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# To Each His Own Reality: How the analysis of artistic exchanges in Cold War Europe challenges categories

Mathilde Arnoux

*Centre allemand d'histoire de l'art*, [marnoux@dt-forum.org](mailto:marnoux@dt-forum.org)

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# *To Each His Own Reality:* How the analysis of artistic exchanges in Cold War Europe challenges categories

Mathilde Arnoux\*

*Centre allemand d'histoire de l'art,  
Paris*

## **Abstract**

How to reconstruct artistic relationships among four European countries, situated on both sides of the Iron Curtain, during the period that commenced post-Stalin and lasted until the fall of the Berlin Wall? This is one of the questions that faces the research program *To Each His Own Reality: The notion of the real in the art of France, West Germany, East Germany and Poland between 1960 and 1989*, which was initiated in January 2011. The paper discusses syntheses of the questions that the research team is facing, descriptions of its methodology, an analysis of preliminary results and what they allow to measure, as well as what seems not to be measurable.

## **Résumé**

Comment reconstruire les relations artistiques entre quatre pays européens situés de part et d'autre du rideau de fer de la période du dégel qui suit la mort de Staline en 1953 jusqu'à la chute du Mur de Berlin ? C'est une des questions à laquelle fait face le projet de recherche *A chacun son réel. La notion de réel dans les arts plastiques en France, RFA, RDA et Pologne entre 1960 et 1989* inauguré en janvier 2011. Le présent article propose une synthèse des questions qui interrogent l'équipe de recherche, ainsi qu'une description de sa méthodologie et une analyse de ses premiers résultats. Il tente d'éclaircir ce qui dans le cadre de ce projet apparaît pouvoir être mesurable et ce qui semble échapper à la mesure.

*\* Mathilde Arnoux is a Research Director at the Centre allemand d'histoire de l'art in Paris and Principal Investigator of the project To Each His Own Reality (funded by an ERC Starting Grant). Focusing on the artistic exchanges in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c., her research currently deals with cross-cultural analyses in Cold War Europe.*

The terms "East," "West," "center," and "periphery" feature prominently in artistic discourse on the Cold War period. Consequently, art history perpetuates geo-political and historical categories and maintains hierarchies and oppositions between blocks. But is it not possible for us to consider the history of Cold War art from a perspective other than one based on binary oppositions? What are the implications of the interdependence between art and politics during the Cold War? Did the influence of political ideologies on the environment in which art practices developed and on the content of certain artworks invariably produce art that echoes the divisions between East and West? Is it possible that these artistic practices explore subjects that reach beyond the immediate political context? Given the major differences between art scenes on either side of the Iron Curtain, were interactions between them exclusively based on a confrontation of two rigid world views? Can an analysis of the interconnections between the former East and former West enable us to recognize ignorance and a lack of understanding of others?

Through a study of the notion of reality/the real in the visual arts of France, West Germany, East Germany, and Poland between 1960 and 1989, the *To Each His Own Reality* project examines the benefits and limitations of geo-political categories that have been applied to the majority of research on European art of the Cold War period. Working as a European team,<sup>1</sup> we aim to investigate ways in which artistic relations were established from the period of "thaw" following Stalin's death in 1953 until 1989. This project does not seek to provide an all-encompassing study of artistic

interactions during this period, but rather to study connections focused on a notion shared by the four countries in order to explore the possibilities of research on artistic practices in countries divided by the Iron Curtain.

## The notion of reality/the real

While the authorities in the USSR and the USA asserted the superiority of their own world view through an extensive use of propaganda, the concept of reality—whether its definition was imposed or allowed to be freely interpreted—was a subject of key importance in the visual arts. During the Stalinist era, socialist realism and abstraction were diametrically opposed. Each style embodied a conception of reality with an esthetic, social, moral, ethical, and political dimension that expressed the ideals of one of the two superpowers that divided the world between themselves. The period of "thaw" following Stalin's death led to a weakening and a re-examination of the two major perceptions of reality, which were represented in the field of visual art by socialist realism in the USSR and abstraction in the USA. An exploration of the notion of reality/the real was central to the search for defining new practices at this time. Examples of this can be seen in artists' recurring interest in mimesis, in the role assigned to gesture and its expression in artwork, the importance attached to the use of raw materials, and the desire to challenge false conventions. Artists sought to illustrate, scrutinize, and reveal reality, or to use it as a source of inspiration when references to art history were felt to be inadequate. The notion of reality is a common thread running through discourse on the art of both Eastern and Western Europe, and yet it has never been the subject of research comparing and contrasting the viewpoints on either side of the Iron Curtain.

