

# Writing on Art after 1989

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The fall of communism in Europe in 1989 was one of the factors that supported rethinking art history, or – in general – writing on art, particularly on contemporary art, but not only. The year 1989 is a challenge to construct a horizontal cultural plane, which includes art history understood as a discourse on past and contemporary art practices. The fall of communism in Europe, which accompanied a series of much more profound historic shifts, functioned as a catalyst for this project. It is important to note that the events in Eastern Europe, namely the Polish Round Table Agreement signed on April 4, 1989, which led to the first democratic elections in Eastern Europe, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, and collapse of the Soviet Union, coincided with the collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa (instituted as a state policy in 1947, again coinciding with the introduction of Stalinist cultural policies in the countries of the Eastern Bloc) and a dramatic increase in interest in postcolonial studies. The year 1989 also witnessed the Tiananmen Square massacre and the shift in the “new” Chinese policies initiated in 1978, which did not, however, stop the development of Chinese contemporary art. On the contrary, its development became much more dynamic and its Western reception (including its energetic rise within the international art market) began to reach ever-wider audiences, and soon became a global phenomenon. However, this growth was not accompanied by a sustained art critical discourse within China. Rather, Chinese contemporary art attracted attention mainly in the West, but also in Eastern Europe.

If we add to the horizontal historic plane established by the date 1989 earlier events that culminated in the rejection of

the totalitarian regimes by various South American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile), as well as discussions about the “former West” that began taking place on the eve of the new millennium, we could arrive at a conclusion that the collapse of the Eastern Bloc was a component of a much larger shift that impacted politics and culture on a global scale. Seeing it in this way it raises two basic questions: What has been the significance of the fall of communism not only for Central and Eastern Europe, but also for the world, and how is this event situated within the conditions of global contemporaneity? In her short text Susan Buck-Morss notes, for instance, that the postcommunist condition is not only affecting Eastern Europe. In other words, it does not have a spatial, but rather a temporal character and therefore describes a historic moment in which we are still situated. In other words, the postcommunist condition describes a historic and universal condition of contemporaneity.<sup>1</sup> Boris Groys, however, discusses the postcommunist condition from the perspective of universal categories, as a particular current vision and description of the world, its parameters and points of reference.<sup>2</sup> The historic process that shaped contemporaneity began with premodernism, and continued through modernism and postmodernism. In reality, this shift from the modernist uniformity (artificial-

1 See: Susan Buck-Morss, “The Post-Soviet Condition,” in: IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map. Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, Afterall Books, London, 2006, p. 498.

2 Boris Groys has written extensively on this subject. See in particular: Boris Groys, *Art Power*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA), 2008, pp. 149–163 and pp. 165–172; as well as Groys, “Back from the Future,” in: Zdenka Badovinac and Peter Weibel (eds.), *2000+ Art East Collection. The Art of Eastern Europe*, Folio Verlag, Vienna et al., 2001, pp. 9–14.

ity) to postmodern diversity constitutes a move towards the market. It is this postmodern market that generates purely aesthetic intensification of artificiality – difference sells.

In the communist era, the world was based on a binary order. Now, since 1989, such an order has apparently become useless as an instrument of description. Understanding politics and culture in terms of oppositions – us, dissidents, and them, communists – did not favor alternative ways of thinking, which was why cultural critique developed much more freely in the West. Still, when the (“former”) Eastern Europe became free of Soviet/communist domination, the activists and artists of both sexes from that part of the continent also joined the emancipation movements. Hence, one could say that the deconstruction of gender in the last two decades of the twentieth century overlapped with the fall of communism and its consequences, which implies a general revision of the world perception.

Thus, the question of the global is one of the impacts of the post-1989 world. There is a great deal of literature on the issue of the global,<sup>3</sup> and one of the most important aspects is Hans Belting's view that contemporary art is global by definition because it touches on problems important all over the world;<sup>4</sup> that is, its critique targets the processes shaping the present time anywhere. What is more if it touches on locally specific questions concerning, for example, production, exploitation, labor, Internet control, migration, wars, rebels, it is in fact still addressing global issues, since what is local in the frame of the Empire (in terms of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri) is global at the same time. Such a process accelerated in 1989, not only because of the end of communism in Europe, but also because of other social, political and – what is very important here – communication transformations. Alexander Alberro argues that 1989 marks the new period.<sup>5</sup> The most spectacular events in the arts in

1989 were three exhibitions with a global character: first Jean-Hubert Martin's *Magiciens de la terre* in Paris, Rasheed Araeen's *The Other Stories. Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain* in London, and Gerardo Mosquera's third edition of the Havana Biennial. These mega exhibitions can be seen in a wider institutional and global context, such as biennials. Of course, there are many views about biennial art as a global phenomenon and one of them is its critical role. For example, Boris Groys writes that such initiatives can help to constitute something as a global “politeia,” a global constitution of international democracy, which would be able to create mechanisms to defend the global society from globalization understood as the “Empire.”<sup>6</sup> Comparable critical potential of the biennial exhibition network is stressed by Charles Esche, too.<sup>7</sup> Also Okwui Enwezor sees mega world exhibitions as a “counter-hegemonic” or “counter-normative”<sup>8</sup> approach to the Western art system.

