

## FROM THE EDITORS

The current issue of the journal ties together several threads that run across our contemporary “geography of art,” entangling territories and themes once divided by ideological and political barriers. Three articles, an exhibition review, a Document section, and an Artist Project all direct our attention to certain tendencies in late-20th/early-21st-century art, culture, and politics: from Cold War networks of anticapitalist solidarity between the Soviet Union, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, to connections and convergences situated both within and beyond the major centers of the Western post-World War II neo-avant-gardes (Paris, New York, and Buenos Aires). Fast-forwarding to the present, we then look at some of the more recent forms of cultural production in Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) and Africa (Senegal), and conclude with an aesthetic meditation offered by Berlin-based artist Vadim Zakharov.

In her article “On Impossibility: Finding Vietnam in a Jordanian-Soviet Film Archive,” Brynn Hatton relates her adventures during a research trip in the Middle East. Responding to a call to assist in deciphering a multilingual film archive in Jordan, and having been suddenly denied access to this archive, Hatton zooms out of the “unsuccessful” mission in order to take a different view of her object of study. She turns the “denied archive access” into a new presence by engaging with a contemporary film addressing the same topic. Through Oraib

Toukan and Ala Younis's found-footage project *From the Impossibility of One Page Being Like the Other* (2013), Hatton provides a brief cultural history of an international network of solidarity formed in the context of anti-American and anti-Israeli resistance in Southeast Asia and the pro-Palestinian Middle East during the 1960s and 1970s. Hatton throws light on the role of culture in this and other Third Worldist movements (encouraged, supported, or used by the USSR), suggesting that "Vietnam" once served as a symbol of political and cinematic struggle in the Middle East and in other regions of the world.

Michaëla de Lacaze Mohrmann's "Marta Minujín's Destructive Intervention into Happenings and Nouveau Réalisme" steps into the "other" side of the former Cold War divide. She takes up Argentinian artist Marta Minujín's happening *The Destruction* in order to draw attention to certain contradictions or tensions that existed during the 1960s in the cultural dialogue between Buenos Aires and Paris and/or the United States. De Lacaze Mohrmann uses Minujín as a critical lens to explore French Nouveau Réalisme and the American neo-avant-garde, insisting that Minujín's work calls into question key concepts of Western "progressive" art at the time, including authorship, authority, ritualism, and authenticity. Referring to well-known Western art historical figures (from Allan Kaprow to Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean-Jacques Lebel), de Lacaze Mohrmann argues that Minujín's journeys and happenings at the time may help us see "canonical" Western names and art practices—produced under capitalist conditions—in a new light.

In his article entitled "Curating as (Expanded) Art History in Southeast Asia: Recent Independent Projects in Ho Chi Minh City, Luang Prabang, and Phnom Penh," Roger Nelson takes us back to Southeast Asia. The author draws attention to a new format of independent curatorial practices that has evolved in this region over the past decade. Nelson argues that independent curatorial projects have been fulfilling a new function, namely that of art historical research. He explains the new tendency through attention to various factors: from the urge to decenter global cultural hierarchies, to responding to the process of dehistoricization at universities and in mainstream museums, to the subversion of current center-periphery modes of cultural production dominated by wealthier nations. What the author calls "curating as (expanded) art history" is then illustrated through a series of case studies of exhibitions organized over the past years in Ho Chi

Minh City (Vietnam), Luang Prabang (Laos), and Phnom Penh (Cambodia). Nelson's article articulates in concrete terms a propensity unfolding within the global "geography of art."

The Document, Review, and Artist Project grapple with issues similar to those outlined in the articles. Terry Smith introduces a rare document by the Greek art historian Nicos Hadjinicolaou (b. 1938), entitled "Art Centers and Peripheral Art." First presented as a lecture in Hamburg in 1982, this text draws our attention to the geography of art history and to the question of how to look at art through the critical, and often ignored or bypassed, relationship between cultural centers and cultural peripheries. Hadjinicolaou poses a question typical of art historians: how and why does artistic form change? He attempts to respond by reflecting on the problem of center and periphery. His lecture envisions a future when this relationship would be reversed, with the cultural position of the periphery now being prioritized (a challenge perhaps to forms of logocentrism or binary thinking that would interpret such a move in terms of the transformation of peripheries into centers and centers into peripheries, with all the ensuing consequences).

The problem of center and periphery returns in Sophia Powers's review article "Agitated Together Again: The Laboratoire Agit'Art at Dak'art's 13th Biennale." The article focuses on what the author argues was the highlight of the 13th Dak'art Biennale: the exhibition *La Cloche des Fourmis* (The Bell of the Ants) by the art collective Laboratoire Agit'Art (Laboratory of Agitation Art). In some way, this review indirectly offers a commentary on Hadjinicolaou's Document, suggesting that since 1982, the relations between center and periphery have not changed much as they pertain to the "geography of art," and that the former binaries and contradictions endure under a new ideological veil. What Hadjinicolaou called Euro-American centrism is now instantiated by the Euro-American cultural foundations that are still funding, presenting, discussing, categorizing (as does this journal), and generally constructing "contemporary African art" for a global audience.

The Project—by the Berlin-based Russian conceptual artist Vadim Zakharov and entitled "ICONS OF HELL. 7 dictators, 700 portraits, 7 pages"—ties the different threads of this issue together. Zakharov has chosen to superimpose images of infamous dictators onto each other until the "portraits" turn into a black spot of "emptiness," echoing a major aesthetic strategy of Moscow Conceptualism. One might say that

Zakharov applies a late socialist aesthetic device—built from prolonged aesthetic meditations, or merging with the object during practices of intense artistic concentration—to address the enduring contradictions of time, such as center and periphery, freedom and unfreedom, power and limitation. The result is perhaps symptomatic of our “contemporaneity,” in which the economic, military, and political divisions of the past (between East and West, communism and capitalism, or the “second,” “third,” and “first” worlds) have been subsumed under or canceled by the empty promise of liberty, or capitalist freedom.