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Condensing Vestiges of *Past Futures* in the Post-Peripheries: Artistic Engagement with Post-Colonial and Post-Authoritarian Contexts.

Past Futures

In the 1970s, the German philosopher Reinhart Koselleck, one of the founders of conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) – which promotes historical analysis outside of nation-state history-telling – placed emphasis on a wider understanding of historical time and space, and their contribution to the production of historical meaning. In his book *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* he develops his idea of a multitude of historical times, which is placed in opposition to the concept of a singular linear time of historiography (Koselleck 1979). In his publication *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, which complements the idea of historical times developed in the *Past Future*, Koselleck argues, that a historian who “is dealing with stories (*Geschichten*), cannot do without imaginative spatial metaphors” (Koselleck 2012 [2000], 3). Abandoning the idea of the linear development of history, the philosopher references a geological metaphor in which the layers of time (*Zeitschichten*) follow the pattern of geological layers, which are piled up, stratified, and interpenetrating, in order to create the complicated fabric of history. Koselleck raises the issue of the simultaneity of events that “in both diachronic and synchronic aspects come from completely heterogeneous life contexts” (Koselleck 2012 [2000], 3). The philosopher emphasizes not only the phenomenon of the temporary cyclicity and repetition of certain events, but also draws attention to the complementation of past events through future and contemporary happenings, which, thanks to this specification, are permanently contemporaneous. The work of a historian is, as Koselleck notes, similar to the task of a geologist, who digs through subsequent layers of soil to recreate a cross-sectional image of a given fragment of history.

The geological plie

Numerous artistic projects created in post-authoritarian and post-colonial contexts could be described by means of the Reinhart Koselleck’s concept of the geological plie, characterized by its multi-temporality and multi-semanticity and its accumulation of historical times and meanings in one site, place, or artwork. By discussing the visual equivalent of the processes of privatization in East European economies after the collapse of the Communism, the

Russian thinker Boris Groys provided in 2008 an analysis of artworks made by Russian Sots Art artists. As Groys claimed, the artists applied a “strategy of rigorous inclusion” in their art, creating images of “an artistic idyll in which symbols, images and texts perceived as irreconcilable in the political reality of the Cold War could live in peaceful coexistence” (Groys 2008, 165-172).

Carrying Groys’ argument further, we can state that art created in non-Western contexts is submitted to processes not only of total inclusion, but also total condensation. When Soviet and American Capitalist propaganda are distinguishable – as embodied the love affair between Joseph Stalin and Marilyn Monroe depicted in the images of another Sots Art artist Leonid Sokov (*Stalin and Marilyn*, 1986), who reveals the complementarity of both propaganda discourses – in artworks created in other non-Western geographies, the binaries of male/female, black/white, Capitalist/Communist are totally blurred. Moreover, works such as *Russian Salad*, painted in 1983 by two Argentinian artists, Guillermo Kuitca and Alfredo Prior, depicting Adolf Hitler, Jesus Christ, Abraham Lincoln, Joseph Stalin (as portrayed by Pablo Picasso in 1953) and a black-skinned male figure known from Sugus candies sitting at one table and sharing a meal (Usubiaga 2012, 148-149), shows not the binarity of the Cold War divide, but its heterogeneous multi-directionality. In the three cases analysed below, images created by the Pole Marek Sobczyk and the Angolan Kiluanji Kia Henda, conflictual reality and discursiveness are incarnated by a single human figure in a single image. The representations produced by these artists, which are intended as responses to local socio-political and historical situations, cannot be described in terms of an “ideological reconciliation”, “peaceful universalism”, or “idyllic utopia beyond any struggle”, as specified by Groys (Groys 2008, 165-172), but rather by a radicalized ideological confusion.



Fig.1 Guillermo Kuitca and Alfredo Prior, *Ensalada rusa* (1983). Mixed media on paper. (Photograph by Daniel Trama.)