Research conducted by the *To Each His Own Reality* project team focuses on this notion to study artistic exchanges between four countries formerly separated by the Iron Curtain. The art

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<sup>1</sup> Julie Sissia, a doctoral student at Sciences-Po University in Paris under the supervision of Professor Laurence Bertrand-Dorléac, is in charge of research on France; Maria Bremer, a doctoral student at the Freie Universität in Berlin under the supervision of Professor Peter Geimer, is in charge of research on the former West Germany; Constanze Fritzsche, a doctoral student at the University of Eichstätt under the supervision of Michael Zimmermann, is responsible for research on the former East Germany; and Aneta Panek, a doctoral student at the Universität der Künste in Berlin under the supervision of Professor Siegfried Zielinski, is responsible for research on Poland. Clément Layet, a postdoctoral researcher in philosophy, is conducting a theoretical reflection on the notion of reality/the real in the countries studied. Research assistance is provided by Laura Langelüddecke and Sira Luthardt in Paris and Krzysztof Kosciuczuk in Warsaw.

scenes in France, Germany, and Poland were chosen as particularly pertinent due to the historical links that bind them together. These four countries constructed their identities in relation to one another and offer us an opportunity to observe interactions between Latin, Germanic, and Slavic cultures, as well as the distinctive characteristics of individual art scenes in the context of the Cold War. Our aim is to analyze the plurality of this notion in these different contexts and to assess whether the meanings attached to it on either side of the Iron Curtain contradict each other or, at times, resonate with each other. Accepted categories of East/West and center/periphery that have dominated research on this period do not facilitate the study of artistic relations. It is useful here to provide a brief overview of existing research and the ways in which it has relied on these categories in order to explain the context in which our research is conducted and to clarify its objectives and methodology.

## Artistic relations across the Iron Curtain

Research to date on artistic interactions across the Iron Curtain is extremely limited.<sup>2</sup> Considerable study has been devoted, however, to the specific subject of the history of German art during the Cold War, associated with the country's political commitment to reunification.<sup>3</sup> A number of articles<sup>4</sup> and projects have focused on case studies of artistic interchanges, such as the exhibition *The Third Room*, held in 2011-2012 at the Kunsthalle in Dusseldorf and the Warsaw Museum of Modern Art.<sup>5</sup> This exhibition investigated the

methodological affinities between teaching at the art academies of Dusseldorf and Warsaw between 1961 and 2011. The planned publication of an atlas entitled *Art Beyond Borders in Communist Europe* by Béatrice von Hirschhausen, Pascal Dubourg-Glatigny, Jérôme Bazin, and Piotr Piotrowski, documents around forty case studies, primarily examining artistic relations within the former Eastern bloc, but also includes a number of studies on interactions between the former East and former West.<sup>6</sup> Several exhibitions have also explored common preoccupations in the art scenes of the former Eastern and Western states,<sup>7</sup> although their emphasis has been on identifying common points rather than analyzing artistic relations.

## The East-West division

The subject of artistic exchanges across the Iron Curtain has clearly not been a central concern in the history of European art in the second half of the twentieth century, a period that was profoundly shaped by the political divide between East and West. This partition of Europe is all the more significant considering that varying definitions of the arts of Eastern Europe during the Cold War began to emerge after the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>8</sup> Each of these definitions sought to draw attention to unknown or little-known artistic practices which had been excluded from the broader narrative of art history.<sup>9</sup> While the views

<sup>2</sup> We refer here to publications that make reference to artistic exchange across the Iron Curtain involving the four countries concerned by our project. Very few publications have been devoted to this subject, and include SCHORLEMMER (2007). For German-Polish artistic relations after WWII, see OMIŁANOWSKA and ROTTENBERG (2011: 642-735).

