his services as a painter.<sup>429</sup> Regarding this work, Alys has stated: "I was denouncing but also testing my own status as a foreigner, a *gringo*. 'How far can I belong to this place? How much can I judge it? Am I a participant or just an observer? By offering my services as a tourist in the middle of a line

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<sup>428</sup> The Loop/La Vuelta took place between June 1st and July 5th, 1997, three months before the opening of inSITE97.

<sup>429</sup> A caption for this image reads: "On 10 March 1994 I went to the Zocalo and stood in the middle of a line of carpenters, plumbers and house painters, offering my services as a tourist". Cuauhtémoc Medina, Russell Ferguson, Jean Fisher, Francis Alys (London: Phaidon, 2007). p. 10

of carpenters and plumbers I was oscillating between leisure and work, between contemplation and interference".<sup>430</sup> Alys's distinction was a byproduct of leveraging his experience of urban life against that of daily laborers. The status of his work as 'art', and its ultimate circulation in the enrichment economy, depended upon solid narrative manouvres by him and affiliated curators.

Although similar questions seem to have guided Alys's intervention in the US/Mexico borderlands for inSITE97,<sup>431</sup> its magnitude transcended the reproduction of local quotidian practices of labor and displacement, and proposed instead a magnified gesture that drew attention to his privileged status as a contemporary artist. The project, *The Loop / La vuelta*, was a five week long extended performance that aligned with his 'walking pieces', walking tours of Mexico City in which he sought to shed light on a specific aspect of life in the city.<sup>432</sup> Further, like other global contemporary artworks of the time, in the gallery the piece showed clear elements from the neo-avant-gardes. In particular, the project relied on Conceptual art's use of standardized forms of objective information such as documentation of his travels and hotel stays. Receipts, boarding passes, journal entries, photographs, collected ephemera were all displayed inside a file-box at the Centro Cultural Tijuana, open to audience perusal.

*The Loop / La vuelta* also continues Alys's interest in proposing actions that showed resignation to present conditions of life. In his piece *Song for Lupita* (1998), he would explore this attitude of "doing but without doing, the not doing but doing", that he saw deeply entrenched in Mexican culture.<sup>433</sup> The purposelessness and self-referentiality of these actions are constants in Alys's career, and have to do with his beliefs about the societal function of the artist. The artist is, according to him, subject to the societal expectation of "poetic license", in which artists "issue a statement without a demonstration". What is the extent and purpose of poetic license, for

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<sup>430</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, Russell Ferguson, Jean Fisher, Francis Alys (London: Phaidon, 2007). p. 11

<sup>431</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, Russell Ferguson, Jean Fisher, Francis Alys (London: Phaidon, 2007). p. 45

<sup>432</sup> Name and describe three.

<sup>433</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, Russell Ferguson, Jean Fisher, Francis Alys (London: Phaidon, 2007). p. 15

Alys? In his words: “[...] is it more about creating a sensation of meaninglessness, one that shows the absurdity of the situation?”.<sup>434</sup>

While Francis Alys claimed that the goal of his project was to be subject to the same constraints that many Tijuana residents were –to not physically cross the international border–, his enactment of the privileged geographical mobility of biennial artists leaves us far from seeing his piece as neither a critical commentary on migration policies nor a mere denunciation of the “painful and uninteresting” experience of the traveling contemporary artist, as curator Olivier Debrouse remarked in the inSITE97 catalog. Alys’s cynicism, praised by Debrouse, is the broader cynicism of a new social scene in configuration: biennial tourism was indicator of a broader spaces of circulation for artworks, professionals, and discourses detached from the lived experience of site.

Alys’s belief in the exceptionality of the artist is yet another iteration of avant-garde art’s self-presentation as an autonomous field of cultural production. If, like he says, “poetic license functions as a hiatus in the atrophy of a social, political, military or economic crisis”, or that poetic acts “provoke a moment of suspension of meaning, a brief sensation of senselessness”,<sup>435</sup> disruptions that allow spectators to grasp the absurdity of the social order, they one should wonder: what best stage for such an exclusive diversion than a contemporary art biennial?

## **Conclusion.**

In this chapter I argue that bi-national cultural collaboration via inSITE materialized Tijuana and San Diego elites’ beliefs in free market as a conciliatory space, thus providing

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<sup>434</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, Russell Ferguson, Jean Fisher, Francis Alys (London: Phaidon, 2007). p. 39

<sup>435</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, Russell Ferguson, Jean Fisher, Francis Alys (London: Phaidon, 2007). p. 40

symbolic capital to the controversial North American Free Trade Agreement (1994) and imagining the region as a space of spontaneous public collaboration between peoples through the use of site-specific and community-based art. I show how, despite their conciliatory mission, InSITE organizers failed to acknowledge the processes of trans-border collaboration and trans-border life already at place in the region. InSITE sought to change the image of the US/Mexico borderlands, from a zone of conflict between states to an area of supranational understanding mediated by culture. In order to do so, InSITE imported aesthetic codes from Mexico City and the Euro-American neo-avant-gardes that helped re-imagine the region. A result of this import was the loss of visibility and contemporaneity of endemic aesthetic languages such as 'Chicano art' and 'Border art'. An already contested scenery for the symbolic deployment of national sovereignty, the US/Mexico borderlands gained visibility in the global contemporary art world framed via the linguistic conventions of 'global contemporary art'. InSITE mirrored the ambitions of other elite-sponsored border-spanning ventures that hoped to mediate between different social and political agents at both sides of the international border. In addition, this chapter shows how InSITE worked as a space for the international validation of artists from the Mexican alternative art scene, as they incorporated the aesthetic codes of the 'global neo-avant-garde' into their practice. It also shows the extent of curators' historiographical power as their narratives of trans-border friendship and celebration helped shape an international perception of the region that highly differs from the everyday experience of state violence lived by most border residents.

In closing, the tensions between local experience and internationally-oriented ideations are not exclusive of the Tijuana/San Diego region. Like in Havana and Rotterdam, the implementation of global designs in different local spaces is facilitated by members of the local elites who are interested in advancing foreign agendas at the local level. Thus, InSITE, like

other global art biennials, serviced the translation of neoliberal cosmopolitans beliefs in the deregulation of the economy into the historically contested space of the US/Mexico borderlands. Culture, here again, helped organize consent about the new regulatory framework among local elites and, most importantly, abroad.

## CHAPTER 4. MANIFESTA: PAN-EUROPEAN CONCILIATION AND THE RECOGNITION OF THE LOCAL.

"I wondered how this was all going to take place and what role would be reserved for the artists' community of Rotterdam. Rotterdam has its own history of art events. [...] Was Manifesta 1 to become another traveling art circus, another quickie? [...] Artists have created their own basis in this city by means of exhibitions, exchanges, discussions and collaborative efforts in creating and maintaining spaces to work and think. How should this existing infrastructure relate to Manifesta 1? Would it be possible to give meaning to the idea of being the first host-city for Manifesta beyond merely satisfying the basic need for space and, of course, money? [...] What is the position of the local host when receiving an international platform? How can the international group of artists participating in Manifesta 1 be connected with their Rotterdam colleagues?"<sup>436</sup>

Rotterdam artists initiative NESTWORK, July 1996.

On Thursday, January 27 of 1994, thirty-one representatives of European national cultural agencies gathered in the headquarters of the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst (the Netherlands Office for Fine Arts) in The Hague to discuss the European Art Manifestation, a newly founded exhibition of young European artists planned to itinerate to a different European city every two years. At the end of the gathering, conveners signed a petition expressing their "firm conviction that the Ministers of Culture belonging to the European Union should seriously consider lending structural support to the European Art Manifestation".<sup>437</sup> Among those attending

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<sup>436</sup> "A NESTWORK report from Manifesta 1", in NESTWORK activities blueprint during Manifesta 1, Rotterdam 1996. Edited by artists Jeanne van Heeswijk. Originally published in *Lokaal Europa* magazine.

<sup>437</sup> "Petition", petition and signature sheet. Foundation European Art Manifestation, The Hague, Netherlands, January 27, 1994.

were directors of art institutions,<sup>438</sup> representatives of national and city governments,<sup>439</sup> and directors of a series of SOROS Centers for Contemporary Arts in Eastern European capitals.<sup>440</sup> Hoping to provide “international exposure to aspiring European artists” organizers described the platform as a pioneer in the tracing of new channels of cultural cooperation between Western and Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The founders of the European Art Manifestation (henceforth EAM) echoed celebratory promises of political proximity and

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<sup>438</sup> Directors of art institutions were: Katalin Keserü, Director of Kunsthalle Budapest, Mucsarnok (Hungary); Anda Rottenberg, Director of the National Gallery of Contemporary Art, Zacheta (Poland); Henry Meyric Hughes, Director of Exhibitions at the Hayward Gallery, The South Bank Centre, London (United Kingdom); and Katalin Néray, Director of the Ludwig Museum in Budapest (Hungary). Rosella Siligato, Deputy Director of the Palazzo dell' Esposizioni de Roma (Italy) had confirmed attendance but was not at the meeting.

<sup>439</sup> Government representatives at the meeting were: Ebe Nomberg, Counselor in the Department of Arts and Culture, Ministry of Culture and Education (Estonia); Markku Valkoonen, Director of Frame, Finnish Fund for Art Exchange (Finland); A. Kontis, Cultural Attache in the Greek Embassy at The Hague (Greece); Thomas Meyerzu Schlochteren, Counselor of Visual Arts at the Rotterdamse Kunststichting (Rotterdam, Netherlands); Robert Haas, Director of the RBK, the Netherlands Office for Fine Arts (Netherlands); Boris Danailov, Viceminister of Culture (Bulgaria); Jan Verlinden, Director of the Art and Museums Department, Ministry of Culture of Flanders (Belgium); Jane Balsgaard, Painter and sculptor from the Danish ministry of Culture (Denmark); René Block, Director of Exhibition Exchange, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Germany); Martha Deneltova, Arts Officer, Ministry of Culture (Republic of Slovakia); Barbara Berce, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Culture (Slovenia); Olaf Fekkes, Director of the Iceland Gallery, Ministry of Culture (Iceland); Svenrobert Lundquist, Director of NUNSKU, Swedish National Commission for Art Exchange Abroad (Sweden); Mikael Adsenius, Secretary of the board, NUNSKU, Swedish National Commission for Art Exchange Abroad (Sweden); Gheorghe Vida, Director of the Visual Arts department, Ministry of Culture (Romania); Sever Mesca, Director of the Department of International Cultural Dialogue (Romania); Leonid Bajanov, Director of Fine Arts department, Ministry of Culture (Russian Federation); Sarah Finlay, Visual Arts Officer, The Arts Council (Ireland); Barbara Tosi, Cultural Attache, Italian Embassy in The Hague (Italy); Ivan Saric, Deputy Minister of Culture (Croatia); Gundega Cébere, Art Arviser to the ministry of Culture (Latvia); Svein Christiansen, Director of the Norwegian Commission for Visual Arts (Norway); Irina Kourolenko, Chief Specialist, Ministry of Culture (Ukraine); Victor Belein, Art Advisor, Secretaria de Estado da Cultura (Portugal). Those who had confirmed attendance but were not at the meeting were: Hubert Wurth, Ambassador of the Gran Duchy of Luxembourg in The Hague (Luxembourg); Joseph Secky, Director of the Visual Arts department, Bundesministerium für Unterreich und Kunst (Austria); M. J. Alonso, Cultural Counselor of the Consulate, Spanish Embassy in The Hague (Spain); Peter Schreiber, Counselor to the Ministry of welfare, Health, and Culture (Netherlands); Eleonora Stehower, Cultural Attache to the Dutch Embassy in Rome (Netherlands); and Y. Martial, Cultural Attache of the Embassy of the French Republic in The Hague (France).

<sup>440</sup> As part of the philanthropic interventions of the SOROS Foundation, a series of SOROS Foundation Fine Arts documentation and exhibition centers opened in the capitals of Soviet republics in the 1980s and 1990s. The first one opened in Budapest, birthplace of investor George Soros, with the goal of “support[ing] modern Hungarian culture which was banned or at least forced into the background by official cultural policies; in essence, [of] support[ing] those Hungarian artists in ‘counter-culture’ circles”. With the advising of prominent American and British curators such as J. Carter Brown (Director of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C.), Thomas Messer (Director of the Guggenheim Museum, N.Y.C.), and Michael Compton (Director of Exhibitions, Tate Gallery, London), the center in Budapest sought to promote “avant-garde spirited art through scholarships, purchases, the organization of exhibitions and the publication of catalogs”. Other centers followed: SCCA Zagreb (1993), SCCA Ljubljana (1993), SCCA Sarajevo (1996), SCCA Skopje (1994). Source for footnote quotations: SOROS Centers for Contemporary Art Network, <http://www.c3.hu/scca/> last consulted on January 10, 2018 For a thorough study of the role of SOROS Centers for Contemporary Art in the art scenes of Eastern European nations see, for example, Izabel Galliera, *Socially Engaged Art After Socialism. Art and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (London, New York: Taurus, 2017)



European unification, and believed that renewed cooperation in contemporary art between Western and Eastern Europe would not just strengthen programs of pan-European cultural cooperation, but that it would also benefit the overall development of the “international dialogue regarding contemporary art”. They defended the need to secure such strengthening by establishing permanent organizations like EAM.<sup>441</sup> This two-day gathering in The Hague advertised to participants a new space of legitimization for a younger generation of artists to celebrate “European talent”, “quality”, and “innovation”, promising to “revitalize the artistic establishment” of the continent.<sup>442</sup> The final petition, signed by representatives of 21 nations attending the meeting,<sup>443</sup> has to this day proved to be an extremely successful endorsement for financial support requests to public and private funding agencies. Such an ambitious avant-garde operation was set, from the beginning, to make up the new face of young European art, opening up a space for the ultimate culmination of national art scenes that had been historically galvanized around different avant-garde genealogies.

This was a big challenge. What kind of exhibition would equally welcome artworks as diverse as the immersive chamber *Datacorridor* by Bucharest art group subREAL and the pop painting diptych *EVERYTHING IS WRONG* by Danish painter Henrik Plenge Jakobsen? *Datacorridor* was part of the *Art History Archives*, a longer project by Bucharest collective subREAL. At the time, the collective was formed by Călin Dan, Iosif Király, and Dan Mihălțianu, two artists and one art historian whose art practice, since 1989, aimed to criticize wide-held myths about Romanian society such as backwardness, and often dealt with them ironically with the legacy of Count Dracula as a media character. For *Datacorridor*, subREAL covered walls and ceiling of one gallery in the Rotterdam Kunsthal with photographic reproductions of

<sup>441</sup> “The European Art Manifestation”, brochure. Foundation European Art Manifestation, The Hague, Netherlands, January 27, 1994.

<sup>442</sup> “The European Art Manifestation”, brochure. Foundation European Art Manifestation, The Hague, Netherlands, January 27, 1994.

<sup>443</sup> National representatives, as mentioned in footnote 3, came from within the European Union and on its East-bound projected growth direction.

artworks from eighteen crates discarded after the dissolution of state-controlled arts journal *Arta*.<sup>444</sup> This publication had been the official venue to represent art production in Romania between 1953 and 1990, and was directed by the Romanian Union of Fine Artists. Covering the Kunsthall's white walls with hundreds of reproductions of official Romanian aesthetics, subREAL highlighted the ideological nature of museum exhibition standards and underlined the nature of exhibition making as a medium. Further, subREAL also pointed to the all-encompassing presence of official representations of nation-ness enveloping museum audiences at all times.

On the other hand, Danish painter Henrik Plenge Jakobsen's piece, EVERYTHING IS WRONG, drew from the Western modernist painting tradition. Plenge Jakobsen's was a dyptic of two murals facing each other inside a white-washed gallery on the top floor of Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art. Two 4m x 4 m "self-contained"<sup>445</sup> circular targets, painted bright primary colors, with a phrase written across them: "EVERYTHING IS WRONG". Plenge Jakobsen characterized the piece as a "civilization critique", a "protest" against planet-wide environmental damage.<sup>446</sup> He described it as a "sample piece based on two appropriations: [American modernist painter] Kenneth Noland and [New York electronic musician] Mobi".<sup>447</sup> Noland's iconic paintings frequently feature concentric circular targets in primary colors. Mobi's 1995 album of the same name was an extremely popular tune in the electronic rave scene of the mid-1990s. The cynicism of this piece, celebratory of rave euphoria yet denunciatory of environmental crisis, was for Plenge Jakobsen a sign of the Euro-optimism of the time, "a very positive period [...] after the fall of the Wall".<sup>448</sup> In our conversation Plenge Jakobsen admitted to only having spent two or three days in Rotterdam because Manifesta staff painted the murals following his instructions from Paris and he was too busy at the time to stay longer.

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<sup>444</sup> The piece had originally been installed in Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, where subREAL were artists in residence for the year 1995-1996. It then travelled to several other art venues in Europe.

<sup>445</sup> From my conversation with Henrik Plenge Jakobsen, March 21, 2018.

<sup>446</sup> From my conversation with Henrik Plenge Jakobsen, March 21, 2018.