The oil on canvas *Ganja* (14 December 1981) by Marek Sobczyk portrays General Wojciech Jaruzelski, responsible for the proclamation of Martial Law in Poland on December 13, 1981 (Sobczyk 2020). This image was constructed through the use of three patterns of representation, derived not only from Eastern Europe and Latin America, but also from Africa. Jaruzelski, who in Sobczyk's image is wearing his characteristic dark glasses, is depicted in a green suit characteristic of official portraits of a socialist country's dignitaries, such as images of Joseph Stalin in a military uniform or Mao Zedong wearing a green cotton twill suit. Jaruzelski is depicted with a thick cigar in his mouth, evoking connotations with numerous images of Ernesto Che Guevara, an Argentine revolutionary and major figure in the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959), smoking Cuban cigars. Jaruzelski's image also alludes to Rastafari culture. Not only is the background of Sobczyk's painting an inverted flag of the Rastafari movement, its title suggests that the cigar contains marihuana. The figure of the general himself could be associated with the images of Bob Marley smoking a joint. Sobczyk's painting seems close to the artistic creations of Russian artists from the 1970s. Nevertheless, his "radicalized utopian inclusivity", to use Groys's term (Groys 2008, 165-

172), concerns all variants of communism, not only those of East Europe and Latin America, but also African variants; the background of Sobczyk's picture resembles the flag of Ghana, designed and adopted in 1957. In this way, Sobczyk seems to establish a parallel between Wojciech Jaruzelski and Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first prime minister and president between 1957 and 1966, an advocate of Pan-Africanism, declared "scientific socialist and Marxist", and co-founder of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Belgrade in 1961, who visited Poland the same year.



Fig. 2 Marek Sobczyk, "Gandzia, [14 grudnia 1981] / Ganja [14 December 1981] (1981). Oil / acrylic on canvas, 90 x 90 cm. Collection of the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen. (Photograph by the artist.)

In his installation from 2017, entitled *Under The Silent Eye of Lenin*, Kiluanji Kia Henda uses art as an effective discursive tool for narrating recent social, political and cultural histories, while remaining critical of ideological manipulations, (Cold) War narratives and the colonial character of contemporary military conflicts, while also revealing the fictional character of historical reality. A sculpture of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov made of a piece of wood painted black, is one of four integral parts of the installation, and functions in this work, as in Marek Sobczyk's previously-mentioned portrait of Jaruzelski, as a geological

plie. Like Sobczyk's painting, Kia Henda's installation represents an accumulation of the entire history of the Cold War and neo-colonial conflicts, ideologies, adversities in one image. Although painted in black, Lenin's realistic sculpture adheres to the tenets of Soviet socialist realism. Being in itself an embodiment of Marxist-Leninist ideology, the figure of a Black Lenin became a symbol of the Communist project and Communist propaganda on the African continent, and more specifically in his country, which on November 11, 1975 was proclaimed the People's Republic of Angola.



Fig. 3 Kiluanji Kia Henda, *Under The Silent Eye of Lenin #4* (2017). Installation. Various dimensions. (Photograph by the artist.)

The second layer of this project is its connection with local traditions concerning the production and functioning of sculpture. As the artist himself stated, the starting point for this project was a recognition of similarities “between the witchcraft events during the Angolan civil war and the science fictions narrative from the Cold War period” (Kia Henda 2017). Through the first phase of the project, called *The Witchery Political Lab*, a Lenin statue was transformed into an object of witchcraft by two craftsmen aiming to activate its supernatural

forces, who were assisted by the artist himself. The process of transformation was inspired, as the artist claimed, by the ritualized production of *Nkisi Kondi* (*Nkisi N’Kondi*) statues by the Bakongo people in the northern Angolan province of Cabinda (Kia Henda 2017). The statue of Lenin was pierced by nails in order to activate its magical powers, in a similar way to its witchcraft prototypes, which through such a process acquire the power to cure or cause illnesses, punish criminals, or enforce vows. Kia Henda’s Lenin became a Bakongo fetish statue and took on apotropaic or/and demoniac features.

Moreover, a transparent black veil which Kia Henda used to cover Lenin’s head and face provokes associations between this statue and the image Darth Vader – the fictional antagonist from the original *Star Wars* trilogy. The identification of Lenin with a knight in samurai-like armour serving the dark side of the Force evokes not only the propaganda of the Capitalist bloc demonizing the Soviet Union and Communist ideology, it also reveals the fictionalized character of globalizing political discourses and the hallucinatory features of contemporary military conflicts, which, as stressed by Jean Baudrillard in 1991, have ceased to be “real” or “useful” – “We have neither the need of nor the taste for real drama or real war” (Baudrillard 1991, 84). This artistic operation illustrates well the irreconcilable gap between Cold War narratives and African day-to-day reality.