<sup>3</sup> On this subject, see, for example, GILLEN (1997), BARRON and GILLEN (2009), GILLEN (2009), and SAEHRENDT (2009).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, U. Goeschel, "Zur Rezeption französischer Kunst in der SBZ/DDR bis 1960," in SCHIEDER and EWIG (2006: 255-278); K. Murawska-Muthesius, "Paris from Behind the Iron Curtain," in WILSON (2002: 250-261); SCHNITZER (2011); J. Sissia, "Donner à voir l'art de RDA. Le critique d'art Raoul-Jean Moulin," in KWASCHIK and PFEIL (2013).

<sup>5</sup> See [www.kunsthalle-duesseldorf.de/index.php?id=295](http://www.kunsthalle-duesseldorf.de/index.php?id=295) and [artmuseum.pl/en/wystawy/trzeci-pokoj](http://artmuseum.pl/en/wystawy/trzeci-pokoj).

<sup>6</sup> *Art Beyond Borders in Communist Europe* by Béatrice von Hirschhausen, Pascal Dubourg-Glatigny, Jérôme Bazin, and Piotr Piotrowski, to be published.

<sup>7</sup> Examples include FLÜGGE and SVETSKA (1994; see, in particular, R. Volp, "Kunst nach 1945: Der gefährdete Umgang mit Grenzen": 22-27) and FLÄCKE (2012-2013).

<sup>8</sup> On the subject of varying definitions of Eastern Europe over the years, see DUPCSIK (2001), MURAWSKA-MUTHESIUS (2004), and K. Murawska-Muthesius, "Iconotext of Eastern Europe: The 'Iron Curtain' Cartography," in BERNHARDT and PIOTROWSKI (2006: 57-70).

<sup>9</sup> For further details, see the first chapter of *In the Shadow of Yalta*, in which Piotr Piotrowski presents a study of the major exhibitions and publishing projects that have accompanied this search for definitions: P. Piotrowski, "The Geography and History of Art in Eastern Europe," in PIOTROWSKI (2009: 11-30). Among exhibitions devoted to the former socialist states we can cite the following: *Europa, Europa: Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, Bonn, 1994 (see exh. cat. STANISLAWSKI and BROCKHAUS (1994)); *Riss im Raum. Positionen der Kunst seit 1945 in Deutschland, Polen, der Slowakei und Tschechien*, Berlin, 1994 (see exh. cat. FLÜGGE and SVETSKA (1994)); *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present*, Ljubljana, 1999 (see exh. cat. BADOVINAC (1999)); *Aspects, Positions: 50 Years of Art in Central Europe 1949-1999*, Vienna, 1999 (see exh. cat. HOCHDÖRFER and HEGYI (1999)); *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins, 1950-1980s*, New York, 1999 (see exh. cat. CAMNITZER (1999), in particular L. Beke, "Conceptualist Tendencies in Eastern European Art": 41-51); *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, Vienne, 2009/2010 (see exh. cat. Pejic (2009/2010)); *Les promesses du passé. Une histoire discontinuée de l'art dans l'ex-Europe de l'Est*, Paris, 2010 (see exh. cat. Macel (2010));

on Eastern European art expressed in publications devoted to the former socialist states are distinctly different, they all seek to highlight the singularity of these former satellite states of Moscow in comparison with the USSR. Furthermore, they all define their position in relation to a canonical narrative of the history of twentieth century art that has been assimilated into Western discourse, without drawing any clear distinction between the United States and the various countries of Western Europe. According to their authors' analyses, Eastern European art either adhered to the logic of this referential discourse or, conversely, deviated radically from it. These publications have brought a legitimacy to the former Eastern Europe. Despite the differing boundaries defined in the texts—which cover a varying number of former Soviet satellites and may or may not include the USSR—the Eastern bloc is perceived as a geographic unit. This region has served as a basis for study in a number of research projects that clearly focus their analysis on a specific selection of former Eastern European states. These projects include the *SocialEast Forum* in the United Kingdom, established by Reuben Fowkes at the Manchester Metropolitan University in 2006,<sup>10</sup> and research work by Klara Kemp-Welch as part of the *Networking the Bloc* project.<sup>11</sup> The continued use of the term "former East" as a generic entity has perpetuated the logic of opposing blocks in the writing of the history of Cold War art in Europe, an approach that is further reinforced by the way in which the former East has frequently endeavored to differentiate itself from "Western" discourse.