<sup>447</sup> From my conversation with Henrik Plenge Jakobsen, March 21, 2018.

<sup>448</sup> From my conversation with Henrik Plenge Jakobsen, March 21, 2018.

Manifesta, as the EAM has come to be known, had its first iteration between June 19 and August 9, 1996, in Rotterdam. It is still celebrated every two years and itinerates around different European cities who bid to host the exhibition. The project has proved successful in contributing to the formation of a European contemporary art circuit since the mid-1990s, and is now seen by most young contemporary art practitioners in the continent as a natural step towards professionalization.<sup>449</sup> The exhibition has also been a useful regional re-branding tool, as the geography of production sectors within the European Union has changed since the 1980s.<sup>450</sup> However, its cooperation with municipal governments and private capital has provoked repeated responses from local art communities, who often criticize the organization for being complicit in processes of gentrification and for failing to denounce political injustice.<sup>451</sup> The next Manifesta, for example, is scheduled for the summer of 2018 in Palermo, Italy, and hopes to work with city agencies to help erase the image of “mafia hub” that Palermo holds in the international imagination, aiding in its portrayal as a Mediterranean tourism destination instead.<sup>452</sup>

This chapter studies the early days of the EAM and its first iteration in the Dutch city of Rotterdam in 1996.<sup>453</sup> In it, I show why the organization’s ambitions to root a new supra-national European identity in the specificity of Rotterdam failed to acknowledge the interests of the local cultural scene. Instead, Manifesta’s goal was only successful after the organization incorporated

<sup>449</sup> As young artists, myself and my immediate group of fellow practitioners were featured in Manifesta 8, 2010, held in Murcia, Spain.

<sup>450</sup> Need explanatory note.

<sup>451</sup> For instance, Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg (Russia), provoked wide-spread protests in the local and international art community for its failure to denounce Vladimir Putin’s annexation of Crimea in 2012, as well as Putin’s and St. Petersburg’s major Vitaly Milonov’s anti-LGBTQ legislation. In response to criticisms, Manifesta founder and director, Hedwig Fijen, stated that “that Manifesta has historically ‘chosen to operate within contested areas’ and ‘the organization often finds itself in a place of political non-alignment’.” Cited in Sergey Gustiv, “Manifesta 10: A Biennial in Question”, in *Art21 Magazine*, May 19, 2014. <http://magazine.art21.org/2014/05/19/manifesta-10-a-biennial-in-question/>

<sup>452</sup> This quote is from a presentation by Marieke van Hal, Head of Research at the Manifesta Foundation, in the context of Biennials & Guest Work, a work group on the future of biennial curating, part of two-day conference Humans of the Institution celebrated during Amsterdam Art Weekend 2017. November, 27, 2017.

<sup>453</sup> Originally Manifesta was scheduled to take place at the end of 1994 and beginning of 1995 at the Kunsthalle Rotterdam. Later, organizers moved it to April – June 1996. It finally happened in the summer of 1996 in several venues in the same city.

in its program forms of hospitality designed by local artists to welcome foreign artists into the city. Although these designs grew from the local art scene's protests against Manifesta's blindness, they were ultimately motivated by the search for empathy with other fellow artists. I argue that Manifesta's ultimate integration of these practices into its exhibition form since then speaks of art biennials' more general trend of coopting of local social processes so as to strengthen their organizational efficiency.

Following, I discuss the EAM's organizational structure and its initial goals, while analyzing the different forms of cooperation with government agencies (at the local, national, and European level) and the private sector. Next, I scrutinize the forms of curatorial labor at play in the design, preparation, and execution of this first iteration. Further, this chapter will elaborate on the responses to Manifesta by Rotterdam's local art scene, with special attention to two particular projects developed by local artists in which forms of hospitality and reciprocity opened spaces of mutual recognition between the foreign artists and local practitioners. In my analysis I claim that curatorial efforts to promote the conciliation of historical European conflicts through contemporary art were based on an understanding of the exhibition space as a form of public sphere that, despite the organization's resources, failed to provide equal access to every participating member. In coherence with the discussions in Chapter 1, I further argue that Manifesta only worked as a technology of authenticity on the local level thanks to ad hoc responses by the local art community to the exhibition. Chapter 5 of this dissertation addresses the present state of Manifesta, looking into the organization's current future goals and its 2018 iteration in Palermo (Italy).

## Section 1: Curating a new Europe.

*If we had to do it all again, I would start with culture.*<sup>454</sup>

### **“Unity in diversity”. The Treaty of Maastricht and a Shared European Cultural Policy**

Two months before the January meeting described above, a more intimate gathering took place in the Netherlands Office for Fine Arts in The Hague. In it, Dutch art historian and Project Manager of the EAM Foundation Hedwig Fijen convened those who would become the organization's advisory board: René Block, Director of the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Stuttgart), Henry Meyric Hughes, Director of the South Bank Centre (London), Svenrobert Lundquist, Director of NUNSKU (Stockholm), Michelle Paris, Cultural Attaché of the French Embassy in The Hague, and Robert R. de Haas and Els Barents, Director and Consultant of the Netherlands Office of Fine Arts. In this meeting, the group set the grounds for what would later be Manifesta. They agreed that the exhibition would “prioritize significance of the works presented over the nationality of artists”. The group decided that artworks would be selected because of their innovative character. In addition, EAM would begin to seek active co-operation from cultural institutions of participating countries, as well as of the European Commission (henceforth EC). At the beginning, participation would be limited to a smaller group of countries, but would broaden as time passed and financial support increased. Regarding location, conveners agreed that the first exhibition be held at Rotterdam, and later moved to different cities potentially coinciding with the European Cultural Capital program so as to potentially increase resource availability. Finally, to complete over the Winter holidays the board had two

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<sup>454</sup> Reportedly said by Joan Monnet, pragmatist realist diplomat and one of the architects of the European Coal and Steel Community, predecessor for the European Economic Community. Richards, Gregory. *Cultural Tourism in Europe*. Wallingford: CAB International, 1996.

tasks: first, they would nominate a new advisory board member from Eastern Europe, mirroring European expansion plans; second, and very importantly, they were to make use of their personal networks to “activate lobbyists in Brussels” and secure a presentation at the next semi-annual meeting of the Cultural Committee of the European Commission in Brussels to increase their likelihood of funding.<sup>455</sup>

As we read from the minutes of these two meetings, the EAM was from the beginning a top-down operation launched by established culture agents and politicians. For the exhibition to happen, co-operation between both groups needed to occur at the local, national, and supranational level. In its implementation in the particular context of Rotterdam, Manifesta worked with local artists and curators in manners not anticipated in the design stages, in response to bottom-up responses to its arrival to the city. As this section shows, EAM was conceived in a climate of renewed belief in the power of culture and the arts in aiding the transition from an economically driven European Economic Community towards a politically unified European Union (henceforth EU), following cultural action guidelines of the Treaty of Maastricht (1992).

The Treaty on European Union (commonly known as the Treaty of Maastricht) was signed on February 7, 1992. This political agreement advanced the process of European integration and created the European Union. It set “firm bases for the construction of the future Europe” and sought to “deepen the solidarity between [European] peoples while respecting their history, their culture and their traditions”.<sup>456</sup> In this context, Article 128 of the Treaty is the first explicit legislation acknowledging the instrumentality of culture in the pan-European political

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<sup>455</sup> From “Minutes of the Meeting Concerning THE EUROPEAN ART MANIFESTATION”, 8 November 1993, The Netherlands Office for Fine Arts, The Hague.

<sup>456</sup> *Treaty on European Union*, February 7, 1992. Luxemburg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. p. 3

project,<sup>457</sup> as there existed no previous legislation on the matter. The aim of this new cultural policy was to consolidate the UE as a political union “celebrating diversity and promoting dialogue between national cultures”.<sup>458</sup> The policy abandoned the former economic logic framing all cultural action during the European Economic Community period, and would now sponsor programs that were legitimized strictly by their ‘cultural value’. While it is impossible to know what did authorities exactly understand as ‘cultural value’, the text seems to use the term pointing to an intrinsic quality of artistic and cultural objects that is seemingly autonomous from their economic and social impact.<sup>459</sup>

Of particular relevance to the beginnings of EAM were two of the interest areas explicitly recommended for support in Article 128: “non-commercial cultural exchanges” and “artistic and literary creation”.<sup>460</sup> Scholar Monica Sassatelli explains that Article 128 opened a space of “delicate equilibrium between the drive for unity and the concern for diversity” in European cultural action, as both national sovereignty of member states and a shared European identity in formation were to be acknowledged.<sup>461</sup> This double focus on the production of a single unitary

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<sup>457</sup> Before the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, timid attempts towards cultural cooperation in the European Economic Community had taken place by initiative of the European Commission, although always subject to the economic framework set by the 1952 Treaty of Rome. As Nicoleta Laşan argues, in the absence of a shared Cultural policy before 1992, the recognition of the importance of the field of culture by European institutions responded to the “development of cultural industries, the wider consumption of cultural goods and services, the recognition that culture and commerce are not mutually exclusive and that in fact the Treaty of Rome affected also trade in cultural goods” (p.3). Although subsequent Communications of the Commission acknowledged the importance of culture by defending the free circulation and improvement of life conditions of cultural workers (1977), the reduction of employment on the cultural work sector, the widening of audiences, and the importance of conserving heritage (1982), these recommendations always obeyed the logic of improving the single-market. See Nicoleta Laşan, “Article 128 in the Treaty of Maastricht: Harbinger of a New European Cultural Policy?,” *The Public Administration and Social Policies Review*, VI, 13 (2014)

<sup>458</sup> See Nicoleta Laşan, “Article 128 in the Treaty of Maastricht: Harbinger of a New European Cultural Policy?,” *The Public Administration and Social Policies Review*, VI, 13 (2014) and Costa, Carlos, “Culture as a Driving Force for Europe 2002”, in *Culture: Building Stone for Europe 2002. Reflections and Perspectives*, edited by Leonce Bekemans, European Interuniversity Press, 2001, pp. 105-110.

<sup>459</sup> See Nicoleta Laşan, “Article 128 in the Treaty of Maastricht: Harbinger of a New European Cultural Policy?,” *The Public Administration and Social Policies Review*, VI, 13 (2014)

<sup>460</sup> Article 128, Treaty on European Union, Maastricht, February 7, 1992. [https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/treaty\\_on\\_european\\_union\\_en.pdf](https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/treaty_on_european_union_en.pdf) Last accessed January 12, 2018

<sup>461</sup> Sassatelli, Monica. “The Arts, the State, and the EU : Cultural Policy in the Making of Europe The Arts , the State, and the EU Cultural Policy in the Making of Europe.” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 51, no. 1 (2007): 28–41. doi:10.3167/sa.2007.510103.

identity and the preservation of different local cultural forms was also present in EAM, especially in its initial stages, when curators and Advising board members emphasized the need to include artworks from all European regions (see analysis of exhibition composition later in this chapter).

Culture became an important source of soft power in attempts for the EU to consolidate its hegemony within the continent and abroad. Internally, common cultural policy has been a tool to integrate national cultural differences in a shared supra-national program, fighting historical conflicts between European nations.<sup>462</sup> But the use of culture by governments to regulate social life is not new. Bennet sees this as an essential function of the modern art institution. According to him, liberal forms of government rely on cultural administration for the production of consent. He says that liberal forms of cultural administration “have relied on means of acting in the social that respect the freedom and autonomy of individuals (or communities), seeking to govern them at a distance, and indirectly, by involving them as active agents in the processes of their own transformation and self-regulation”.<sup>463</sup> Manifesta's goal to build a “structural platform for young European artists to redefine the value of European cultural heritage and to launch a search for the mental space of a redefining Europe” fits this rationale.<sup>464</sup>

### **Euro-elitism and Europeanness.**

After World War II, industrial elites fostered unification of national markets between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. What came to be called the Benelux hoped to pacify a region marked by a long history of internal conflict with the goal of creating a stable tax-

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<sup>462</sup> On the governing of diversity within unity through cultural policy see, for example, Bonet, Lluís, and Emmanuel Négrier. “The End of National Cultures? Cultural Policy in the Face of Diversity.” *International Journal of Cultural Diplomacy* 17, no. 5 (2011): 18–34. doi:10.1080/10286632.2010.550681.

<sup>463</sup> Tony Bennet, “Art, Culture, and Government” in Meredyth, Denise, and Jeffrey Minson. *Citizenship and Cultural Policy*, 2001. p. 21

<sup>464</sup> *Foundation European Art Manifestation*. Manifesta I. 1996 Rotterdam Nederland Masterplan (concept) Augustus 1995. Consulted at the Manifesta Foundation offices on November 2017.



free trade zone that would foster economic growth. As its successor, the financially-driven CEE, led way to the formation of a new supra-national polity that culminated decades later with the EU, elites first and common citizens much later adopted a shared belief in Europeanness. This sentiment of supra-national belonging echoes Benedict Anderson's concept of nation-ness, one of the forms in which political formations regulate relationships between place, individuals, and political projects.<sup>465</sup> For Anderson, commonly held myths play a unifying role in the consolidation of the 'imagined community' that is the nation<sup>466</sup> - in this case the EU. As time passed, elites increasingly embraced the myth of Europeanness as a teleological project of modernization,<sup>467</sup> and promoted it convinced that it would "[offer] them a stronger impact on world political and economic affairs".<sup>468</sup> However, Etienne Balibar reminds readers that the "universalism of the dominant ideology", in our case elites' belief that advancing Europeanness was beneficial for everyone, not only responds to securing their position in the economic system. It lies, however, much deeply, in the need to forge "an ideological 'world' shared by exploiters and exploited alike".<sup>469</sup>

Cultural elites were not alien to this feeling of belonging. The production of a new supra-national nation-ness required the belief of elites and common citizens in the all-encompassing nature of Europeanness. Elites, or "people in power",<sup>470</sup> kept the unification project going through formal and permissive consensus.<sup>471</sup> The first entailed institutions of representation such as European government agencies, a new European legal framework, and European elections. The second rested in the wide-held perception that public and elite interest would

<sup>465</sup> Coll, Kathleen, Evelina Dagnino, and Catherine Neveu. *Disputing Citizenship. Disputing Citizenship*. Bristol: Policy Press, University of Bristol, 2014.

<sup>466</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1993)

<sup>467</sup> Checkel, J. T. and Katzenstein, P. J. (eds) (2009) *European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

<sup>468</sup> Best, Heinrich, György Lengyel, and Luca Verzichelli. *The Europe of Elites. A Study into the Europeanness of Europe's Political and Economic Elites*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. p. 5

<sup>469</sup> Etienne Balibar, "Introduction", *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991) p. 4

<sup>470</sup> Etienne Balibar, Intervention in International Conference Democratic Transitions in Latin America and in Eastern Europe: Rupture and Continuity 4-6 March 1996, Paris, France

<sup>471</sup> Best, Heinrich, György Lengyel, and Luca Verzichelli. *The Europe of Elites. A Study into the Europeanness of Europe's Political and Economic Elites*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

benefit from European unification, after a long history marked by military conflict and violent nationalisms.<sup>472</sup> According to World Systems analyst Immanuel Wallerstein, overcoming problems of internal cohesion is a prerequisite for the formation of nations. His argument that “to the extent that 'national' sentiments develop, these threats are lessened”,<sup>473</sup> helps us understand the emphasis of the Council of Europe in the production of new symbols and cultural policies parallel to the forge of a European nation-ness in the early 1990s. As I have exposed earlier, the cultural industries played a key role in the production of permissive consensus. The Treaty of Maastricht's cultural policy framework formalized what had been a long felt sentiment among European elites, and created the legal and institutional conditions for its materialization. Cultural elites joined the construction of supra-national cultural networks to disseminate Europeanness.

Manifesta was an instance of that effort. From the beginning described as a network “to redefine the value of European cultural heritage and to launch a search for the mental space of a redefining Europe”,<sup>474</sup> Manifesta helped spread Europeanness among regional intellectuals in general, and a new generation of art workers in particular. For instance, in the exhibition catalog EAM director Hedwig Fijen and Project Office Coordinator Jolie van Leeuwen wrote that:

“In 1993 a piece of paper was lingering somewhere on an office desk in the Netherlands. It contained notes for a future art project, ignited by the belief in a Europe without borders. In November of the same year, five people from the field of the visual arts came together to discuss the possibilities for a 'different' platform for the presentation of young European art, a new type of biennial as an alternative to large-scale shows”.<sup>475</sup>

On a similar vein, curator Katalyn Néray, member of the curatorial team, wrote that:

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<sup>472</sup> Best, Heinrich, György Lengyel, and Luca Verzichelli. *The Europe of Elites. A Study into the Europeanness of Europe's Political and Economic Elites*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

<sup>473</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Construction of Peoplehood:”, in *Race, Nation, and Class. Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991) p. 81-82.