Marek Sobczyk and Kiluanji Kia Henda adopted a very similar strategy, proposing an incarnation of conflictive identities and antithetic ideological discourses in one body. In all two cases, the body belongs to a left-wing leader: a general and head of a Soviet-dependent authoritarian regime, a Bolshevik front-runner and a key theoretician of Communism. Moreover, in the two cases, the heteronormativity of the depicted persons is also questioned. This takes place in a context in which homosexuality, transsexuality and transvestism are silenced and repressed in Socialist countries and by Communist ideology. A cigar, an attribute of Che, which in Jaruzelski’s portrait became a Rastafari joint, could also be associated with a dynamite stick or the barrel of a tank, like those that appeared on the streets of Poland during martial law. But it could also be associated with an image of a penis and depict the sexual act of a blow job, which the Polish general symbolically performed on Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who exercised real power in its satellite states. Kiluanji Kia Henda’s use of a transparent veil to cover the head of his Black Lenin’s statue became an act of travestism. A black veil transforms the representation of the Bolshevik leader into the Christian motif of the *Stabat*

Mater Dolorosa: the suffering Virgin Mary, very popular in Portuguese Catholicism. This association of Lenin's figure with an image that represents an exaltation of human pain could symbolize the inevitability of the collapse of the Communist project in Angola. The image of Lenin, who becomes a mother figure, serves to allow the artist to criticize the paternalistic and imperialist attitudes of the Soviet Union towards African countries which had adopted a socialist formula of governance. The feminization and divinization of Lenin connects this work to the forced Christianization of Angola and the colonial domination of Portugal over the country for four centuries (1575–1975).

Condensed hybridity as constitutive feature of post-authoritarian art

While analysing and deconstructing the images produced by artists from post-authoritarian contexts, we can observe that they respond not only to multiple discourses, propagandas, ideologies, political and social projects. They also show how confusing and confused those discourses are and how antithetical ideologies that function as clearly opposed in the former West, are almost indistinguishable in Non-Western contexts. Like Koselleck's geological plie, the images created by these artists accumulate in one picture the visual propagandas of different temporalities. For that reason, these images could also be described by the concepts of multitemporal heterogeneity and hybridity as coined and developed by the Argentinian/Mexican sociologist Néstor García Canclini. For him, these terms are apt for describing Latin American socio-political and cultural circumstances, in which the opposition between the modern and the traditional artistic forms, as well as the ideas of the copy and the original, between modernism and postmodernism, are not relevant. In giving a definition of Latin American cultures, García Canclini stated:

for being the land of pastiche and bricolage, where many periods and aesthetics are cited, we have had the pride of being postmodern for centuries, and in a unique way. Neither the "paradigm" of imitation, nor that of originality, nor the "theory" that attributes everything to dependency, nor the one that lazily wants to explain us by the "marvellously real" or a Latin American surrealism, are able to account for our hybrid cultures (García-Canclini 1995 [1989], 6).

García Canclini's definition of Latin American cultures is also relevant in other "peripheral" and especially post-colonial contexts, where the disjunction between propaganda

discourses and lived experience is excessive, and for that reason the differences between fiction and historiography are blurred. There is no distinction between the Cold War and Star Wars. The artworks created by the artists evoke post-authoritarian contexts where there is no truth, no objectivity. Individual memories and metahistorical narratives are more constructed than reconstructed. Meanings are accumulated, condensed and confused. This puzzlement depicts properly the multifaceted character of conflicts in their local as well as global articulations and the inappropriateness of “global” discourses produced in Europe, whether in the Soviet and hegemonic Russia or in the former West. The artists’ intent is not only to provide a “big picture” of lived conflicts: their works concern whole countries, continents; they also discuss the past, present and future of their local contexts and of the whole universe, very often in a subtle and veiled way. They merely refer to rather than narrate the factual reality of actual or historical events. The strategy of constructing multi-layered and ambiguous images, often semantically and symbolically contradictory could be seen as reminiscent of the practices of censorship implemented in these contexts. Numerous artworks and publications contained hidden messages and became critical in an indirect way of authoritarian regimes. They “privatized” their collective experiences, to use Groy’s term (Groy 2008). They sometimes also adopted for their own purposes, strategies involving manipulative dialectics and ideological lies, ones developed previously by hegemonic and authoritarian powers. Achronic rather than chronological and imagined rather than factual, artistic narrations present to the viewer subjective storytelling as objective metahistorical narratives.