In contrast to attempts to gain an understanding of artistic production in Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the former Western Europe has not sought to define the particularities of its own artistic practices during the Cold War or to construct its own artistic discourse. The triumph of capitalism has allowed for a continuum to be

maintained from the Cold War period to the present day, without the emergence of a pressing need, as is the case in the former Eastern states, to make sense of the previous forty years and the socio-political model that was rejected after the wall came down. Even if not all of the art scenes of the former Western Europe have been the subject of detailed studies, no period of history has been left unexplored by the major texts, which stands in stark contrast to documentation of Eastern European art during the Cold War. The particularities of each art scene in Western Europe have been documented in numerous publications by art critics and historians more or less continuously over the past fifty years, uninhibited by authoritarian regimes.<sup>12</sup> While the Western European art scenes developed in constant dialogue with each other,<sup>13</sup> the differences between their historiographical traditions are too great for their interconnections and collaborative relations to result in a uniform narrative on this region, as suggested by the term "Western discourse," which frequently appears in texts on the former Eastern Europe. What, then, is meant by this so-called Western discourse? In Piotr Piotrowski's book *In the Shadow of Yalta*, it is suggested that Western discourse refers to American art criticism, derived particularly from the journal *October*, an essential reference source for the art of the second half of the twentieth century that has been widely exported internationally since it was founded in 1976.<sup>14</sup> In this book, Piotrowski points out the extent to which art criticism became sidetracked in its interpretation of former Eastern European art by relying exclusively on formal connections that neglected to take specific contexts into consideration. This Western discourse also includes attempts at producing a universal history of art that makes no reference to artistic practices in the former Eastern Europe.<sup>15</sup> Just as the

and *Ostalgia*, New York 2011 (see exh. cat. GREGORY and VALDEZ (2011)). Other books, published reference works, and projects devoted to the former socialist states include: *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s* (see HOPTMAN and POSPISZYL (2002)) and *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (see IRWIN (2006)).

<sup>10</sup> See documentation form the SocialEast Forum <http://www.translocal.org/socialeast/index.html>.

<sup>11</sup> See [networkingthebloc.blogspot.fr/](http://networkingthebloc.blogspot.fr/).

<sup>12</sup> This applies only to former Western European countries that were not dictatorships; the context was different in Spain, Portugal, and Greece.

<sup>13</sup> Our focus here is on interactions within the former Western Europe of particular concern in our research, i.e. artistic relations between France and Germany in the second half of the twentieth century. See SALM-SALM (2004), SCHIEDER (2005), SCHIEDER and EWIG (2006), SCHIEDER and KITSCHEN (2011), and KRAMER (2012).

<sup>14</sup> On the subject of the viewpoint developed by Piotr Piotrowski, see ARNOUX (2012).

<sup>15</sup> To enhance our understanding of the Western discourse, we discussed this subject with Piotr Piotrowski during the Art@s seminar organized by Béatrice Joyeux-

definition of the Western discourse is multifaceted, that of the art of the former Eastern Europe — which itself implies the existence of an art of the former West—only perpetuates this logic of blocks.<sup>16</sup>

## A non-uniform former East

While recent historiography has led to an opposition between binary categories of the former East and West, art-historical research on individual countries on the east side of the Iron Curtain,<sup>17</sup> which has developed intensely over the past twenty years, runs contrary to any standardization in the analysis of Eastern European art practices. This research helps to