<sup>474</sup> “Foundation European Art Manifestation”. Manifesta I. 1996 Rotterdam Nederland Masterplan (concept) Augustus 1995. Consulted at the Manifesta Foundation offices on November 2017. p. 4

<sup>475</sup> Hedwig Fijen and Jolie van Leeuwen, in *Manifesta 1 Rotterdam* (Rotterdam: European Art Manifestation, 1996) p. 157

“After many years of a 'Sleeping Beauty Dream' we are at last present on the spiritual map of the world. The idea of Manifesta was created when the Iron Curtain of the Cold War was dismantled (indeed pieces of the barbed wire were offered by American department stores as collectible souvenirs) and its symbol, the Berlin Wall, had come down. It has taken some years until the idea became reality. Our endeavors as curators were to create a process which at a certain moment appears in the form of an exhibition. We will see our attitudes become form in Rotterdam”.<sup>476</sup>

Manifesta suffered a push-back from the local art community. For instance, art critic Elly Stegeman wrote of the opening events that “for the intellectual elite [Manifesta] was all bread and play”, despite their intentions to address themes like migration, cultural diversity, and communication, she writes that it was “a bit annoying to hear [about these themes] when the protagonists are narcissistic luxury children, post-avant garde tourists”.<sup>477</sup> For Stegeman this culture of self-celebration was well exemplified in the work of Young British Artist Catherine Yass, a group photograph of the five curators shown at the entrance of the auditorium at the Het Nieuwe Instituut. According to Stegeman, the only project that “succeeded in penetrating” Rotterdam into the official programme was NESTWORK, led by Rotterdam artist Jeanne van Heeswijk which proposed a series of lectures, discussions, and tours around the city (see later in this chapter).

As I argue in this chapter, Manifesta aided in the production of European supra-nationness by promoting a new avant-garde that, by juxtaposing different art genealogies in the same exhibition space, posited a teleological belief in supra-national unification and shared with its audiences a feeling of Europeanness in the making. Not in vain, the exhibition's working title as of August 1995 was “Placenta Europa. Manifesta, the rebirthing of Europe”.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Katalyn Néray, in *Manifesta 1 Rotterdam* (Rotterdam: European Art Manifestation, 1996) p. 25

<sup>477</sup> Elly Stegeman, “Manifesta 1”, *Metropolis M*, summer 4, August – September, 1996

<sup>478</sup> In English in the original. *Foundation* European Art Manifestation. Manifesta I. 1996 Rotterdam Nederland Masterplan (concept) Augustus 1995. Consulted at the Manifesta Foundation offices on November 2017. p. 7

## Cultural tourism.

“Manifesta 1 did not choose Rotterdam by accident. An industrial city, living off one of the world's largest ports, Rotterdam is in cultural terms building itself. Spread out along the river, it is a vast city with multiple centres, constantly reshaping itself. Manifesta 1 will take place in the cultural centre, which is situated around the Museumpark, north of the river. This means that some of the aspects that give the city its character and shape its cultural climate will remain invisible”.<sup>479</sup>

The above quote reflects the feelings of local artist Jeanne van Heeswijk about the filtered representations of Rotterdam produced by cultural tourism. Her dislike is symptomatic of a general discontent about the ways in which the development of tourism-oriented heritage industries around the globe comes to alter the narratives about place for international and local audiences. Chapter 3 has shown how this tension materialized around projects of site-specific art in the US/Mexico borderlands. In the following, I analyze the impacts of cultural tourism in Rotterdam at times of consolidation of a supra-national European identity.

The Maastricht Treaty policy emphasis on culture joined the revitalization of the European tourism industry in the 1990s. Municipal and national governments perceived both sectors as motors for economic revitalization of post-industrial mid-size cities like Rotterdam. Like other European cities in the early 1990s, Rotterdam experienced a process of regeneration aimed to aid the city overcome the industrial crisis on the 1980s. During the 1980s and the 1990s

Rotterdam moved away from being a port city<sup>480</sup> towards becoming a service city.<sup>481</sup> The

<sup>479</sup> From letter sent by Rotterdam artist initiative NESTWORK to eighty Rotterdam artists inviting them to intervene a map of the city. Included in NESTWORK activities blueprint during Manifesta 1, Rotterdam 1996. Edited by artists Jeanne van Heeswijk. p. 82

<sup>480</sup> The forging of Rotterdam's identity as a modern port city began with the opening of the Nieuwe Waterweg in 1886, which increased maritime traffic and accelerated the development of the port. To these years dates too the first important wave of migration from rural Holland. Unlike other highly bombed cities, post World War II reconstruction plans in Rotterdam ignored the pre-war urban-scape and sought to build a modern city center concerned with the development of port and traffic infrastructure. Residential development favored the suburbs, provoking an exodus of the middle and upper classes away from the city center.

<sup>481</sup> Although the city's economy has become increasingly service oriented, Rotterdam's port is still the biggest in Europe and one of the busiest in the world. Since the New Rotterdam plan, the port has moved away from the city geographically and organizationally, as new facilities have been built West of Rotterdam and on the North

redistribution of the production sectors in the European Economic Community and the externalization of industrial activity to non-European countries caused high unemployment and social unrest in former industrial centers like Rotterdam. In this context, cultural tourism often became a “tool for social integration and emancipation of multi-ethnic communities and the regeneration of the public functions of run-down inner city areas”.<sup>482</sup> The EU's renewed stimulus of cultural tourism on the local level as an economic force also increased transnational cooperation between national and local agencies in cultural matters. Other examples of this trend were cities like Barcelona and Manchester.

In chapter 1 I described curatorial labor as a symptom of the consolidation of ‘enrichment economy’ in the present form of planetary capitalism, following the work of Boltanski and Esquerre, and Stuart Hall. A key aspect of curatorial labor is its faculty to produce narrative justifications for objects’ valuation as ‘art’ or ‘heritage’. In this model, curators engage in a production of heritage that is sustained in their defense of objects’ uniqueness and connection with tradition. The pressure to emphasize the particularness of place – in this case Rotterdam, but other European cities later on – is a good example of the imperative, under enrichment forms of valuation, to accent the singular traits of place (Rotterdam) and connect it to broader shared understandings of culture (tradition). Touristic promotion of cities like Rotterdam, Manchester, and Barcelona in the early 1990s follows the same logic of enrichment and heritage production of curatorial work in global biennials.

Rotterdam adopted this EU-wide trend to promote tourism to foster local economic growth and social cohesion. In particular, the city fostered forms of tourism motivated by art and culture.<sup>483</sup> We can see this trend reflected in Rotterdam's City Tourist Office 1992-1994 tourism

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Sea and port infrastructures have been privatized. See M. Carmona (ed.), *Planning Through Projects: Moving from Master Planning to Strategic Planning – 30 Cities* (Amsterdam: Techne Press, 2009)

<sup>482</sup> Richards, Gregory. *Cultural Tourism in Europe*. Wallingford: CAB International, 1996. p. 68.

<sup>483</sup> See Brouwer, R. (1993) *Het Nieuwe Rotterdam: de Kunst, Het Beleid, de Zorg en de Markt, Vrijtijd en Samenleving*, 11, pp. 31–43. See also Corijn, E. and Mommaas, H. (1995). Council of Europe, Strasbourg

marketing strategic plan, which identified culture as one key element for city re-branding.<sup>484</sup>

Heavily bombed during World War II, Rotterdam lacked the historical architectural heritage of other European cities, a difference that contributed towards its uniqueness under the logic of enrichment and heritage production. Its mid-century reconstruction had favored functionalist and pragmatist architectural solutions to the city's growing population of industrial workers.

Manifesta curator Andrew Renton compared Manifesta's structure around ten venues with the absence of a clear "city center" in Rotterdam. In his words, "It is very interesting that Manifesta should take place in a city like Rotterdam, incidentally, because one of the disconcerting things about the city is that you can keep walking and never find its center. When it was rebuilt from scratch it could never grow organically around a center. It kept on shifting. I think this is how Manifesta has evolved, too".<sup>485</sup> A key cultural tourism attraction in Rotterdam was the Museum Quarter. The area spans in and around Museumpark, and hosts the Natuurhistorisch Museum Rotterdam, the Rotterdam Kunsthal, the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, the Museum Chabot, and the Het Nieuwe Instituut (Netherlands Architecture Institute), all Manifesta exhibition venues in the summer of 1996.

### **The New Rotterdam: "Europe's gateway to the world".**

In addition to European trends favoring the development of cultural tourism following integration and economic goals, some municipal responses to the industrial crisis sought to reform the local fabric. Rotterdam city council commissioned to an external committee the production of the New Rotterdam plan (1986). The plan was designed to "halt urban decline and regain Rotterdam's position as a global player in world trade" and intended to turn the city into

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<sup>484</sup> Richards, Greg, and Julie Wilson. "The Impact of Cultural Events on City Image : Rotterdam , Cultural Capital of Europe 2001." *Urban Studies* 41, no. 10 (2004): 1931–51. doi:10.1080/0042098042000256323.

<sup>485</sup> Andrew Renton, in conversation with Rasheed Araeen. "Manifesta 1", in *CAHIER 5*, (Rotterdam, Dusseldorf: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Richter Verlag, 1996) p. 148

Europe's "gateway to the world".<sup>486</sup> The plan manifested the neoliberal belief that fast economic growth in the private sector would eventually result in better living conditions for all residents. Its primary goals were to increase port competitiveness, transform older port facilities into luxury residential waterfront areas, and increase infrastructures for the international business sector. Social expenditures were reduced, and cultural intervention was put in the service of economic growth.<sup>487</sup> The plan united several disconnected regeneration ventures already taking place, and set the city renewal agenda for the next decade. However, it failed to provide a new unifying organizational framework to synchronize existing and future interventions.

The New Rotterdam plan inscribed the city's transformation into a broader international trend of urban renewal motivated by cities' changing roles in the global market.<sup>488</sup> Since the early 1980s strategic urban planning approaches had replaced the modern urban master planning model in cities. Less interventionist states, seen as more efficient because they enabled the private sector, progressively replaced the former Keynesian paradigm based on ideals of strong state interventionism and regulation, which had produced modernist cities where mobility and residential expansion were main principles. Dutch social democracy participated of this trend. It sought to facilitate economic competition, relied on the market for regulating cities' transformation, and cut the authority of the central state over the residential, health and social sectors. This conceptual change towards strategic planning relied on the participation of four actors: local government, the private sector, residents, and knowledge industries.<sup>489</sup> However, the inclusion of dwellers' participation took long to take root.

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<sup>486</sup> W. Albeda, *Her Nieuwe Rotterdam*, Gemeente Rotterdam, 1986, cited in Gerard Oude Engberink, and Frank Miedema. "Governing Urban Regeneration : The Case of Rotterdam." *Geographische Zeitschrift* 2/3, no. 89 (2001): 114–24.

<sup>487</sup> Gerard Oude Engberink, and Frank Miedema. "Governing Urban Regeneration : The Case of Rotterdam." *Geographische Zeitschrift* 2/3, no. 89 (2001): 114–24.

<sup>488</sup> M. Carmona (ed.), *Planning Through Projects: Moving from Master Planning to Strategic Planning – 30 Cities* (Amsterdam: Techne Press, 2009)

<sup>489</sup> M. Carmona, *Planning Through Projects: Moving from Master Planning to Strategic Planning – 30 Cities* (Amsterdam: Techne Press, 2009)

An important focus of culture-led urban developments in Rotterdam was the area around central Witte de With “cultural quarter”.<sup>490</sup> This area hosted half of Manifesta's exhibition venues. Witte de With street, which since 1990 hosts world-renown Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art , was described to me by a local curator as a street “where you wouldn't want to go at night” in the early 1990s, in reference to the presence of prostitution and drug traffic. However, by the time Manifesta took place, the area was ready to host contemporary artworks and their audiences. For instance, artists Douglas Gordon and Rirkrit Tiravanija organized for Manifesta a discussion café in an empty building in this street. The collaborative project was called Cinema Liberté. Art critic Daniel Birnbaum described it like this in *Artforum*: “Gordon shows films that were censored when they were released in the Netherlands. One can view these films while seated on great beanbags. During or after the film one can have a drink in the bar, designed by Tiravanija”.<sup>491</sup> Although the space opened with a big and well-attended all night party, Birnbaum described it as “pretty dull” and agreed with local art critic Ineke Schwartz that it “remained dead and deserted after the opening weekend”.<sup>492</sup>

For Oude and Miedema the New Rotterdam plan worked as myth to frame disconnected technocratic interventions in Rotterdam since 1986. They remark on the plan's failure to accomplish integrated and sustainable city growth, and its direct impact in the rise of inequality. While economic recovery figures were soon optimistic, poverty and unemployment rose, widening the class divide and slowing down social development. The plan impacted wealth distribution in the city, accelerating the exodus of middle and upper classes to the suburbs and impoverishing the downtown districts. A 1989 report by an independent committee attributed the existence of wide-reaching unresolved social problems to essential failures in the 1986 original

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<sup>490</sup> E. Hitters and G. Richards, “Cultural quarters to leisure zones: the role of partnership in developing the cultural industries”, *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 11 (2002), pp. 234–247

<sup>491</sup> Daniel Birnbaum, “Manifesta 1: Rotterdam”, in *Artforum International*, vol. 35, no. 1, September 1996

<sup>492</sup> Ineke Schwartz, “Manifesta 1”, *Metropolis M*, summer 4, August – September, 1996



plan.<sup>493</sup> As part of the solution, the report recommended diverging the city's focus to citizens' needs, and advised that it created "the necessary conditions for self-reliance of the citizens and for supporting communal projects".<sup>494</sup> Initially, this opening to the self-management and self-organization of citizens around their self-identified needs produced only small and short term patches to structural social problems. The climate improved after several revisions of this emphasis on social renewal consolidated in a number of localized social policy reforms in the early 1990s. One of the small communal projects that came to be was the B.A.D. Foundation, a squat art center of vital importance for the success of Manifesta in 1996 (see later in this chapter).

Trying to provide a wider representation of Rotterdam to Manifesta artists and audiences, local artist initiative NEStWORK planned for a series of activities that, among other things, visualized areas and populations impacted negatively by the reforms brought about by the New Rotterdam Plan. While NEStWORK will be discussed in large detail later in this chapter, it is worth mentioning here its efforts towards class and race inclusivity in Manifesta's otherwise homogeneous program. For instance, during Manifesta's opening night NEStWORK organized in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuninjen a series of rap performances titled Representing the Rotterdam Docks. Musicians and performers from the predominantly working-class immigrant community south of the river offered art audiences elements of the local underground music scene.

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<sup>493</sup> Gerard Oude Engberink, and Frank Miedema. "Governing Urban Regeneration : The Case of Rotterdam." *Geographische Zeitschrift* 2/3, no. 89 (2001): 114–24.

<sup>494</sup> Gerard Oude Engberink, and Frank Miedema. "Governing Urban Regeneration : The Case of Rotterdam." *Geographische Zeitschrift* 2/3, no. 89 (2001): 114–24.

## It's now or never.

Post-Maastricht changes in political, economic, and cultural policy at the European level were well understood by EAM organizers and curators. According to Hedwig Fijen,

“the effect of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 brought about a euphoria regarding the potential for new structures of cooperation as well as new forms of communication and exchange with the organizations in a so-called Pan-European context, focusing on the exploration of the identity of a new Europe, encompassing the former Warsaw Pact countries and those formerly comprising Western Europe, the latter of which still at that time dominated the art world”

Further, in a promotional video, Manifesta 1 curator Andrew Renton<sup>495</sup> explains that

Manifesta is very exciting because [...] it involves the definition, or the attempts of a definition of what Europe could be today. And I think that's a place that's not defined by maps or political boundaries. Rather, it's something that could be held in the mind. It's a mental space. It needs to be defined by people and people in their spaces<sup>496</sup>

Renton's understanding of Europe as a “mental space” mirrors the conceptual nature of the European unification project, whereas its “need to be defined” highlights the lack, at the time, of materialized concretions for this newly designed *supra-nationness*. His words are a good example of Benedict Anderson's emphasis on the idealist nature of myths of nationhood that I addressed earlier. But, how to accomplish the conciliation of regional cultural differences? According to Renton,

The way you do this is that you center it on one place. You bring people together on a single site or a series of localities. Rotterdam. And in Rotterdam from elsewhere they'll come together and define themselves in relation to others<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>495</sup> In its first edition, Manifesta had five curators: Katalyn Neray (Hungary), Andrew Renton (United Kingdom), Rosa Martínez (Spain), Hans Ulrich Obrist (Switzerland), and Victor Misiano (Russia).

<sup>496</sup> “Introduction to: MANIFESTA 1. The Pan European Art Manifestation”. Promotional video. Consulted at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art archives. December 2017.

<sup>497</sup> “Introduction to: MANIFESTA 1. The Pan European Art Manifestation”. Promotional video. Consulted at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art archives. December 2017.

Relatedly, in the same video curator Viktor Misiano described Manifesta as a space where to discuss analogous ideas from curators coming from different regions of the continent:

I was convinced that our contribution to the contemporary art scene should be exactly the new mode of an art event, which is in a degree the lost of a clear paradigm, the age in between in-betweennesses<sup>498</sup>

For these two members of Manifesta 1's curatorial team the contemporary art biennial was to function as a space for the recognition and reconciliation of regional differences. Moreover, they were aware of their potential, at the time, to articulate a new international curatorial standard. In their mind, this conciliatory nature of the art exhibition would lead to the production of a unified Europe, at least in the symbolic realm of avant-garde art. To view the art exhibition as a reconciliatory space assumes two factors: first, that artworks stand for their authors' perspectives on the world; second, that the coexistence of artworks translates in the coexistence of different –and often competing-- worldviews. Such notions suggest that for the curators the exhibition room ultimately followed a conversational paradigm in which different worldviews would find common ground through dialogue (see later in this chapter for a detailed exploration of this model). Later sections of this chapter demonstrate how recognition was a driving motive in the curatorial and organizational levels as much as it was on the grounds.