The artworks created by, among others, Marek Sobczyk and Kiluanji Kia Henda reflect, above all, a situation of multiple and multi-layered ideological, political, historical and economic manipulations in their local contexts. For them, as García Canclini noted, confusion is or was a habitual state of mind, and a weakly structured chaos the environment in which they had to get accustomed to living. The above-mentioned artists express disillusion, disappointment and unrealised prospects for the future. Their artworks should be considered above all acts and vestiges of visual resistance.

Wojciech Jaruzelski as depicted by Sobczyk is an anti-hero. Directly responsible for the proclamation of Martial Law and for the presence of military troops on the streets of Polish cities, he was considered at that time a traitor. His image, produced, at least in part, according to the rules applied in official portraits of socialist countries’ dignitaries, acquired a

satirical meaning during the decline of the socialist system. The yellowish colour of the general's skin evokes, as Sobczyk himself observed, his sickness (Sobczyk 2020). By hybridizing Jaruzelski's representation with that of Che Guevara, Josef Stalin, Mao Zedong or Kwame Nkrumah, the artist reveals himself to be critical of all – local and mainstream – variants of Communist and Non-Aligned ideological discourses developed during the 20th century. The confusion in this portrait responds to the general atmosphere of puzzlement, misbelief and fear that was present in Poland just after the initiation of a state of emergency.

Kiluanji Kia Henda's portrait of an Africanized Lenin refers to all the most significant conflictive moments and processes in Angolan history: Civil War (1975–2002) and the War of Independence (1961–1974), which were intertwined more broadly with all kinds of Cold War struggles for domination of the African continent, and with the shameful history of Portuguese colonial domination. His Black Lenin can acquire – in a way similar to Nkisi N'Kondi statues – both positive and negative traits. He expresses the artist's criticism towards the illusory apotropaic powers of the Soviet Union, and its imperialist and neo-colonial attitudes. The installation responds to the trauma of the People's Republic of Angola's collapse, directly connected to the symbolic, political and economic bankruptcy of the Socialist project world-wide and the fall of the Soviet Bloc in 1989.

For the above-mentioned reasons that still distinguish non-Western artistic production from that of the West, it is legitimate to state that condensed hybridity is a constitutive and distinctive feature of post-authoritarian art. Narration that is not only non-linear, but also multi-directional, and this vexing for the spectator, could be seen a main characteristic feature of art produced in non-Western, post-authoritarian and post-colonial contexts. The hybridity of these non-Western cultures, which as claimed by García Canclini is justified by their geographic and semantic distance from European and hegemonic patterns, result from its singular character, one that is common to such distanced and diverse world regions as Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America. They are cultures that have been battlefields in both a symbolic but also very direct and practical way. The visual synthesis that is assumed by the artists is not the result of a dialectical confrontation between two oppositions, as in the case of Russian Sots Art. Images of a Black and Feminine Lenin and Jaruzelski the marijuana smoker synthesises a larger number of conflictual discourses that operate harmoniously in countries subjected to East and West hegemonies and imperialist aspirations. Moreover, in these post-authoritarian contexts, the use of art as a tool to tell the history of regions,

countries and continents is a frequent phenomenon. Confusing and anecdotal storylines provide an objective big picture of events and historical processes. Having been submitted to real and symbolic violence and racisms, artists from these contexts often express a dystopian vision of the world and local history in countries that were victims of hegemony, colonialism, forced European modernisation and discrimination of all kinds. Paradoxically it is not written testimonies but artworks – especially those that provide confusing and multi-layered storylines, and constructed in accordance with Koselleck’s geological piles – that provided the best historiographic narratives. Because they operate by means of visual language – more direct and more universal than the printed word – they relate, in an almost instantaneous way, what truly happened.

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Katarzyna Cytlak is a Polish art historian whose research focuses on artistic creation of Central Europe and Latin America. She studies conceptual art, radical and utopian architecture, socially engaged art, seen through transmodern transnational and decolonial perspective. In 2012, she received a PhD from the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. She was a postdoctoral fellow at the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, Argentina (CONICET) and at the University of San Martín, Argentina. In 2018, she worked at the School of Humanities of the University of San Martín, Argentina. She currently teaches Art Criticism at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (Poland). She is a grantee of the University Paris 4 Sorbonne, the Terra Foundation for American Art, and the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (Paris). Selected publications include articles in *Umění/Art*, *Telón de Fondo*, *Third Text*, the *RIHA Journal*, *Modos*, *Revista de História da Arte*, and *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*.