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Prunel on May 30, 2013, at which Piotrowski gave a lecture entitled "Globalizing Eastern Europe. The Global NETWORK. An Introduction to Comparative Art History". Piotrowski identifies this discourse with, for example, the position developed in HAFTMANN (1954), which was reprinted nine times until 2000.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that Western Europe, apart from Great Britain, did not actively develop contemporary art history research links with former Eastern European countries. Research links in contemporary art history are particularly well developed, however, between English-speaking countries and former Eastern European countries, as demonstrated, for example, by previously mentioned research by Reuben Fawkes and Klara Kemp-Welsch, and research by Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius based on her reflections on Eastern Europe. See MURAWSKA-MUTHESIUS (2000 and 2004) and K. Murawska-Muthesius, "Iconotext of Eastern Europe: The 'Iron Curtain' cartography," in BERNHARDT and PIOTROWSKI (2006: 57-70); research by David Crowley, notably on design during the Cold War, particularly CROWLEY (2008-2009). The C-MAP project developed by the MoMA devotes part of its research to experimental art and the Fluxus movements in Central and Eastern Europe (Magdalena Moskalewicz made a presentation of the C-MAP project at a workshop held as part of the *To Each His Own Reality* project on January 10, 2013. For more information on the C-MAP project, see [post.at.moma.org/themes/3-research-at-moma-contemporary-and-modern-art-perspectives-c-map](http://post.at.moma.org/themes/3-research-at-moma-contemporary-and-modern-art-perspectives-c-map).) Foreign researchers who have contributed to the development of a discourse on artistic practices in the former Eastern Europe during the Cold War are primarily from English-speaking countries: see, for example, seminar contributions devoted to Włodzimirz Borowski held November 19 and 20, 2010 (see [artmuseum.pl/pl/wydarzenia/wlodzimirz-borowski-prace-i-rekonstrukcje-pierwsza](http://artmuseum.pl/pl/wydarzenia/wlodzimirz-borowski-prace-i-rekonstrukcje-pierwsza)); contributions to the Strzeminski seminar held at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, October 13 and 14, 2011 (see [msl.org.pl/en/wydarzenia/international-conference-skrzeminski/](http://msl.org.pl/en/wydarzenia/international-conference-skrzeminski/)); and JAKUBOWSKA (2011). Methodological exchanges and theoretical discussions with art historians from the former West of continental Europe are few and far between, although research into the European art during the Cold War would benefit significantly from insights provided by transnational European research teams.

<sup>17</sup> We refer here only to examples of publications relating to the former East Germany (GDR) and Poland which are of central concern to our project and which demonstrate the vitality of research on each of the local art scenes. This overview is confined to transverse research work and does not include the large number of published monographs on artists and gallery publications. Examples concerning Poland: WOJCIECHOWSKI (1994), PIOTROWSKI (1999), GRYGLEWICZ and SZCZERSKI (1999) which presents a collection of articles exploring methodological challenges in writing the history of socialist Poland, MARKOWSKA (2003), LACHOWSKI (2006), ZIÓŁKOWSKA (2007), NADER (2009), RONDUDA (2009), ŚWITEK (2009), BISHOP and DZIEWAŃSKA (2009), and RONDUDA, FARQUHARSON and PIWOWARSKA (2011). We must highlight here the important research work carried out by the Warsaw Museum of Contemporary Art, which digitizes art archives, offers online access to a library of Polish experimental films, and publishes online reports on conferences (see [www.artmuseum.pl](http://www.artmuseum.pl)). For examples concerning the GDR, we can mention, in particular: FEIST, GILLEN and VIERNISEL (1996), KAISER and REHBERG (1999 and 2003), GOESCHEN (2001), and GILLEN (2005). For a recent perspective on research on the GDR, see the bibliography in BAZIN (2014). Reference can also be made here to research groups and projects on art in the GDR: see, i.e., *L'art en RDA* under the supervision of Professor Sigrid Hofer, Philipps-Universität Marburg, Kunstgeschichtliches Institut (see [www.uni-marburg.de/fb09/khi/akdtr](http://www.uni-marburg.de/fb09/khi/akdtr)); *Bildatlas. Kunst in der DDR*, under the supervision of Professor Dr. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, Institut für Soziologie der Technischen Universität Dresden (see [www.bildatlas-ddr-kunst.de](http://www.bildatlas-ddr-kunst.de)); and the program *Autonomie der Kunst. Kunst jenseits der Staatskultur*, organized by the Sächsische Akademie der Künste, Dresden (see [www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/autonome-kunst-in-der-ddr/](http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/autonome-kunst-in-der-ddr/)).