Moreover, recent political events justified starting another biennial exhibition of art. Like the Advisory Board of Manifesta wrote in the catalog for Manifesta 1: “The need for a new platform for artists was most keenly felt in 1989, after the fall of the Berlin wall. It wasn't hard to see then that there would be a new need for information, for open discussions, for new infrastructures and alternative exhibition spaces”.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> “Introduction to: MANIFESTA 1. The Pan European Art Manifestation”. Promotional video. Consulted at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art archives. December 2017.

<sup>499</sup> “Manifesto of the Advisory Board of Manifesta 1: Why Another Biennial”, in *Manifesta 1 Rotterdam* (Rotterdam: Foundation European Art Manifestation, 1996) p. 12.

But the timeliness of EAM relied not just in changes on cultural policy or historical events. It was idiosyncratic to recent events in the art industry as well. The end of the Paris Biennale in 1985, together with the dissolution of the office within the Netherlands Office for Fine Arts in charge of distributing Dutch art abroad, prompted the creation of EAM. Hedwig Fijen, EAM project manager and current Director of the Manifesta Foundation, remembers that “Manifesta was conceived of as a reinvention of the Paris Biennial, with a specific focus on younger generations”.<sup>500</sup>

The Paris Biennial had began in 1959 and ended in 1985. French Minister of Culture André Malraux inaugurated it as a “space for the gathering and experiences of young artists, a space open to hopes and unknowns”. The exhibition was meant to reclaim Paris's central position in the genealogy of avant-garde art against the rise of Venice, Sao Paulo, and New York: “France, that occupies a unique space in the domain of arts, could not stay out of a movement of such nature that brings wide information and extends intellectual exchanges”, read the catalog.<sup>501</sup> Per design, the exhibition was internationally oriented (it became a regular venue for contemporary Latin American avant-garde art in the period), and bore an important geopolitical mission. These two features resurfaced in EAM.

### **The Masterplan, August 1995.**

Looking at Manifesta’s Masterplan sheds light on awareness of both EU officials and EAM organizers about the power of culture to service identity formation. It is also telling of the top-down nature of Manifesta, an exhibition that has sought to defend its roots in local art

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<sup>500</sup> “How a European Biennial of Contemporary Art Began”, in Barbara Vanderlinden, Elena Filipovic (eds.) *The Manifesta Decade. Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005) p. 190

<sup>501</sup> *Biennale de Paris. Manifestation Biennale et Internationale des Jeunes Artistes ... Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris*. (Paris: Biennale de Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1959-1985) p. n/a

practices since its first iteration. The Masterplan is a 31 page dossier detailing the objectives, structural organization, communication strategy, and budget for the project as of August 1995.<sup>502</sup> This document came after the two meetings described above and situates Manifesta in broader efforts to participate in the construction of European nation-ness at the local, national, and supranational levels. Although the initial masterplan has been reviewed and altered through time, understanding this document helps clarify the original organization of this curatorial venture at a moment of strengthening of European hegemony within and outside the continent.

The August 1995 masterplan was produced by the project office of the Foundation European Art Manifestation, in consultation with the Bureau Menno Heling Cultural Marketing in Amsterdam. This internal document was meant to circulate among all individuals and agencies involved in the production of Manifesta, seeking to engage “participating institutions, subsidies, sponsors and the participating European countries”. It set two objectives for Manifesta: “setting up and maintaining a European Network of artists, art institutions and art critics,” and “organizing the Manifesta 1 1996 exhibition in Rotterdam, which aim[ed] to be the first exhibition of a series of biennales with contemporary European art”.<sup>503</sup>

The first goal spoke of the ambitions of the organizing team, who saw in the new Maastricht cultural policy an opportunity to launch a supra-national avant-garde operation unifying the distinct national and regional art scenes present in Europe at the time. According to the masterplan, the network would work by:

- “. creating a broad, structural platform for young European artists to redefine the value of European cultural heritage and to launch a search for the mental space of redefining Europe.
- . initiating a different form of cooperation and discussion possibilities with various

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<sup>502</sup> The document followed a closed-doors meeting in Moscow with the curatorial team for Manifesta 1 in Rotterdam on 1996:

<sup>503</sup> “Foundation European Art Manifestation”, Manifesta I. 1996 Rotterdam Nederland Masterplan (concept) Augustus 1995. Consulted at the Manifesta Foundation offices on November 2017. p. 3.

target groups in Europe via the new media, Open House meetings and workshops.  
. setting up a basic financing program to start the network”.<sup>504</sup>

The items in the list deserve detailed scrutiny because they set the requisites for the success of such high-reaching aspirations. First, the operation required organizational and financial support. Its solid foundations would rest on open house meetings, colloquiums and laboratories, and workshops held all over Europe.<sup>505</sup> Financial support came from the public and private sectors. National cultural agencies paid a participation fee for each artist and host cities provided partial funding; surprisingly however, Manifesta's main sponsor was tobacco firm Philip Morris (see section on sponsorship).

Second, EAM aimed to reconsider the continent's cultural legacy so as to produce a renovated image of Europe that portrayed its regions' Europeanness. This emphasis on the rewriting of Europe's cultural legacy via contemporary art is of especial relevance due to the continent's long history of colonialism, a phenomenon that has been partly fostered by European nations' deployment of different organizational ventures to consolidate cultural hegemony in its regions of influence. It signals the European Union's embracing of a soft-power diplomacy model to secure its influence inside and outside of Europe in the 1990s.<sup>506</sup>

Further, this new European network of cultural agents would require cooperation and conversation with “target groups” in the continent. Manifesta target audiences comprised:

- “. artists, with an emphasis on young European visual artists
- . artists' organizations and initiatives
- . representatives and students from academies of visual arts
- . representatives and students from schools of art history
- . a more publicly interested in contemporary art

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<sup>504</sup> "Foundation European Art Manifestation", Manifesta I. 1996 Rotterdam Nederland Masterplan (concept) Augustus 1995. Consulted at the Manifesta Foundation offices on November 2017. p. 4.

<sup>505</sup> "Foundation European Art Manifestation", Manifesta I. 1996 Rotterdam Nederland Masterplan (concept) Augustus 1995. Consulted at the Manifesta Foundation offices on November 2017. p. 4.

<sup>506</sup> This strategy to secure international influence diverges with the one adopted at the same period by the United States, who has consistently chosen a model of international influence based on military aggressiveness.

- . a broad audience interested in art and culture (recreationists, tourists, families)
- . (inter) national youth audiences interested in events that reflect their lifestyle and ideas (school groups)
- . (inter) national governments, subsidizers (politics and policy, culture and science).
- . (inter) national professionals (art historians, critics, contemporary art museums staff, exhibition makers, museum associations, gallery owners)
- . sponsors
- . Soros Centers for Contemporary Art in Central and Eastern Europe
- . other influencing agents”<sup>507</sup>

Other sections of the masterplan provided general information about the exhibition catalog (structure and budget), calendar, proposed venues in Rotterdam, and ideal representations of European nations (both from the CEE and Eastern Europe). It also provided short biographies of curators for the Rotterdam exhibition: Katalyn Neray (Hungary), Rosa Martínez (Spain), Victor Misiano (Russia), Andrew Renton (United Kingdom), and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (Switzerland). There were sections on the composition and duties of the Advisory Board, the National Committee, and the Projectbureau. Last, the dossier included an estimated general budget and a section on EAM's financing model.

### **Forms of sponsorship.**

A budget from January 1994 estimated the total cost of Manifesta 1 to be fl 845,000 (US\$ 435.052 in 1996).<sup>508</sup> This amount included project office personnel costs (fl. 420,000), exhibition (fl. 220,000), and catalog (fl. 205,000). Although the total sum probably increased with time, the organization combined forms of private and public sponsorship to meet projected expenses. Looking at the forms of sponsorship supporting Manifesta can help elucidate the different

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<sup>507</sup> “Foundation European Art Manifestation”, Manifesta I. 1996 Rotterdam Nederland Masterplan (concept) Augustus 1995. Consulted at the Manifesta Foundation offices on November 2017. p. 10-11

<sup>508</sup> “Budget Foundation European Manifestation Visual Artists 1994 for the implementation of the European Manifestation Beeldende Kunstenaars project from January 1994 to January 1995”. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017.

interests at play behind the enterprise. In the following, I describe the presence of public sponsorship from the city and European levels, and the private sector.

### **- Public sponsorship**

Public sponsorship came from local, national, and European institutions. On the local level, public sponsorship came from the Office of the Mayor of the City of Rotterdam, the Office of the Alderman of the City of Rotterdam, the Office of the Director of Cultural Affairs of the City of Rotterdam, the Rotterdam's Arts Council, and the Rotterdam City Development Corporation. Sponsorship from national Netherlands public organisms came from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science.

In addition to these sources, national agencies from supporting countries paid a participation fee of fl. 10,000. In several cases, this fee was paid even if no artist from the country was included in the show. Ministries of Culture from the following countries paid the fee: Hungary, Finland, Portugal, Sweden, Belgium, Luxemburg, Slovakia, Russia, Macedonia, Ireland, Slovenia, Austria, Estonia, Denmark, Czech Republic, Romania, Germany, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom (the British Council). In some cases, the supporting fee was paid by other organisms: Albania (the Open Society Foundation of Albania), Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Open Society Foundation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Belarus (the Open Society Foundation of Belarus).<sup>509</sup> Lastly, on the supranational level, public funding came from the Council of Europe and the European Cultural Foundation.

The Open Society's role in mediating access of Western European curators to former Soviet capitals speaks of the American foundation's broader interest in advancing liberal democratic values in these regions since the decline of the USSR. In this case, the collaboration

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<sup>509</sup> From "Actual State of Participating Countries. September 1995", Manifesta Foundation Archives. Consulted on November 2017.



between Open Society and Manifesta as an out-branch of European cultural action supports my study of how contemporary art has serviced the import of particular political ideologies into new regions at time of consolidation of Euro-American hegemony across the globe.<sup>510</sup> Moreover, it illustrates yet another instance of foreign institutional partnership in third regions at times of globalization of the cultural industries and consolidation of 'global contemporary art' as a planetary aesthetic form.

#### **- Private sponsorship.**

An undated document addressed to the Rotterdam Kunsthall states that one fourth of Manifesta 1's budget should come from the private sector. The document explained that "a main sponsor and a number of partial sponsors will be sought. This is thought to include national entrepreneurship that focuses on the European market".<sup>511</sup> The main private sponsor of Manifesta in Rotterdam (1996) ended up being tobacco firm Philip Morris. A sponsorship contract from September 29, 1995,<sup>512</sup> sets the conditions for the relationship between the EAM and Philip Morris. The sponsorship bond would be active between 29 September 1995 and 19 August 1996. Philip Morris Holland payed a total sum of fl. 300,000 (which at the time converted to US\$188.869) to be deposited in three parts on September 29th, 1995, January 1st, 1996, and June 9th 1996. The contract stipulated that Philip Morris would be the only private sponsor of Manifesta 1.

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<sup>510</sup> As I write these words, the central European University, funded by the Open Society, has been forced out of its headquarters in Budapest due to Hungary's current Prime Minister Viktor Orban's attacks on Hungarian-American philanthropist George Soros. See Benjamin Novak and Marc Santora, "University Backed by George Soros Prepares to Leave Budapest Under Duress", in *The New York Times*, Oct. 25, 2018. Last consulted on December 7, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/world/europe/hungary-central-european-university-george-soros.html>

<sup>511</sup> See "Sponsor proposition Manifesta 1. Kunsthall Rotterdam 1995". Undated and unsigned document. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017. My translation.

<sup>512</sup> From "Sponsorship Agreement", 29 September 1995. Signed between the private company Philip Morris Holland BV, represented by Mr. G. L. de Bruin, and Stichting Europese Manifestatie Jonge Beeldend Kunstenaars, represented by its chairman, Mr. J N A van Caldenborgh. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017.

Further, the contract clarified the forms of publicity that Manifesta would provide to Philip Morris in exchange for the sponsorship. Chiefly, publicity of Philip Morris would happen by association of its name with that of Manifesta 1. This association would be made in “all written or spoken announcements, brochures, program booklets, posters, advertisements, stationery and similar”, and would “take place where appropriate in the required colors as the colored printed matter, or in black, white, gray, when the black-and-white printing is concerned [...] stating 'Philip Morris main sponsor of Manifesta 1', clearly and in a prominent place, although not perceived as disturbing by the public”.<sup>513</sup> In addition, the sponsor had the right to ten admission tickets and ten catalog copies. More, Philip Morris Holland could organize private views and educational tours of the exhibition before and after the opening date. Lastly, Manifesta 1's programming autonomy was safeguarded by a contract clause that stated that “the sponsor [could] in no way influence the content and the concept of the exhibition, which could affect the independence of the curators of the exhibition”.<sup>514</sup>

In addition to receiving financial sponsorship from Philip Morris, EAM received funds from private art foundations in the Netherlands, such as the Mondriaan Foundation and the Caldic Collection. In a letter from March 13, 1995, Melle Daamen, director of the Mondriaan Foundation, agreed to contribute with fl. 100,000 to EAM (US\$ 63,427.6 at the time).<sup>515</sup> Similarly, in a letter to Joop van Caldenborgh, Chairman of chemical and food distribution company CALDIC and Director the CALDIC Collection, EAM Project Manager Hedwig Fijen requested a total sum of fl. 150,000 (US\$ 94.948,8 at the time). However, the Culture Fonds

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<sup>513</sup> From “Sponsorship Agreement”, 29 September 1995. Signed between the private company Philip Morris Holland BV, represented by Mr. G. L. de Bruin, and Stichting Europese Manifestatie Jonge Beeldend Kunstenaars, represented by its chairman, Mr. J N A van Caldenborgh. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017. p. 2. My translation.

<sup>514</sup> From “Sponsorship Agreement”, 29 September 1995. Signed between the private company Philip Morris Holland BV, represented by Mr. G. L. de Bruin, and Stichting Europese Manifestatie Jonge Beeldend Kunstenaars, represented by its chairman, Mr. J N A van Caldenborgh. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017. p. 3. My translation.

<sup>515</sup> Letter from Mondriaan Foundation, 27 March 1995, BKNV 474 / 95.5, subject: Manifesta 1. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted in November 2017.

Foundation of the Bank Nederlandse Gemeenten denied EAM's sponsorship request on the grounds that the Foundation goal's were to prioritize "the knowledge of municipal activities" already taking place in Dutch towns and cities.<sup>516</sup> Other forms of collaboration were sought by EAM with transportation companies such as NS Rail<sup>517</sup> and Deutsche Luftansa.<sup>518</sup>

### **Collaboration with local art institutions.**

In addition to financial sponsorship from private companies, public agencies, and art foundations, EAM sought to partner with local art institutions in Rotterdam in order to secure enough exhibition space. Although from the beginning the central venue for Manifesta 1 was planned to be the Rotterdam Kunsthal, as I have explained earlier, other museums and art centers joined as the selection of artist grew over time, expanding to a total series of ten venues.

The terms for partnering with local institutions were set in a standard contract written in September 12, 1995. With respect to the exhibition production, the contract established that the "participating institute is responsible for the construction of the exhibition", with "no additional post-calculation costs".<sup>519</sup> Partner institutions would also be "responsible for the state of the exhibited works".<sup>520</sup> Financially, institutes would agree to sell entrance tickets for all Manifesta venues at a same agreed on fee. A percentage of earnings from entrance tickets would be distributed back to each institution after totals had been transferred to EAM. Institutions agreed

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<sup>516</sup> See letter from Stichting Cultuurfonds of the Bank Nederlandse Gemeenten of November 23, 1995. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017. My translation.

<sup>517</sup> See letter from Hedwin Fijen to NS Rail Marketing Manager Marjan Kretz of November 16, 1995. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017.

<sup>518</sup> See letter from Hedwig Fijen Deutsche Luftansa Sponsorship Department of March 20, 1995. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017.

<sup>519</sup> See "Cooperation contract model for participating institutes at Manifesta 1 1996 Rotterdam". September 12, 1995. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017. p. 2.

<sup>520</sup> See "Cooperation contract model for participating institutes at Manifesta 1 1996 Rotterdam". September 12, 1995. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017. p. 2.

as well to sell Manifesta 1 catalogs and reimburse all purchase related earnings to EAM. Moreover, collaborating institutions would take on the responsibilities of “organiz[ing] and financing of the transports of the works of art of the participating artists from Europe, preparing and financing the art projects of participating artists 'in situ', technical, construction and logistics, [and] organiz[ing] and financing the travels of the artists, stay and per diem according to the agreed amounts and terms”.<sup>521</sup> In addition to all these, partner institutions would commit to insure artworks, supervise their technical necessities, provide press-quality photographs of all exhibitions and events to EAM, and organize a press conference on June 7th, 1996.<sup>522</sup> Finally, partner institutions were required to visibly display Manifesta 1 visual materials like flags and banners, as well as Manifesta's logo.

The above paragraphs shows how culture is a field for the competition between different interests – be them private or public, local, national, or international. As advanced in chapter 1, culture is an important space in the organization of consent. It is a common practice in liberal political landscapes that cultural action is partly sponsored by private funds. The mutual benefit of this form of collaboration is explained, on the one hand, by the supplementary resources received by the cultural venture (non-profit) to advance their mission and, on the other hand, the gain in symbolic capital for the funding source in the form of advertising. Further, institutional support in the form of collaboration between Manifesta and local cultural institutions in Rotterdam speaks of the mutual benefits of both parties. While local cultural institutions received already programmed content for their venues (hence saving resources that could be devoted to other parts of their program), Manifesta inserted its artworks in already existing infrastructures. For local cultural institutions, participation in this collaboration also meant a gain

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<sup>521</sup> See “Cooperation contract model for participating institutes at Manifesta 1 1996 Rotterdam”. September 12, 1995. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017. p. 3.

<sup>522</sup> See “Cooperation contract model for participating institutes at Manifesta 1 1996 Rotterdam”. September 12, 1995. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017. p. 4.

of visibility in national, European, and international art literature, gain of status as cultural institutions, and the ultimate self-identification with the new identity of European-ness in the making.

## Section 2: The Exhibition.

### White cube pragmatism.

As the previous section shows, in its selection of exhibition venues the EAM favored collaboration with already existing art institutions in Rotterdam. For curatorial historian Elena Filipovic, this choice followed a purely pragmatic logic. In her words, “given Manifesta's itinerant existence, it would be difficult to start from scratch each time”.<sup>523</sup> But Manifesta's pragmatism must be examined in detail. Filipovic goes on to remark that: “in this process, the white cube seemingly had been accepted as a kind of 'international-style' exhibition frame, an internationally recognized container that was deemed appropriate almost no matter where the project moved of the nature of the artwork being displayed”.<sup>524</sup> Most of Manifesta's host institutions, except V2 Organization for Unstable Media and the Maritime Museum, shaped their exhibition spaces like white cubes: galleries painted white and with no windows. This modern exhibition standard was popularized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the 1930s, and is based in the belief that white walls, atmospheric lights, and disconnection from the outside world create conditions of autonomy and objectivity necessary to judge artworks in faithfulness to their truth value. Given Manifesta's declared intentions to root European artistic diversity in the specificity of the local, the choice of international standards of exhibition such as the white cube over contextual exhibition solutions seems contradictory.

Although experiments with museum wall colors and artwork organization in the galleries began in the 19th Century, not until the 1920s did standard solutions become widely applied in the showing of a wide-range of art styles. For example, already in 1918, secretary of the Boston

<sup>523</sup> Elena Filipovic, “The Global White Cube”, in E. Filipovic, B. Vanderlinden (eds.) *The Manifesta Decade. Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Boston: the MIT Press, 2005) p. 70

<sup>524</sup> Elena Filipovic, “The Global White Cube”, in E. Filipovic, B. Vanderlinden (eds.) *The Manifesta Decade. Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Boston: the MIT Press, 2005) p. 70

Museum of Fine Arts Benjamin Ives Gilman recommended in his empirical study of museum attendance to avoid “perpetual variety of wall coloring, found in many newer museums” and instead apply light grays or whites to the walls.<sup>525</sup> Further, art historian Charlotte Klonk speaks of how the Folkwang Museum in Essen experimented with white walls behind heavily black German Expressionist paintings, and of how it was during the Third Reich that German museums widely turned to white as a symbol of purity to back their artworks on display.<sup>526</sup> But it was at New York’s Museum of Modern Art that the solution became standard of practice for exhibiting modern art. In 1936 director Albert Barr curated *Cubism and Abstract Art*, the first major exhibition in the United States of the early 20th Century European Avant-Gardes. Still housed in a Rockefeller-owned house in Manhattan, gallery walls were painted white, windows closed, and wood floors laid bare. The purpose of these changes was to avoid references to the social and political context under the belief that, this way, artworks would speak of themselves in autonomy. Adoption by the Euro-American art world of the white cube as an exhibitionary standard has helped frame its content as universalist productions. In the case of *Manifesta*, the international standard helped contribute to *Manifesta*’s transnational versatility in different European regions.

Artist and art theorist Brian O’Doherty penned a famous critique of the white cube in a series of essays published in *Art Forum* in the 1970s. O’Doherty explained the appearance of the white cube as a gesture coherent with a centuries long European tradition of easel painting. For him, the wall became an “aesthetic force [that] modified anything shown on it”, aiding in the alienation of art audiences from their conditions as spectators. O’Doherty wrote that:

“The white wall’s apparent neutrality is an illusion. It stands for a community with common ideas and assumptions. Artist and audience are, as it were, invisibly

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<sup>525</sup> <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-white-cube-dominate-art>

<sup>526</sup> “The White Cube and Beyond. A Conversation between Niklas Maak, Charlotte Klonk and Thomas Demand” in *Tate Etc.* issue 21: Spring 2011. <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/white-cube-and-beyond>

spread-eagled in 2D on a white ground. The development of the pristine, placeless white cube is one of modernism's triumphs -a development commercial, aesthetic, and technological",<sup>527</sup>

and,

"[The White Cube is] of a highly specialized nature, is impure. It subsumes commerce and aesthetics, artist and audience, ethics and expediency. It is in the image of the society that supports it".<sup>528</sup>

Manifesta's choice of the white cube standard imposed a framework of Euro-American modernity upon artworks that were not necessarily created under the Western modern avant-garde paradigm. As later sections of this chapter show, many of the artworks showed in Manifesta were in fact respondent to a Soviet avant-garde tradition. Some examples discussed later in this chapter are Datacorridor, by Romanian collective subREAL, and the Pavlov's Dog Laboratory, by Kiev-born artist Oleg Kulik. The tensions informing Manifesta's first iteration were clear: on the one hand, the exhibition gestured towards a transnational unity and a sort of universalism; yet on the other hand, it sought to foreground particularity. How did they try to reconcile these different aims?

### **Curatorial work.**

The curatorial team for Manifesta 1 was formed by a group of five curators: Rosa Martínez (Spain), Katalyn Néray (Hungary), Andrew Renton (UK), Viktor Misiano (Russia), and Hans Ulrich Obrist (Switzerland). These five curators, by then rising stars of the European contemporary art scene, were in charge of translating Manifesta's pan-European aspirations into a selection of artworks and exhibition proposals for the ten Manifesta venues.

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<sup>527</sup> O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, 1999) p.70

<sup>528</sup> O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, 1999) p.80



Although work with Manifesta began in June 1st, 1995, the five curators signed their contract with EAM on August, 1995. From then until the opening date in June 1996, they were expected to “deliver a concept and structure for the European Art Manifestation” and “realize the exhibitions”.<sup>529</sup> The first task followed on the main objectives of celebrating European contemporary art that had guided EAM's efforts since 1993. Curators were expected to translate those ideals into a language relatable to European contemporary art audiences, thus reinforcing Manifesta's image as not only a top-down operation but one that was also grounded on the specificity of artistic developments. This logic mirrored the one behind the new EU project, and created tensions between the transnational and the particular. Traces of this concept could be seen in materials produced before and during Manifesta's opening date. One of them was the promotional video that I referred to earlier in this chapter, where curators talked about Manifesta as an “attempt of a definition of what could be Europe today”,<sup>530</sup> a “laboratory where artists can meet, can interchange information, can get in connection with each other”,<sup>531</sup> and as a platform from where to “widen our research, our understanding [...] about European artists working in the Eastern countries”.<sup>532</sup> Overcoming this East/West distinction was a key goal for EAM organizers that mirrored EU's ambitions to expand Eastwards and increase their influence in the former Soviet republics. Later sections of this chapter show how this tensions materialized in the work of Russian performance artist Oleg Kulik.

For the second task, curators would work towards “the selection of artists, the practical implementation of exhibitions in the specific spaces, the mental and artistic assistance to selected artists, and the assistance to the process of the implementation of the exhibition in

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<sup>529</sup> “Contract for the Members of the Curatorial Team”, Foundation European Art Manifestation, August 1995. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017.

<sup>530</sup> Andrew Renton speaking in Manifesta 1 promotional video. Rotterdam Cultural Histories, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art. Consulted on December, 2017.

<sup>531</sup> Rosa Martínez speaking in Manifesta 1 promotional video. Rotterdam Cultural Histories, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art. Consulted on December, 2017.

<sup>532</sup> Hans-Ulrich Obrist speaking in Manifesta 1 promotional video. Rotterdam Cultural Histories, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art. Consulted on December, 2017.

Rotterdam institutions".<sup>533</sup> Each curator was also expected to write one catalog essay, and participate in curatorial meetings scheduled between the signature date and Manifesta's opening date in June 1996. In exchange for these services, each curator received a fixed honorarium of DGL 25,000 (US\$ 16,120 as of August 1st, 1995) plus a travel honorarium of DGL 7,500 (US\$ 4,836 as of August 1st, 1995).

To advance on artist selection, curators were expected to travel around Europe during the Fall of 1995. During these travels, they did studio visits and met with local artists, curators, and critics. While most of these research travels took place on an individual basis, sometimes two curators would visit together a specific location. Katalyn Néray visited Sweden, Croatia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Poland, England, Russia, Austria, and Turkey. Andrew Renton visited Sweden, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Letland, Russia, Slovenia, Belgium, Netherlands, Portugal, Austria and Turkey. Viktor Misiano went to Belgium, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, and Turkey. Rosa Martínez's trips included Sweden, Slovenia, Greece, Portugal, Turkey, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, France, and the United Kingdom. Lastly, Hans Ulrich Obrist visited Germany, Austria, Iceland, Turkey, and France. A fax from September 13, 1995, provides helpful information on how were these trips arranged. The fax shared EAM's plans to organize an additional tour in East Europe for Hans Ulrich Obrist for the second week of October. During this trip, which would include visits to Moldavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Macedonia, Hans Ulrich Obrist would "be 'protected' and 'guided' by a special curator of the local SOROS Center for Contemporary Arts".<sup>534</sup> This detail shows that one way EAM organizers tried to enroll Eastern localities into their transnational project was by working with local branches of transnational non-profits, such as the SOROS Foundation. This was one solution for navigating the problems

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<sup>533</sup> "Contract for the Members of the Curatorial Team", Foundation European Art Manifestation, August 1995. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017.

<sup>534</sup> Fax from Nicole Meijer (EAM) to Hans Ulrich Obrist. September 13, 1995. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017.

of localness and representation product of Manifesta's transnational ambitions. Hans Ulrich Obrist, like the other Western Europeans in the curatorial team, had little knowledge of these Eastern European local art scenes and, as such, he and his team relied on local informants, like Soros, who mediated the curators' connection to and understanding of specific localities. Although the absence of artists from these nations in the final curatorial selection indicates that this trip probably never happened, this message helps understand the scope of EAM's mapping intentions and their ambitions.

During the Fall of 1995, curators also held a series of four Open House meetings that would help publicize Manifesta to local art scenes of different European regions. Open House meetings took place at MUHKA Antwerp (Belgium), Kunstraum Vienna (Austria), Golbenkian at Lisbon (Portugal), and the South Bank Centre at London (United Kingdom). These extended trips responded to the contract's request that curatorial selection "reflected a broad diversity of the European situation",<sup>535</sup> and grew both from curators' own network of contacts and new connections fostered by EAM. Lastly, during these trips curators were also expected to establish or nourish relations with local culture officials.

What seemed like could be Manifesta's unique dynamic and open research model based on curatorial collaboration and group cohesion was however hard to hold together at times. For instance, on January 28, 1996, less than six months before the opening date, Jolie van Leeuwen, EAM Project Office's manager, sent a fax to the curatorial team reminding them that "I truly dislike a position as your nanny and running a class-room. You are all independent curators being paid (a very serious amount of) money to make this exhibition and therefore you should act and work accordingly as professionals" (bold in original).<sup>536</sup> The reason behind Jolie

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<sup>535</sup> "Contract for the Members of the Curatorial Team", Foundation European Art Manifestation, August 1995. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017.

<sup>536</sup> Fax from Jolie van Leeuwen to curatorial team, January 28, 1996. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017.

van Leeuwen's discontent was EAM's perception of an “enormous discrepancy between [their] desire to work as a collective and the actual effort [they] had put into process to execute the ideals”. According to van Leeuwen, communication between curators had not been as constant as first agreed on. These tensions between the individual professional ambitions of curators and the shared mission of the EAM project mirror other contradictions between the specific and the universal that materialize at different levels in the EAM project.

These feelings were also felt from the perspective of participating artists. For example, U.S. artist Daniel Faust, initially considered for the selection but not included in the end, wrote in a fax to EAM Office Manager Nicole Meijer:

“Ms. Nicole – It's me again. Our associate Hans-U O is not making my life or work easy. [...] You and I are wonderful and having fun while HUO is phoning and faxing and saying and sharing lots of nothing. [...] Last Sunday I faxed you around a four page handwritten letter asking you and especially HUO a good five to seven or so questions. Have I got an acknowledgment or response or answer to some of these. NO None whatsoever. Please write our funny and fun but troublesome/troublemaker Mr HUO our questions again. [...] 1. WHAT does he have in mind? WHAT is his idea regarding the Chabot museum. 3. In the event that I may participate in some manner or another, a notion and understanding of our potential BUDGET would assist a great deal. Specifics, financial figures, [...] deadlines, details[...].”<sup>537</sup>

While the lack of synchronicity of the curators' organizational modes challenged EAM's initial dreams of smooth pan-European collaboration at the curatorial level, the exhibition came to fruition and opened at the estimated date. The finish of Manifesta 1 was however different from the polished standards of other big art events in Europe or the U.S.. In words of art historian Elena Filipovic, Manifesta's first edition was marked by a “remarkable fragility, informality, and tentativeness” mostly due to its distribution around “subtle and small scale” venues, and its “unspectacular artworks and performances [that] hardly seemed to cater to the

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<sup>537</sup> Fax from Daniel Faust to Nicole Meijer, February 27, 1996. Manifesta Foundation archives. Consulted on November 2017.

ambitions of a city looking to place itself on the cultural (tourist) map”.<sup>538</sup> Foreign media registered similar feelings. For instance, FRIEZE art magazine said that “Manifesta lacked clarity; had a confusing catalogue; included too many interventions and abused the museum setting”.<sup>539</sup> Writing for Artforum, Daniel Birnbaum reached similar conclusions, stating that “as for Manifesta as a whole, one is left feeling that more energy went into the project that came out [...] in the end, its emphasis on collaboration sounded better than it looked. Rather than providing a perspective on a Europe redefining itself, Manifesta amounted to little more than another group show”.<sup>540</sup>

The project fell short of its aims, The lack of synchronicity between members of the curatorial team and the other organizers testifies for the improvised nature of this first iteration. In the absence of a blueprint to follow and lacking still the inherited knowledge about the forms of labor involved in curating an art biennial, members of the curatorial team followed instead the labor logic of the freelance individual curator. The individuality and authorship characteristic of the later contradicted the collaboration and choral decision making expected to activate the ambitious transnational venture of Manifesta.