define and clarify the particularities of the art of each country. It also establishes chronologies and separate histories in the former Communist states and draws nuanced connections between art scenes and institutions. In this way, it challenges the generalized view of the former Eastern Europe as a single entity and obliges us to take into account the individual characteristics of each art scene when studying the region as a whole. All of the in-depth studies on the various former satellite states and the USSR raise the problem of coherence in the concept of a supposed former East. Artistic practices are far too diverse to be rigidly divided into two opposing groups based on a logic derived from the broader opposition between political and economic models. Such neatly divided terms of reference are not compatible with the study of intellectual exchange, dialogue between individuals, and the response of artists to the legacies of past generations.

## Project objectives and methodology

The *To Each His Own Reality* project takes full advantage of all recent research developments, while questioning the binary logic that has been utilized to establish classifications in art history, but which inhibits the analysis of interactions between individuals. This project seeks to alter current perspectives on analyzing the European artistic environment during the Cold War. Rather than adhering to this logic of opposing blocks, our approach is to observe the art scenes of the former East and former West through the same analytical lens and assess their interactions, without calling into question the political divisions that separated the various states. Thanks to input from micro-historical studies on connections between individuals, research on cultural transfers has provided a new perspective on the relevance of major political and military events, and has demonstrated that wars and official reconciliations did not necessarily impact on

personal relations.<sup>18</sup> For its part, social history has shown that societies in the Communist states did not speak with a united voice.<sup>19</sup> It has also emphasized the distinctions that must be drawn between the party line and individual initiatives. Social history has thus provided a fundamental critique of the supposedly uniform, coherent nature of Communist societies. These essential contributions, which challenge interpretations of political chronologies, combined with the importance of drawing distinctions between political systems and individual initiatives, and the specific nature of artistic exchange between individuals, provide a solid base on which to conduct our research. They open up possibilities for us to shift our frames of reference towards a perspective that fully embraces the history of contemporary art in the former Eastern and Western Europe, and raise a series of questions to be explored.

These questions include: Beyond the underlying political divisions, can specific characteristics be attributed to artworks produced in this period in Europe, a region that was the setting of the Cold War waged between two non-European powers? While taking the East-West political divide into consideration, is it possible to establish some continuity with periods prior to the Cold War that may serve as a basis for dialogue between countries under different political regimes? Must the history of art within a particular socio-political-cultural context abide by the rules of political geography or can it propose other connections and crossovers, while continuing to respect the historical method? Can art history shift away from the binary paradigms of the Cold War and offer alternative avenues of study?

These questions are not intended to arbitrarily challenge analytical conventions or to subscribe to a transnational essentialism rooted in the myth of the universalism of avant-garde movements. In spite of the different political systems and

ideologies, we can identify an interplay between certain artistic ambitions and practices on opposing sides of the Iron Curtain. While art, artists' intentions, and the production of artworks are dependent on the context in which they develop, artistic practices cannot be seen as equivalent to their political, social, or economic environment, even if they imitate, comment on, or draw inspiration from it, or if they assert their independence from this environment, or, alternatively, wish to serve it. This hybrid nature of artistic references is enriched from many sources, including discussions, the study of art theories, the press, scientific and literary publications, and artists' own relationship with tradition and their views on work by other artists—and enables us to construct a field of study in which to analyze different perspectives on this subject.

By concentrating on artistic exchanges between France, West Germany, East Germany, and Poland in relation to the notion of reality/the real, this project examines points of connection rather than comparing differences. Research conducted by our French-German-Polish team is structured around the study of periodicals, texts by artists, and archival material, to address the project's two objectives: firstly, to reconstruct artistic relations between the four countries by researching exhibitions, travel by artists and art critics, and translated documents; and secondly, to determine whether the notion of reality/the real is indeed a key feature of art discourse from the period of "thaw" until 1989, and if this notion helps us to understand ways in which these countries forged their identities in relation to one another. This research identifies cases of direct interaction, such as meetings between individuals and correspondence, as well as the process of reception of other cultures through reading, visiting exhibitions, browsing magazines, and so forth. Due to the differences in context and historiography between the countries studied, this protocol must be adapted to each region. A project such as this focused on a period of recent history that is highly emotionally and ideologically

<sup>18</sup> See ESPAGNE and WERNER (1988, 1990, 1991 and 1994), DMITRIEVA and ESPAGNE (1996), and ESPAGNE (1999 and 2009).

<sup>19</sup> See KOTT (2002), the historiographical review by CHRISTIAN and DROIT (2005), and CHRISTIAN and KOTT (2009). We can once again refer here to the work of Jérôme Bazin (2014) for his contribution to art history.

charged inevitably faces a number of difficulties. These include the great disparity in the amount of existing historiographical documentation between the countries studied. While major publications on contemporary art history and criticism have been produced in France over the past ten years,<sup>20</sup> very few studies have addressed this subject in the FRG,<sup>21</sup> the GDR,<sup>22</sup> and Poland,<sup>23</sup> making it more difficult to construct a history of Cold War art and appreciate the intellectual background of writers. Similarly, available information on diplomatic and institutional archives, and access to this material, varies widely between countries. Disparities in methodology are also significant. While the study of artistic interactions and transfers is well-developed in France and Germany, these subjects are not a major preoccupation of specialized art history research on Poland and the former East Germany. It is extremely difficult to examine the subject of interconnections when historiographical documentation is non-existent or insufficient, which is the case for artistic relations across the Iron Curtain. Initiating a research project on Europe during the Cold War is an exercise in transdisciplinary cooperation within the context of a single discipline.

The fact that the social and political upheavals caused by the fall of the Berlin Wall took place in the very recent past requires that we approach our analyses with great circumspection. While the participating doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers belong to the same generation, they do not share the same experiences of these events. Some participants spent a part of their lives under socialism and are directly affected by the legacy of this system through their families, friends, and education, while other participants' only knowledge of it comes through other peoples' accounts. Experiences thus vary widely within the

same generation.<sup>24</sup> The myths and beliefs specific to each of the countries included in our research are also continually challenged by opposing points of view and conflicting memories. In this way, Pierre Restany, the founding father of Nouveau Réalisme in France, was viewed by art critics in the former Eastern European states as a benefactor from the West who opened up the possibility of new art practices<sup>25</sup> and offered a reformist perspective on society that was construed as a liberating leftist discourse contrasting with the closed authoritarian discourse of the socialist system. Yet recent research has provided evidence of Restany's conservative ideological stance and his anti-May 1968 position.<sup>26</sup> Does this alter the image that Polish, Czech, or Slovak art historians have constructed of Restany? Restany's biography does not contradict the views held by art critics of the former Eastern Europe, but rather examines the intentions and strategies of this French art critic. This project thus calls for a refining of existing definitions by bringing together different viewpoints and broadening the spectrum of analysis to liberate us from the constraints of national considerations.<sup>27</sup> The *To Each His Own Reality* project encourages regular discussions at international meetings and workshops that allow for comparison of historiographical traditions and narratives specific to each country, with the aim of creating the conditions to construct a history of art that includes exchanges and connections across the Iron Curtain. Rather than providing a comprehensive overview of the subject, our study focuses on selected case studies involving cross-

<sup>20</sup> See LEEMAN (2007, 2009a and 2009b) and FROISSART PEZONE and CHEVREFFILS DESBIOLLES (2011).

<sup>21</sup> See BRACHT (2002), DOLL et al. (2006), HOYER (2009), and PAPPENBROCK and SCHNEIDER (2010).