While the central venues hosting Manifesta's exhibitions were anything but subtle and small scale (Rotterdam Kunsthall, Witte de With, Boijmans Museum), criticisms by art critics and members of the local art community probably had more to do with the domestic feeling that smaller peripheral venues provided to Manifesta, in comparison with other art biennials of the time like the Venice Biennale, the Istanbul Biennial, the Whitney Biennial, and Documenta, all of them hosted in important museums or monumental fair grounds. Their perceptions of Manifesta's domesticity and “small scale” dimensions also probably spoke of the exhibition's ad

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<sup>538</sup> Elena Filipovic, “The Global White Cube”, in E. Filipovic, B. Vanderlinden (eds.) *The Manifesta Decade. Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Boston: the MIT Press, 2005) p. 70

<sup>539</sup> “Manifesta. The Inaugural Manifesta in Rotterdam.” *Frieze*, issue 30. September, October 1996

<sup>540</sup> Daniel Birnbaum, “Manifesta 1: Rotterdam”, in *Artforum International*, vol. 35, no. 1, September 1996

hoc affiliation with independent art organizations, such as the B.A.D. Foundation (see later in this chapter), which provided forms of engagement with the local arts community and introduced elements of festivity and conviviality into the biennial. The same article on FRIEZE already referenced concluded stating that “on the level of sheer personal exchange, [Manifesta] may have succeeded well enough to make its rivals reconsider their own tactics”.<sup>541</sup>

### **Curating Eastern Europe.**

Like the rest of the members of the curatorial team, Viktor Misiano also had problems, but his were of a different kind. On February 2, 1996, the exhibition *Interpol – A Global Network* from Stockholm and Moscow, which Misiano co-curated with Swedish curator Jan Aman, opened in Stockholm's Färgfabriken Center for Contemporary Art. This exhibition has been planned since November 1993 and was based on a two-year long process of dialogues between curators and participating artists from West and East Europe. Its premise was to bring to the gallery a series of conflicting art projects that, in order to coexist in the gallery space, would need to develop ways to acknowledge their mutual differences. All projects would have a “quality of totality”,<sup>542</sup> by which curators meant that each of them would fill the whole of the exhibition area instead of limiting their interventions to a fraction of the space. Like *Manifesta*, in words of Misiano, “the staging of *Interpol* had become a metaphor for the establishment of a New Europe”.<sup>543</sup>

One of the only two artworks by artists from the “Russian side” that were produced for the exhibition was that by Kiev-born Oleg Kulik, who was also scheduled to feature in *Manifesta 1* at

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<sup>541</sup> “*Manifesta. The Inaugural Manifesta in Rotterdam.*” *Frieze*, issue 30. September, October 1996

<sup>542</sup> See Viktor Misiano, “*Interpol. The Apology of Defeat*”, in *Moscow Art Magazine*, issue 41. <http://moscowartmagazine.com/issue/41/article/799> Last consulted on March 13, 2018

<sup>543</sup> See Viktor Misiano, “*Interpol. The Apology of Defeat*”, in *Moscow Art Magazine*, issue 41. <http://moscowartmagazine.com/issue/41/article/799> Last consulted on March 13, 2018

Rotterdam the following summer. For Interpol Kulik performed his dog-man persona: nude, chained to a kennel, Kulik crawled around the exhibition space smelling and licking objects. Kulik the dog eventually reacted violently to a curious member of the audience who decided to pet him despite signs warning audiences against it around the gallery. Kulik jumped on this man and bit him in the leg repeatedly. He wouldn't let go. In reaction, co-curator Jan Aman called the police, who arrived at Färgfabriken to handcuff and arrest the artist. On that same opening evening Russian artist Alexander Brener attacked an installation by Chinese/American artist Wenda Gu as part of a longer 'rock-star' performance that began with one hour and a half of drumming and emitting guttural sounds.

The day after the incident, French art critic Olivier Zahm wrote a letter that was signed by co-curator of Interpol Jan Aman and others present that night. The letter was sent widely to art institutions, art publications, and art professionals across Europe and the U.S. It denounced artists Oleg Kulik and Alexander Brener, and curator Viktor Misiano. It sought to expose “the consequences of collaboration with these people”, among which was a revelation that Misiano's curatorial practice “[had], in fact, nothing to do with art theory, but with hooliganism and skinhead ideology”, “he wants to destroy the art world”, they said.<sup>544</sup> The letter especially warned Manifesta 1 curators Hans Ulrich Obrist, Andrew Renton, Rosa Martínez, and Katalyn Néray against working with Kulik and Misiano. It stated that “they are a direct attack against art, democracy and the freedom of expression”.<sup>545</sup>

Viktor Misiano remained part of Manifesta's curatorial team. Oleg Kulik stayed as part of the artist selection (Alexander Brener, not an artist in the show, was however present during the opening remarks, which he interrupted by standing up and yelling against a member of the exhibition's organization board). Despite the incidents in Stockholm, Kulik performed again in

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<sup>544</sup> Olivier Zahm et al. “An Open Letter to the Art World”, in *Third Text*, 10:34 p. 108

<sup>545</sup> Olivier Zahm et al. “An Open Letter to the Art World”, in *Third Text*, 10:34 p. 109

Rotterdam his dog-man piece the Pavlov Dog's Laboratory, albeit this time there were no incidents of aggression. A film produced by the local initiative NESTWORK (discussed at length later in this chapter) and conducted by British curatorial assistant Jason Coburn, focuses on the Pavlov Dog's Laboratory. In this piece, Kulic is completely nude, he wears a black leather collar and is walked around Rotterdam by his collaborator Mila Bredkhina. The video shows Coburn interrupting Kulic in his room-sized cage inside the V2 Institute for Unstable Media: we see his shaved head and body, he is on his legs and arms over a platform, connected to a bracelet with sensors. The artist is in the process of taking a laboratory test. Hoping to find out what the test is about, Coburn asks Kulic's collaborator. She explains that "the aim of the test is to find out how long can Kulic hold on to this device. The aim of this test is to compare his results with the results of real dogs in these experiments". The experiment, recalls art critic Daniel Birnbaum "comprised a mechanism capable of turning humans into animals through the systematic application of pain".<sup>546</sup> While Mila Bredkhina talks to the camera, Kulik crawls down the platform and approaches the lens, jumping and barking to attract his collaborator's attention, who soothes him caressing his head with her hand. Kulic then leaves, back to the experiment site. He climbs up to a big rolling cylinder. Like a hamster, he stays on top for some minutes, arms and legs moving in coordination to stay up. Sensors send information back to the computer. In addition to Coburn, spectators of the experiment include a middle aged couple and a man on his thirties with two young girls. These last two caress Kulik's head once he crawls back to the audience. They then smell their hands and make disgusted faces. Remarkably, these girls' hands petted Kulik the dog through iron bars, an uncanny throw back to Wiston Churchill's 1946 imagined "iron curtain [running] from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic" dividing East and West.

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<sup>546</sup> Daniel Birnbaum, "Manifesta 1: Rotterdam", in *Artforum International*, vol. 35, no. 1, September 1996



Most reviews of Manifesta highlight Kulik's piece as one of the best in the show. Why was this? While on one hand it is reasonable to expect that art critics were already curious about Kulik's practice after the Stockholm incident, it is important to stop and scrutinize the piece with more detail. The Pavlov's Laboratory shocked audiences and curators alike. The performer's capacity to endure the physical and behavioural commitments of impersonating a dog for several days comes clear in the above mentioned reportage on the piece, where, for example, we see Kulik tirelessly chasing a ball in the park, back and forth, once and again. The dog learns to please humans so as to qualify for treats. The artist is domesticated, like the animal, by the institution of culture –in this case, the contemporary art institution. This piece was an instance of "Zoophrenia", Kulik's and Bredkhina's artistic program that explores the subject of "the animal as alter-ego of man". In a context defined by the "espectre of a global ecological disaster", Zoophrenia sought to integrate human and animal in one entity, opposed "human predisposition to superfluous thinking", and favored "the irrational" as the only realm that could be "source of something extraordinary, a new source of hope, [...] uniting people and animals in coalition for a better noosphere".<sup>547</sup> Kulik and Bredikhina went on to state that "democracy, as it exists in the human world, is no worse than life in a jungle. Some inhabitants have an advantage, some are stronger, faster. [...] The problem of successful communication remains unsolved within the species of man. It is not our belief in fruitful communication that gives hope for the future to come, it is the confidence that universal collaboration is possible".<sup>548</sup> The Pavlov's Dog worked then, as a metaphor for the search of a better reconciliatory model, between humans and with nature more broadly.

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<sup>547</sup> Oleg Kulik, Mila Bredokhina, "Pavlov's Dog", in *Manifesta 1Rotterdam, The Netherlands 1996* (Rotterdam: Manifesta, 1996) p. 107

<sup>548</sup> Oleg Kulik, Mila Bredokhina, "Pavlov's Dog", in *Manifesta 1Rotterdam, The Netherlands 1996* (Rotterdam: Manifesta, 1996) p. 107

But in this master-slave relationship Kulik and the audience stood for larger referends: Kulik is an icon of Eastern Europe, while the contemporary art institution is none but the Euro-American contemporary art world. A moment of historical reconciliation in European elites' imaginary, the expansion of the European Union to the East would happen under the political conditions set by Western member countries. This expansion would also signify the overcoming of historical differences via the adecuation of socialist culture to the Western liberal political tradition. Hence the EU's Eastbound political expansion translates as well in the space of aesthetics. Manifesta: Placenta Europa, was a battlefield for the collusion of two aesthetic regimes: one bred from the Soviet avant-garde tradition and another, the liberal avant-garde gestated in post-World War II Marshall Plan welfare state expansion. The clash is tragic. In response to the denounce letter signed by critics and curators from Western Europe after the Stockholm incident, Viktor Misiano reached a conclusion that helps frame Kulik's piece in Mainfesta five months later:

“it soon became apparent that the West would only recognize Russia as a great power on one condition: that she would not behave as such. So Kulik was chained up at the Fargfabriken on condition that he did not bite. When he did bite, he was accused of 'imperialism and directly attacking democracy'. Western political correctness presupposes that the Other may receive an equal status and count on dialogue only when it shows itself to be humble, weak, ill-starred. If it departs from the victim's role, it is immediately seen as a fundamentalist and imperialist”.<sup>549</sup>

In his book *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization in the Mind of the Enlightenment* historian Larry Wolff argues that the 1990s image of Eastern Europe's cultural, social, and financial “backwardness” is not a product of Soviet legacy but dates back to European Enlightenment philosophy.<sup>550</sup> Wolff claims that during the 18th Century a conceptual reorientation of Europe took place: from a South-North scheme (with Classic and Renaissance

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<sup>549</sup> Misiano, Viktor. “Interpol. The Apology of Defeat.” *Moscow Art Magazine* 1, no. 41 (2005): 1–25.

<sup>550</sup> Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization in the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

Italy as center) to a West-East split (championed by emerging cultural and financials like Paris, London, and Amsterdam). For Wolff the European Enlightenment was an Orientalist intellectual project that produced Eastern Europe as a “demi-Oriental” transitional region mediating between Europe, on one hand, and Asia and Africa on the other. In his analysis of Western European literary representations of Eastern Europe, Wolff remarks on the frequency of tropes of physical ownership of the Eastern European body, such as sexual domination and punishment. Reading Kulik's self-presentation as an animal-human body to tame, control, and dominate by Rotterdam art audiences, brings to mind the centuries-long image of Eastern Europe as a violent and irrational space to be humanized by a tradition of Western enlightenment philosophy.

If Manifesta was to be a space of dialogue between East and West, what would the terms of access to the conversation be? Whose model of reason and dialogue would rule? Curator Viktor Misiano was openly concerned about this power distribution. In his words:

“Though we keep underscoring this idea of a multiplication of centers, we should not forget that the art scene still exists within the structure of power. Artists from different regions of Russia come to Moscow, try to conquer the big city and next they will try abroad. Migration is a symbol of success! And within the system, it is a mechanism of symbolical exchange. But is that exchange a dialogue? Is the dialogue authentic or not? [...] This logic implies that a really authentic dialogue does not exist. If it exists, it is something very particular, very complicated, and very risky”.<sup>551</sup>

Manifesta's conception of the exhibition space as a forum for the overcoming of historical differences reminds of Habermas's model of the bourgeois public sphere. The 'bourgeois public sphere' was a concept coined by Jurgen Habermas in 1962 that signaled a space for the production of rationalized consensus about social common good. For Habermas, the public sphere is a historical formation where private individuals gather to discuss issues pertaining to

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<sup>551</sup> Viktor Misiano in conversation with Rasheed Araeen. “Manifesta 1”, in *CAHIER 5* (Rotterdam, Dusseldorf: Witte de With, Richter Verlag, 1996) p. 149

their common life, while they monitor the actions of state officials and hold the state accountable for its regulations of social life. For Habermas, citizens in the public sphere “behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion -that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions- about matters of general interest”.<sup>552</sup> Critics such as Geoff Eley and Nancy Fraser, among many others, denounced this model on the grounds that it idealized accessibility to the public sphere by overlooking the exclusionary mechanisms keeping all members of society from participating in this forum on equal terms. While Fraser appreciates the idea of a deliberative space where all members participated equally, she sees the model empirically faulty because, according to her, such thing as a non-stratified society does not exist. For Fraser, Habermas's model relies on the bracketing of actually existing “status distinctions” so that participating individuals can deliberate *as if* they were peers.<sup>553</sup> But this bracketing of distinctions implies then that the Habermasian public sphere is a “space of zero degree culture, so utterly bereft of any specific ethos as to accommodate with perfect neutrality and equal ease interventions expressive of any and every cultural ethos”. For Fraser and Eley this illusion of equality is the basis of a new mode of political domination. In Fraser's words, the public sphere is “the prime institutional site for the construction of the consent that defines the new, hegemonic mode of domination”.<sup>554</sup>

Like curator Victor Missiano, many voices at the time understood that artists from East European countries could not participate in the new global contemporary artworld in consolidation as peers of Western Europeans. For example, Russian curator Ekaterina Degot wrote in 1997 that

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<sup>552</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article.” *New German Critique* Autumn, no. 3 (1974): 49–55.

<sup>553</sup> Fraser, Nancy. “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56–80.

<sup>554</sup> Fraser, Nancy. “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56–80.

"the Russian artist perpetually finds himself or herself between the Scylla and Charybdis of two representational mechanisms which are switched on automatically and ruthlessly. In Russia, where twentieth-century art with its ideology of individualism and unrestrained freedom is still a foreign phenomenon of invested dreams, being a "contemporary artist" means to represent Western culture. [...] In the West, on the other hand, a Russian artist must inevitably represent Russia. Western curators are almost never interested in him or her personally, but in having "an artist from Russia", best of all a typical one, i.e., a representative one, particularly one representing the political reality, chaos and disruption".<sup>555</sup>

Manifesta 1 was not the only space within the institution of contemporary art trying to reconcile differences between Eastern and Western European avant-gardes. Other exhibitions like Europa, Europa: das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Ostereuropa (Bonn, 1994), or Westkunst: zeit-genössische Kunst seit 1939 (Cologne, 1981). Like art historian Mária Hlavajová has documented, efforts to "normalize" historical tensions between East and West were frequent in European art institutions between 1989 and 1999. In addition to the new "international style" promoted by the network of SOROS Centers of Contemporary Art (SCCAs), and the Syndicate, a new communication network including East and West European artists, critics, and curators, exhibitions like Manifesta helped strengthen Western European hegemony over the new "reconciled" Europe.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> Completar source (Zones of Disturbance. Graz: Steirischer Herbst, 1997)

<sup>556</sup> Mária Hlavajová, "Towards the Normal. Negotiating the 'Former East'", in Barbara Vanderlinden, Elena Filipovic (eds.) *The Manifesta Decade. Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005)

### **Section 3: Responses to MANIFESTA from the local art community.**

“When I began work on Manifesta I did have a very idealistic dream that such a project should not only present itself as something international and 'imported' but should be wholly integrated into the local cultural context.”

Andrew Renton, Manifesta 1 curator

The above words by Manifesta 1 curator Andrew Renton portray the central tension guiding my analysis of this case study: on the one hand, organizers aspired to be international and trans-local, thus in keeping with the dominant Euro-American global elite's spirit of the times. On the other hand, the desire to enroll *different* localities and cultural-historical traditions into the EU's transnational hegemonic project. These aspects were not exclusive of Manifesta 1. They surface in Havana's thirdworldist socialism (1980s) and around the celebration of free-trade collaboration in Tijuana and San Diego (1994). The following pages account for how these tensions materialized in Manifesta's relationship with Rotterdam's local art scene. In this section I argue that forms of hospitality provided by Rotterdam artists framed the encounter between the city and Manifesta's foreign artists that did not just help mitigate Manifesta's failure to engage with the local, but were ultimately integrated into the biennial form and reproduced since.

#### **Disregarding the local.**

As the previous sections show, original Manifesta plans limited the organization's engagement with Rotterdam's cultural life to a set of prearranged bonds of institutional reciprocity through which nine local museums provided exhibition space for the biennial, and

Manifesta, in turn, provided content in the form of exhibitions. Notably, no artists in Manifesta's initial selection were from Rotterdam. While many efforts had been put into Manifesta's international reach (see sections above), no consultation mechanisms had been put in place to engage the local art community in the process.

Members of Rotterdam's art community took Manifesta's failure to acknowledge them and their work as a sign of disregard for their value as art workers placed in Rotterdam. While many local artists shared their impressions with Manifesta, at first the organization seemed ambivalent over its need to acknowledge these reactions. For instance, in a fax from January 3, 1996, Nicole Meijer from EAM's Rotterdam Project Office shares a statement by Rotterdam artists (lost now) with the curatorial team, of which she explains that

“these seem to be the common local problems generated by such a project. Please, reply at your wish, because you don't have to answer all questions. You can also forward some questions back to the project office. You can give as much or as little information as you please”.<sup>557</sup>

One symbolic reaction to these claims was the inclusion in Manifesta's website of a list of artist initiatives and gallery exhibitions happening simultaneously to Manifesta. The list included address of individual artists' studios, galleries, and artist initiatives.<sup>558</sup> A specific group sought recognition by Manifesta and culture officials by expressing their discontent in public forums and proposing alternative methods for their inclusion in the program. These alternative methods inaugurated what in words of Axel Honneth would be a “culture of compensatory respect” meant to “rectify, through demonstrative stylizations, what they [felt] to be an unjust appraisal of the worth of their collective characteristics”.<sup>559</sup> The following sections describe and analyze the

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<sup>557</sup> Fax from Nicole Meijer to the curatorial team. January 3rd, 1996. Manifesta Foundation Archives, Amsterdam. Accessed on November 2017.

<sup>558</sup> The list is still available today at Manifesta 1's website: <http://m1.manifesta.org/projects.htm> Last consulted on March 15, 2018

<sup>559</sup> Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996) p. 124

initiatives undertaken by members of the local art community to claim their value, with special emphasis on two overlapping projects: NESTWORK and My House: Your Home.

## **NEStWORK.**

In May of 1995, Manifesta organizers held an open meeting announcing the exhibition for the next year. Members of the local art community attended that meeting. Among them was artist Jeanne van Heeswijk, who remembers:

“I wondered how this was all going to take place and what role would be reserved for the artists' community of Rotterdam. Rotterdam has its own history of art events. [...] Was Manifesta 1 to become another traveling art circus, another quickie? [...] Artists have created their own basis in this city by means of exhibitions, exchanges, discussions and collaborative efforts in creating and maintaining spaces to work and think. How should this existing infrastructure relate to Manifesta 1? Would it be possible to give meaning to the idea of being the first host-city for Manifesta beyond merely satisfying the basic need for space and, of course, money? [...] What is the position of the local host when receiving an international platform? How can the international group of artists participating in Manifesta 1 be connected with their Rotterdam colleagues?”<sup>560</sup>

This lengthy quote (that opens this chapter) shows Jeanne van Heeswijk's initial reaction after learning about EAM's plans to organize an exhibition of young European artists in Rotterdam for the next year. It shows her concerns about lack of foreign recognition of the existing local art community, and her interest about the forms that could allow for local artists-foreign artist mutual recognition to take place. But van Heeswijk's reaction was not isolated. In the May 1995 meeting EAM organizers had claimed they wanted to create a sense of community around the exhibition. However, local artists and artist initiatives were only allowed to participate as parallel independent projects.

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<sup>560</sup> “A NESTWORK report from Manifesta 1”, in NESTWORK activities blueprint during Manifesta 1, Rotterdam 1996. Edited by artists Jeanne van Heeswijk. Originally published in Lokaal Europa magazine.



The only effort to acknowledge the desires of local artists to be included in the exhibition happened at the end of the summer 1995, when EAM released a small folder with instructions on how to list independent events in Manifesta's press campaign. Most responses were scattered and took the form of open studios, gallery tours, studio visits, etc. Information about these events circulated in *Lokaal Europa*, a publication produced by Rotterdam artists that only lasted four issues during the Spring and Summer of 1996. In this climate, Jeanne van Heeswijk hoped to provide a more cohesive response to the "exclusiveness of the official Manifesta 1 programme".<sup>561</sup>

NEStWORK was such response. Founded in November 1995 after first learning about plans for Manifesta in the following summer, "NEStWORK [had] the intention to be hospitable, to promote connections and to be a sounding board for the local and international art world". In their words: "Artwork and art activities always take place. But this place of art activity has its own history and identity. This offers possibilities and provides limitations. There must be room to take up space and be able to offer space. The place already exists before the guest arrives".<sup>562</sup>

In addition to van Heeswijk, NEStWORK was formed by artists Karin Arink, Wapke Feenstra, Edwin Jaansen, Menna Laura Meyer, and Kamiel Verschuren, as well as philosopher Ruud Welten. It self defined as an "hospitable group which aims to foster connections and be a sounding board for the local and international art world".<sup>563</sup> The initiative took office in Zaal de Unie, a 1985 replica of 1925 coffee shop by De Stijl architect JJP Oud. Between June 8, 1996 and August, 18 1996 NEStWORK organized forty-three events corresponding to five categories: Portable Art/Local Art, a series of conversations about art; NEStWORK Ad Hoc, a video

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<sup>561</sup> "A NEStWORK report from Manifesta 1", in NEStWORK activities blueprint during Manifesta 1, Rotterdam 1996. Edited by Jeanne van Heeswijk. Originally published in *Lokaal Europa* magazine.

<sup>562</sup> NEStWORK. Press Release. November 1995. Accessed in Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, December 2017.

<sup>563</sup> In an invitation letter sent by NEStWORK to Rotterdam artists. July 4, 1996. Included in NEStWORK activities blueprint during Manifesta 1, Rotterdam 1996. Edited by artists Jeanne van Heeswijk. p. 82

programme about Manifesta; Going Places, a set of tours around Rotterdam; Neighbourhood Rotterdam/NEStWORK City Plan, a map of Rotterdam's art community; and Stratego, a cycle of discussions with artists. It also set up an Information and Documentation Center at the Rotterdam Center for Visual Arts. This space provided Manifesta's audiences with information about artists' initiatives and special events in the Rotterdam art community.

Portable Art/Local Art was a series of conversations about art theory that took place at the café of Zaal de Unie. The discussions followed Rotterdam's philosopher Ruud Welten's theory of portable art and local art, and set the framework for the rest of activities programmed under the NEStWORK umbrella. In these gatherings, facilitators asked participants about their impressions to the possibilities of developing 'local' art. These ideas were made public in a manifesto that Ruud Welten published in the magazine *Lokaal Europa*. Welten describes portable and local art in relation to place. For him, specific artworks can move back and forth between these categories, as they negotiate their engagement with specific settings. According to Welten's theory, culture is always heteronomous. In his words, it “counterbalances 'autonomy', and acts as a critique of the idea of the artist as independent or self-determining”.<sup>564</sup> Participants in these conversations included Samuel Ijsseling, Renée van de Vall, Nathalie Houtermans, Henk Oosterling, Kees Vuijk, and Liesbeth Levy.

For NEStWork Ad Hoc, invited artists, critics, and curators produced eight short documentaries about the works featured in Manifesta 1. The films were led and commented by artist and curator Jason Coburn, the Via-Via group, art consumer Frits Smith, artist Ben Schot, art critic Ineke Schwarts, management consultant and writer Shirley Azimullah, musician and composer Arthur Sauer, and art critic Riki Simons. In them, we see the camera following the guest presenter visiting a selection of Manifesta works. In most of the films presenters also

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<sup>564</sup> “Going places”, in NEStWORK activities blueprint during Manifesta 1, Rotterdam 1996. Edited by artist Jeanne van Heeswijk.

engage in conversations about the pieces with artists, production assistants, and members of the audience. For example, in one video, musician Arthur Sauer tours Witte de With street, center of downtown Rotterdam's urban remodeling. He then walks into Witte de With contemporary arts center, as the camera follows him stairs up to the fourth floor, where he yells *Goedendag!* (Good day!) to a receptionist and enters in a gallery to discuss two large scale paintings by Danish artist Hendrik Plenge Jacobsen. The artworks, featuring big circular shooting targets in rainbow colors, have the text 'Everything is wrong' superimposed on them. Another video shows the artworks of Tracy Mackenna and Joseph Grigely installed in the Villa Alckmaer and commented by Ben Schot: post-its, pens, pencils, paper sheets, tea cups, books, flower bases, desks, and chairs, all necessary materials for the conversation based art works of these two artists.

Every Tuesday evening at 8.30pm, between June 11 and August 13, 1996, Rob Beentjes guided the public to “a large number of locations, unknown places and non-existent worlds”.<sup>565</sup> For over two hours, “the idea of 'place' [would] be mapped out in varied and entertaining ways”.<sup>566</sup> Each iteration took a different form and featured guest speakers. For example, in June 11, the 'Museum of the Banal' was “an evening looking at the charm of 'ugly' and 'everyday' places”. Three speakers came to this iteration: curator of the Chip Hut Museum Paul Ilegems gave a lecture on Belgian chip huts, designer Tom Matton presented on “strange situations that [...] set you thinking”, and journalist Rob Sijmons used photographs by Wout Berger to show members of the audience some of the Netherlands most toxic landscapes. 'Invisible Cities' (June 18) addressed the relationships between existing cities and their mythical representations. Some cities discussed were heavenly Jerusalem and real Jerusalem, Paris,

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<sup>565</sup> “Going places”, in NESTWORK activities blueprint during Manifesta 1, Rotterdam 1996. Edited by artist Jeanne van Heeswijk, p. 58

<sup>566</sup> “Going places”, in NESTWORK activities blueprint during Manifesta 1, Rotterdam 1996. Edited by artist Jeanne van Heeswijk, p. 58

Rome, and New York. 'A Flat Existence' (June 25) was devoted to regions unacknowledged in maps such as deserts and ocean valleys. Guest speakers included a desert nomad and author, a speleologist, an aviation expert, and a deep-sea biologist. 'Synthetic Cities' (July 2), promised to "enter the world of speed, realism, violence and interactive user-convenience" by exploring computer designed spaces. The evening include the showcasing of the software DOOM and the showing of CD-ROMS "which the public [would] later be able to explore themselves". Stories told in 'From Micro to Macro Landscapes' (July 9) were accompanied by stereoscopic slides of fantasy photographer Wim van Engold and artist P.H. Connaughton. Archaeologist W.H. Metz and geographer Roel Sneider showed images of archaeological sites and the inside of the Earth. 'The Cell' (July 16) was an evening devoted to discussing "the charm of imprisonment". Presentations by artist Alicia Framis, criminologist Herman Franke, and psychologist Hans van de Sande prompted discussions about solitary confinement with the audience. The evenign of July 23 was devoted to exploring Spokania, a remote archipelago-nation not know to many. During the gathering, participants learned about the country's music, beer industry, and language. The meeting titled 'The Stretchable City' (July 30) was devoted to discussing suburbs. It included a conversation with designer Lucas Verweij and discussion of an interview with author Robert Vernooy. On August 6, 'The Private Domain' explored the "confusing territory" of one's body space as defined by cultural and individual boundaries. Guest presenters included Arjen Mulder, who spoke about sensory deprivation tanks, artist Karin Arink, and publicist Karin Spaink. The last meeting (August 13) was titled 'Tour du Monde/The Grand Tour'. It sought to "seduce and stimulate the audience with an excess of unknown stories and smells in order to take them to the furthest reaches of thought and taste". Presentations featured a talk by philosopher Elsbeth Brouwer on paradises and utopias, stories by Josien Laurier, an exposition on Dutch 18th Century fantastic travel stories by historian Marleen de Vries, and discussions on the mutability of the kitchen through history by food sociologist Anneke van

Otterloo. The Going Places series closed that evening with a dinner of world foods prepared by Zaal de Unie chef Rien van der Waa.

The last project initiated by NESTWORK was Neighbourhood Rotterdam. NESTWORK City Plan: a map that showed Rotterdam's downtown and the Southern district of Charlois. It included nine landmarks that provided views of the city, participating institutes in Manifesta 1, NESTWORK projects, projects related to Manifesta 1 (individual artists and artists initiatives), galleries with a program related to Manifesta 1, other galleries, artists initiatives, and studio buildings. NESTWORK produced 10,000 copies, of which 500 had no street names on them. The latter were distributed among eighty artists living in Rotterdam or who had spent some time working in the city, who would intervene the maps, and send them back with comments about the city. Responses from foreign artists included, for instance, that of Sylvie Reno, who lived in Marseille but did an artist residence in Rotterdamse Kunststichting in 1995; Ari Gold, a nomad between Los Angeles, New Mexico, and San Francisco, was in Rotterdam intermittently between 1991 and 1996 and wrote "please don't tear down the old cinema-houses"; and Karlos Lydon, from London, who was in Rotterdam during the summer of 1995, "recovering from broken heart, making art". The purpose of this map was to visibilize parts of Rotterdam left out by Manifesta organizers in their planning of the exhibition's distribution over Rotterdam. NESTWORK artists hoped to provide international participants in Manifesta and tourists with a representation of the local produced from the local, thus correcting an image of Rotterdam produced by Manifesta that, in their opinion, "[invisibilized] some aspects that give the city its character and shape its cultural climate".<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>567</sup> In an invitation letter sent by NESTWORK to Rotterdam artists. July 4, 1996. Included in NESTWORK activities blueprint during Manifesta 1, Rotterdam 1996. Edited by artists Jeanne van Heeswijk. p. 82

All these initiatives materialized NEStWORK's willingness to welcome foreign visitors into their city with an attitude of hospitality and receptiveness. This perspective is summarized in the following words by Jeanne van Heeswijk:

“In a period when nomadism and traveling art circuses are being welcomed as an important quickie, NEStWORK wants to focus attention on the place where work is done. Occupying space and offering space is a form of reciprocity between guest and host. [...] Space is not a blank page. Every space -and therefore also the space of the art work and the artistic activity- has its own history. [...] At Manifesta 1 NEStWORK will be linking the stories of people from here with the stories of the guests”.<sup>568</sup>

### **My House: Your Home**

Some months before the opening of Manifesta in June 1996, Manifesta organizers delivered a letter to selected artists that came from a third-party until then unknown to them. The document was signed by fourteen artists from the B.A.D. Foundation, a squat art center in a former public school in Oud-Charlois, a majoritarian working class and immigrant district South of the Mosa River and within walking distance to port facilities.<sup>569</sup> Although working in relative autonomy, this group was involved in most of NEStWORK activities described above. Members of the B.A.D. Foundation, who did not know yet who would the artists featured in Manifesta be, disagreed with how the organization planned to address the topics articulating the exhibition: the “dramatic division between culture and nature”, “migration and nomadism”, “cultural diversity”, and “the role of media” in these processes.<sup>570</sup> More, they wanted to

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<sup>568</sup> “NEStWORK Announcement”, in NEStWORK activities blueprint during Manifesta 1, Rotterdam 1996. Edited by artists Jeanne van Heeswijk. Originally published in *Lokaal Europa* magazine.

<sup>569</sup> The B.A.D. Foundation began in 1988, when its members were students in the Rotterdam Academy of Art. Its first headquarters were a bath house (hence their name, *bad* is *bath* in Dutch), and later moved to an empty bank building and a factory, to end in their current location, the empty public school Rijnmond-Zuid, in 1991. The foundation is still active and in the same venue. The building featured eighteen studios, of which four are for guest artists, a gym, a kitchen, a project room, and a multi-purpose central hall. It now also includes a gallery that was not available in 1996. For more on the present state of B.A.D. Foundation, see chapter 5.

<sup>570</sup> Quoted from Invitation letter signed by Stichting B.A.D. Ateliers & Projectruimten. Un-dated. Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art archives. Consulted on December, 2017.

contribute to shaping “Rotterdam's role as the host to the venue of Manifesta 1”.<sup>571</sup> and hoped to subvert the passive role of local audiences by fostering “exchange and discussion on a visual level and in a direct way”.<sup>572</sup>

In order to achieve this, the B.A.D. Foundation invited Manifesta artists to live in their building during their time in Rotterdam. They proposed to build one 'dwelling' for each guest artist inside each studio. To construct this 'dwelling' space they proposed a process of collaboration in three stages: first, each guest artist would send ideas about what they wanted their 'dwelling' space to look like. After, a host artist from B.A.D. would interpret these guidelines and produce an intermediate form. Last, when guest artists arrived to Rotterdam, together they would finalize the space and get it ready to be inhabited. B.A.D. Foundation artists explained that “through this gesture of hospitality you will be able to learn more about the artists working in Rotterdam and about Rotterdam itself [...] Construction and placing in our building should give visual expression to the maker's personal idea of hospitality and his/her views on living/dwelling/being”.<sup>573</sup> In addition to the 'dwellings', the main building would feature “common rooms” and “spaces for projects and discussion”. In the evenings, collaboratively cooked meals (everybody was expected to participate in the cooking) and other events would help everyone “get to know each other”, “hopefully leading to culinary exchanges and informal contacts”.<sup>574</sup> Some events planned were an Introduction Evening, a Mystery Tour of Rotterdam (this event was co-organized with NESTWORK and took place in the BADmobile, a van rented for the occasion), and a closing party when all 'dwellings' would be open to be visited by the outside public. Manifesta assistant curator Jason Coburn, who also participated in My House: Your Home, wrote in his diary:

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<sup>571</sup> Quoted from Invitation letter signed by Stichting B.A.D. Ateliers & Projectruimten.

<sup>572</sup> Quoted from Invitation letter signed by Stichting B.A.D. Ateliers & Projectruimten.

<sup>573</sup> Quoted from Invitation letter signed by Stichting B.A.D. Ateliers & Projectruimten.

<sup>574</sup> Quoted from Invitation letter signed by Stichting B.A.D. Ateliers & Projectruimten.

“Today about 35 of us went on a mystery tour as part of the My House: Your Home project. Drove along scenic roads, ended up at the Slufter beach and after watching the sun set we all enjoyed a supper of salmon, gambas, eel, trout, salad, pasta, and champagne. Martin and Laurien cooked for Holland. Tomorrow should be fun as I am assisting Andrew Renton for the day”.<sup>575</sup>

This model of hospitality is of special interest to our case study because it provided a formal recognition framework to mediate in the encounter between foreign artists in Manifesta and the human, cultural, and physical specificity of Rotterdam. My House: Your Home introduced in the peripheries of Manifesta a temporary symmetrical space of recognition between local and foreign artists, where they could sympathize with others' work and world-views, regardless of their inclusion or not in the Manifesta selection and the consequential legitimization of their practice. Returning to Honneth's model of solidarity, the temporary community forged around My House: Your Home was a form of collective resistance to Manifesta's top-down representation of Rotterdam.<sup>576</sup> These social relations grew outside of Manifesta's program and constituted, for many of the foreign participants, the most valuable part of their experience in Rotterdam.