<sup>22</sup> See H. Dilly, "Terminologisch, nicht paradigmatisch. Die (kunst)wissenschaftlichen "Revolutionäre" der DDR", in BALUS and WOLAŃSKA (2010).

<sup>23</sup> For an overview of the history of art in Poland from 1945 to 1989, see J. Sosnowska, "Polska historia sztuki 1945-1989: Kwestie metodologii", in JAKUBOWSKA and MYŚLIŃSKI (2006). Some aspects of this subject are covered in GRYGLEWICZ and SZCZERSKI (1999).

<sup>24</sup> To clarify questions of definition posed by contemporary realities and to gain a better understanding of the different, superimposed, or parallel time periods in which a single generation may live, see ROUSSO (2012).

<sup>25</sup> We refer here to a conversation that took place during the international meeting held as part of the *To Each His Own Reality* project on April 11, 12, and 13, 2013. Following a presentation by Jennifer Watson on Arman, a discussion ensued in which Antje Kramer clarified certain points concerning Pierre Restany's ideological stance and his Gaullist and anti-May 1968 convictions, which deeply surprised Piotr Piotrowski. Piotrowski explained the extent to which his own generation was convinced of the critic Restany's Leftist convictions. Reference to this subject can be found in contributions concerning Eastern Europe in LEEMAN (2009a): see L. Hubatová-Vacková, "Pierre Restany et Prague entre 1960 et 1970: Le Nouveau Réalisme à la tchèque": 251-268; Z. Bartošová, "Pierre Restany et la Slovaquie. L'œuvre d'Alex Mlynářčik": 269-282; H. M. Hughes, "Pierre Restany, l'AICA et l'aventure est-européenne": 387-401.

<sup>26</sup> See J. Carrick, "Vers un art de l'intégration?" and K. M. Cabañas, "Le Nouveau Réalisme et le Réalisme fantastique", in LEEMAN (2009a: 7-88 and 89-97).

<sup>27</sup> The importance of this liberation from the constraints of national viewpoints in the study of contemporary history was recently clearly presented in DROIT and REICHERZER (2013/2).



cutting research that encourages the support, participation, and commitment of researchers from each country to identify and discuss instances of dialogue and similarities. Working as a group is the only effective way to avoid serious misunderstandings that can occur in drawing formal parallels, as their interpretation and symbolic significance vary according to their particular context. In this sense, this project has a strong political dimension as it emphasizes the necessity of pooling knowledge to clarify understanding of Europe's recent historical legacy, using the example of four European countries. This co-operative work draws attention to disparities between historiographies of the various countries and facilitates discussions on methodology and the development of collaborative projects based from the outset on a cross-cutting approach.

## Conclusion

This project does not intend to imply a false cohesion or unity in Europe, but rather to open up opportunities for shared reflection on the diversity and plurality of artistic relations during the Cold War. Tensions, frictions, misunderstandings, gaps in knowledge, as well as encounters and shared experiences are all fundamental to the history that we seek to reconstruct in this project, and are an integral part of European identity. Art history, allied with input from linguistics, sociology, history, psychoanalysis, and esthetics, is a particularly appropriate field of study to bring clarity on these issues. It articulates histories of the creation of artworks, of artists' aims and intentions, and of the critical reception of art. These histories engage in a dialogue with a long history of artistic production as well as with their immediate socio-historic context, questioning the social, political, and esthetic function of art and highlighting the differences in scales of analysis that serve to correlate art produced in distinctly different environments, based on an exploration of interconnecting themes. While recent historiography of the art of the Cold War period has been based on an opposition between the

former East and West that focuses on the singularity of the history of the art of an unexplored territory, it is important today not to subscribe to this strict division if we wish to avoid descending into caricature. We cannot separate the former East from the former West in favor of what is seen as Eastern Europe's pressing need for redefinition. For this reason, it is essential for art history to contribute to enriching this search for definition through a questioning of conventional categories drawn from inherited political culture.

Translated by Sarah Tooth Michelet

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