It also shows that a dialogical approach to design and conviviality informed NESTWORK's and BAD Foundation's efforts to root the experience of foreign artists in the local. The model of dialogical aesthetics that Grant Kester proposes emphasizes the process of communication constitutive of artworks over the resulting physical objects. In this model, communication between co-participants in the artwork obeys their desire for empathy with the other. While participants in the communicative exchange often come from different social positions, it is via empathy-driven exchanges that common knowledge situated in the specificity of their commonality can be achieved. Kester's dialogical aesthetics model is informed by his readings

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<sup>575</sup> Extract from Jason Coburn's Manifesta Travelogue. “Extracting the Human”, in a booklet from Kamiel Verschuren personal archive. Consulted on December, 2017.

<sup>576</sup> For more on solidarity as resistance to political oppression, see Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996)



of Mary Field Belensky's feminist theory of 'connected learning' and Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogical experience'. 'Connected learning' is a form of knowledge that aims to recognize and situate the other in their social conditions, building what Kester calls "empathetic identification" together.<sup>577</sup> Relatedly, the collaborative interactions of Bahktin's 'dialogical experience' lead to unforeseen forms of subjectivity. All instances of conviviality, collaborative design, and collaborative mapping initiated by NEStWORK and the BAD Foundation shared these intentions.

Due to the nature of the collaborative design process behind them, all 'dwellings' were different. One 'dwelling' was a house-shaped wooden form built on the outside of the building's second floor's facade. This one, by host artist Judith Schoneveld, featured two square windows of approximately 1m. per side in the front side, and a smaller square window on the side. The structure stuck 1,5 m. outside the building, and it still is there to this day. A third, and more minimal, structure had walls made of clean canvas, stretched on wood frames, letting light come through. Inside, a single bed, a tv monitor, and a desk. The walls in this structure built in the studio of Bibo opened up coming down to the floor on a 90° angle, and could be closed at night for privacy. Others had wood walls forming spaces following the space distribution of small apartments: with one room, a living room, and a small entrance. Another 'dwelling' had four single beds, and proposed a less individualistic approach to cohabitation. Pictures show a group of four men talking from their beds at night, with bath towels hanging from the bed frames. My favorite one was the 'dwelling' built by B.A.D. artist Martin Brenninkmeijer to host U.S. artist Joseph Grigely (the only U.S. artist in Manifesta 1): a pair of two house-shaped greenhouses located in the back garden of the building. Grigely used one as studio and the other as living space. Photographs show the two structures surrounded by tall lush green grass and trees, with white walls and translucent glass window ceilings. In his travelogue, Jason Coburn wrote:

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<sup>577</sup> Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) p. 113.

“I was invited by Aletta de Jong, whose studio was unoccupied, to take her place. The house is a cube that occupies the centre of her studio and it is constructed from grey metal shelving units which have been packed with stuff from Aletta's studio. A gap in one of the cube walls allows access to a modest room which has a bed and a desk, these have also been constructed from shelving. Several empty shelves have been reserved for me to put my belongings. What I have is a room within a room - the inner being dense and concentrated, whilst the outer one is sparse and light. I have returned early so I can enjoy the unique atmosphere that comes with this wonderful space”.<sup>578</sup>

While the encounter with the local scene that Manifesta facilitated to guest artists was limited to events organized at the nine collaborating art institutions, BAD and NESTWORK provided a type of experience that, albeit also mediated, built from meaningful interpersonal bonds forged in different forms of conviviality. (The bond between Coburn and de Jong was so strong that they married soon after that summer and Coburn has remained in Rotterdam since.) Further, Manifesta artist Joseph Grigely wrote in a fax from his studio in New Jersey after the experience that:

“By converting their studios into houses for the visiting artists of Manifesta, the artists of Bad quietly but effectively articulated the principal theme of the exhibition, and did so in a way that most art did not do. And Stichting Bad did this by emphasizing the importance of the process of transnational exchanges –exchanges that involved words, ideas, gestures, actions, and ultimately homes”.<sup>579</sup>

Manifesta curator Andrew Renton went on to affirm that:

“The initiatives at NeSTWORK and BAD made that possible. [...] this initiative is singled out by other organizers as one of the most positive and beneficial elements in this 'new' concept of international exhibition making. I really begin to see it as a model for other projects elsewhere”.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Extract from Jason Coburn's Manifesta Travelogue. “Extracting the Human”, in a booklet from Kamiel Verschuren's personal archive. Consulted on December, 2017.

<sup>579</sup> See fax by Joseph Grigely to BAD Foundation. New Jersey, July 29th, 1996. In a booklet from Kamiel Verschuren's personal archive. Consulted on December, 2017.

<sup>580</sup> Letter by Andrew Renton to BAD Foundation. August 2nd, 1996. In a booklet from Kamiel Verschuren's personal archive. Consulted on December, 2017.

His words show how the curators incorporated, after the fact, both initiatives into their new concept of international exhibition making. Further, they show how the EAM's interest in aiding cooperation between European nations permeated the organization's approach to curatorial work. For example, a January 1996 memo about next steps to take in early 1996 explains in relation to the selection of artists from Austria that "It would not harm the diplomatic relations if Hans Ulrich Obrist would pay a visit to the Ministry, Mr. Joseph Secky to explain a little bit about the choice of the artists and the exhibition as a whole". Hans Ulrich Obrist was, at the time, a rising name in the international curatorial sphere; today, he is one of the most powerful art curators in the world.

## **Conclusion.**

This chapter shows how Manifesta participated in the formation of a new identity of Europeanness aligned with the political unification goals of the European Union. Further, I have argued that Manifesta's international ambitions overlooked the presence of a local art scene in Rotterdam, replicating the more general failure of cultural tourism to provide truthful representations of the local to international audiences. To close, I show how, in response to the organization's initial blindness, members of the local arts community developed forms of conviviality to welcome Manifesta artists into their city that were ultimately coopted by Manifesta and incorporated into the art biennial standard.

To achieve this, I first show that the organization's goal of redefining European contemporary arts obeyed long-held ideals of supranational unification by Western European elites, and fit the new policy framework of the Maastricht Treaty (1992). This goal aligned as well with mid-1990s trends of cultural tourism promotion to foster urban regeneration. Second,

this chapter analyzed the forms of curatorial labor at play in the design and installation of Manifesta. In this section, I discussed the conflicts that arose by subjecting contemporary art from Eastern Europe to Western avant-garde exhibition conventions. Last, this chapter looked in detail at two ad hoc responses by Rotterdam's art community to Manifesta: the projects NesNETWORK and My House/Your Home. In this section I argue that it is thanks to these two last efforts that Manifesta succeeded in situating the exhibition in the specificity of Rotterdam's social fabric.

NesNETWORK and My House/Your Home were articulated around forms of hospitality and resource sharing that inaugurated a framework of mutual recognition in which local and foreign artists developed nuanced understandings of each other and the city. Empirical material points to the fact that it was only under the activities and encounters facilitated by these two projects that the goals of European conciliation and cross-cultural collaboration behind Manifesta took place. While Manifesta's organization proposed a conciliatory framework akin to Jurgen Habermas's concept of the "bourgeois public sphere", the local art community opened instead a space of mutual recognition based on relationships of friendship and practices of solidarity between agents driven by the pursuit of empathy.

On the long term, Manifesta has successfully reinforced Western Europe's cultural hegemony in the continent. However, the initial curatorial position was unable to address the local and trans-national ambitions of the project. Instead, they incorporated the approaches designed by local artists into their official program. The exhibition has since incorporated in its programming projects similar to NESTWORK and My House: Your Home in an effort to connect with local art communities of its host cities. I remember, for example, participating in their locally-oriented section Parallel Events as a local artist in their iteration in Murcia, Spain, in December 2010. However, the institutionalization of these ad hoc practices of solidarity often

tames the sincerity and freshness that characterize encounters between individuals in a pre-institutional stage, often driven by blind mutual trust instead of by the acquisition of extra human and cultural capital. In coherence with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1, the biennial's incorporation of these empathy-driven practices of solidarity and recognition into its corpus is an instance of primitive accumulation necessary for the expansion and consolidation of the global contemporary art industry since the 1990s. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this dissertation show other instances in which local forms of solidarity and recognition from Havana and the US/Mexico borderlands have been incorporated into the contemporary art biennial form.

## CONCLUSION

In his 1983 book *How New York Stole the Idea of the Avant-Garde*, art historian Serge Guilbaut showed how abstract expressionism was, not unlike other art styles through history, a product of its epoch's sociopolitical formations and cultural space.<sup>581</sup> Guilbaut's work overturned the presumption of autonomy from other fields of the social that had been granted to the avant-garde by the art institution of the time. His analysis showed how, in the construction of this modern notion of autonomy, critics such as Clement Greenberg and museums like the Museum of Modern Art in New York translated to the field of the aesthetic ideals of freedom and democracy from the US state ideology, aiding thus the nation's efforts to solidify its international influence during the Cold War period.

Almost twenty years later, art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh opened the introduction to his collection of essays *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry. Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* with a question: "to what extent can [the criteria upholding assumptions of national specificity for avant-garde art] be detached from the political–ideological agenda of the European nations and the US in the period of European reconstruction and the formation of a specifically American neo-avant-garde?"<sup>582</sup> Both authors foregrounded the service paid by different avant-garde formations to nation building and imperial growth. They also questioned art history's disciplinary reluctance to engage with the broader social processes surrounding art production. While these two authors differ on points as key as their working notions and temporalizations of the avant-garde, their methodological approach to art historical criticism, and their relative independence to the same forces that, in

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<sup>581</sup> Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983)

<sup>582</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry. Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000). p. xix

the past, upheld the very idea of art's autonomy, their writings share the commitment to shed light on the intricate bonds between political and aesthetic hegemony.

With this dissertation I have tried to answer similar questions as they apply to a time period and aesthetic style closer to us in time. My hope has been to explain how the production of 'global contemporary art' as the 1990s international avant-garde mirrored needs of political and economic elites to advance their class agendas at times of planet-wide geopolitical change. The new form of the art biennial developed to become the institutional scenario for the emergence of this new art style. My analysis looks into these processes in the specificity of sites as different as Havana, the US/Mexico borderlands, and Rotterdam, where the symbiosis between 'global contemporary art' and the coming to being of new political classes in them signs to the pervasive dependency that political power has on culture as a tool for the organization of consent.

Each chapter of this dissertation analyzes how forms of social reciprocity that were endemic to Havana, Tijuana, San Diego, and Rotterdam entered the corpus of international exhibition making in ways that strengthened the repertoire of an expanding global art industry. I argue that the aesthetic forms, organizational practices, and discourses of collaboration that characterized these art biennials both depended on but also ultimately co-opted local forms of solidarity in order to extend the growing global art industry into these regions. These outbound transfers of social and cultural knowledge were accomplished alongside the import of the Western neo-avant-garde canon, thus modifying autochthonous aesthetic traditions. In these exchanges, aesthetic forms from nations of the Non-Aligned Bloc, Mexico, and former Soviet Europe came to integrate the artistic repertoire of what we now identify as 'global contemporary art'. In my analysis I also show how these processes of cultural incorporation serviced three

different supranational political projects: European unification after the Cold War, the creation of NAFTA, and Cuba's attempts to spearhead Third World international solidarity.

In chapter 1 I laid the historical and theoretical conditions of the contemporary art biennial, an exhibition type that inherits the ambitions of 19<sup>th</sup> Century international expositions to fabricate universalizing narratives of world order and actualizes them in the context of post Cold War expansion of neoliberalism as dominant ideology across the globe. Art biennials are an institutional form that helped develop new standards in the field of cultural and heritage production. Aided by the rich support of European nations and the US, these professional standards were soon exported and incorporated in many localities across the planet. In this chapter I argue that key in the incorporation of Western standards of practice outside the West are actors positioned in the industry as translators of Western ideas of art and cultural difference to local cultural codes and values. I analyze art curators' protagonism in this transfer via Antonio Gramsci's theory of the organic intellectual. Colonization begins in the metropolis, yet takes root thanks to the brokering of locals who aspire to access global networks of circulation and value production, while gaining convertible capital in the transaction.

In the following chapters I test the model against the specific circumstances of Third World socialism in Cuba, neoliberal border spanning in San Diego and Tijuana, and identity driven social democracy in the European Union. A recurring tension, regardless of the political formation in question, was the incompatibility between already existing local values and the goals of those aspiring to belong to a global cosmopolitan class in formation. In Cuba (chapter 2), this conflict manifested very clearly once the nation's economy entered a longstanding period of crisis in the early 1990s. What until then had been an art biennial focused in advertising the inherently collaborative nature of cultural production in Cuba to international audiences, soon changed to act as an export channel of individual Cuban artists to the



international art market, as well as an opportunity to foster niche cultural tourism in the island. At the border between San Diego and Tijuana (chapter 3), centuries long contested performances of state sovereignty by both the Mexican and the US state led to inSITE, a cultural border spanning venture that sought to celebrate bi-national collaboration in trade and manufacturing. Reproducing the classed bias of its organizers, inSITE occluded in its representation of site the complex forms in which state sovereignty also acts as state violence against disenfranchised sectors of the population. Instead, the festival succeeded in incorporating elements from these sectors' cultural repertoire into 'border art', a new category of site-specific art that claimed to be able to disclose the essential features of the region to international audiences. In 1996 Rotterdam hosted the first iteration of Manifesta (chapter 4), a "pan-European biennial" that came to satisfy to the agenda of cultural integration upon which the promise of political unification has relied since the Treaty of Maastricht (1992). Hoping to produce a new style of contemporary European art, Manifesta joined curators and artists from Western and Eastern Europe, and received sponsorship from national and supranational governments, as well as from a number of private sector donors. In its attempt to represent a shared European identity via contemporary art, Manifesta reproduced longstanding cultural prejudices in Western Europe against the East, and ignored the existence of a rich fabric of local art practitioners in its host city. While Manifesta has since developed very sophisticated tactics to incorporate aesthetic diversity and local culture into its representations, through its history it has worked as a city branding tool that has solidified already existing discrepancies between cultural elites and grassroots cultural producers.

The above described problems to conciliate moral and cultural frameworks from within and outside these sites point to the power of avant-garde art to re-imagine aspects of the social. Like most prior avant-garde formations, the production of 'global contemporary art' as an art

style that overcame the representational limits of former avant-garde forms, relied on the incorporation into its registers of aspects of everyday lived experience that were originally external to it. Like I show in the three historical chapters of this study, forms of reciprocity that problematized the Western liberal art institution entered the registers of 'global contemporary art' – both nominally and methodologically – often loosing their original social purpose and as indexes of 'global contemporary art's' original link with place. For instance, labor practices ideated within Cuban socialism as emancipatory escape routes away from capitalist alienation made their way into 'global contemporary art' projects, loosing their practiced political potential yet enriching the registers of how labor can be represented for global art audiences. Similarly, conviviality solutions designed by Rotterdam squatter communities as ways to resist urban gentrification were ultimately added to Manifesta's structure as peripheral anchors between the exhibition and the city. These and many other instances described in this dissertation prove the potential of the avant-garde logic to bracket, first, and then neutralize potentially conflicting aspects of the social.

I propose that we see art biennials as living history monuments: they confuse reality and performance for foreign audiences and help, again, sustain the tourist fantasy of access to authentic local life following the script that is of interest to organizers. I agree with Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's argument about site-specific art, as it applies to the logic of art biennials. For her, site-specific art inhabits the conflicted middle-grounds between "real environments of memory", where historical memory is shared and sustained through everyday life, and "official sites of memory", such as museums and monuments, which uphold fixed historical narratives. When big organizational productions such as an art biennial follow this logic, the official production of history becomes a very sophisticated one.

I argue that art biennials are monuments to the victories of a global cosmopolitan elite that came to be during the 1990s. They coopt popular cultural forms to build consensus around the status quo, crafting sophisticated spectacles of material culture and lived local difference. They achieve so by bracketing aspects of social life in their regions as inherently *different*, leveraging their sites' visibility in an increasingly competitive world map. Unfortunately, their methods make local social life available to today's market-reliant globalization of culture.

I want to end this conclusion with a set of open questions on the future of art institutions and avant-garde exhibition forms. The three case studies that I have engaged with describe an era during which the growing faith on the potential of market-reliant cosmopolitanism to pacify the planet led to the expansion and consolidation of a cosmopolitan neoliberal elite during the 1990s and 2000s. However, times have changed. As I mention in the introduction to this study, simultaneous resurgences of autocratic nationalisms in the last decade threaten the stability of supranational treaties such as NAFTA, the European Union, and the now weak Non-Aligned Bloc. What art institutional model will mirror the increasing importance of nationalism in the years to come? Given that today it is not against the state but against corporations where battles for governance and sovereignty take place, what institutions will substitute the national museum and the art biennial as the scenarios for heritage production? What will the autocratic counterpart to art biennials' cosmopolitanism look like? What new professional standards will it produce and through which networks will they circulate –if they do, at all?

These and other related questions will materialize in future writings in the years to come. Today, I am tired and I long to put an end to what has been a fruitful and joyful process of dissertation research and writing.

Onward.

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