The other perspective I would like to mention here is the postcolonial condition and its relation to the postcommunist one. The work of authors such as Rasheed Araeen, Okwui Enwezor, or Partha Mitter, to mention but a few, has mainly focused on the colonial diasporas in Europe, and historic studies of the modernist culture of European colonies and postcolonial countries.<sup>9</sup> An example of this is an exchange published in *The Art Bulletin*, which consisted of responses to the important article by Partha Mitter “Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-garde Art from the Periphery.”<sup>10</sup> Mitter's conclusions concern the so-called new art history, which was supposed to have heterogeneous character, break down of the monolith of Western modernism, reveal through art historical studies the resistance of the colonial world to the dominance of the metropolis. However, the author does not mention the tensions internal to the so-called metropolis, or the “Old World,” which has

- 3 Of the vast bibliography on this subject see especially: Jonathan Harris (ed.), *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester et al., 2011; Silvia von Bennigsen, Irene Gludowacz, and Susanne van Hagen (eds.), *Global Art*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2009; Charlotte Bydler, *Global ArtWorld Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art*, Uppsala University Press, Uppsala, 2004; and Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated. The Story of Contemporary Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004.
- 4 See: Hans Belting, “Contemporary Art and the Museum in the Global Age,” in: Peter Weibel and Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *Contemporary Art and the Museum. A Global Perspective*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2007, pp. 16–38; and *ibid.*, “Contemporary Art as Global Art: a Critical Estimate,” in: Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2009, pp. 38–73. Hans Belting's concept of the museum as elaborated in these essays was the main inspiration for developing my strategy of the critical museum as director of the National Museum in Warsaw. See: Piotr Piotrowski, “Museum: From the Critique of Institution to a Critical Institution,” in: Tone Hansen (ed.), *(Re)Staging the Art Museum*, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Revolver Publishing, Berlin, 2011, pp. 77–90.
- 5 See: Alexander Alberro, “Periodising Contemporary Art,” in: Jaynie Anderson (ed.), *Crossing Cultures. Conflict, Migration, and Convergence*,

- The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria, 2009, pp. 935–939.
- 6 Boris Groys, “From Medium to Message. The Art Exhibition as Model of a New World Order,” in: *Open. Cahier on Art and the Public Domain*, no. 16, 2009, pp. 56–65.
- 7 See: Charles Esche, “Making Art Global: A Good Place or a No Place?,” in: Rachel Weiss et al., *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Havana Biennial, 1989*, Afterall Books, London, 2011, pp. 8–13.
- 8 Quoted from: 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*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2011, p. 293.
- 9 See: Rasheed Araeen (ed.), *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain*, Hayward Publishing, London, 1989; Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor (eds.), *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA), 1999; Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display*, University of California Press, Berkeley (CA), 2007; Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism. India's Artists and the Avant-garde 1922–1947*, Reaktion Books, London, 2007.
- 10 See: Partha Mitter, “Interventions: Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery,” in: *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 90, no. 4, December 2008, pp. 543–548.

its own centers and peripheries, and where development of modernism should also be decentered. The respondents to Mitter's article did not mention them either, though they did make interesting observations concerning "provincializing modernity" (Rebecca M. Brown) and "comparative modernism" (Saloni Mathur),<sup>11</sup> which suggest their consistency with the conception of horizontal art history, as I have called it elsewhere.

The question is: how can postcolonial studies provide a common background for the politics of emancipation? To look at this issue closer we of course realize that the colonial experience of India is completely different than that of South America, even from a historical point of view. India gained its independence in 1947, and somehow that was the beginning of the postwar struggle for independence not only in Asia, but also in Africa. Yet at that time there were no European colonies any more in South America. Therefore: To what extent (ethnically, culturally) are South American societies, and even nations, postcolonial? How and on what level can we compare them with India? Furthermore, if we look at African countries and their struggle for independence with West European colonizers, how we can deal with South Africa, which was then already an independent country? Was apartheid in South Africa colonial within the same framework as the experience of the black Africans in Congo, or Arabs in Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s?

To go into details let's discuss vocabulary, or at least some basic concepts of the postcolonial scholars. The first notion that should be formulated more clearly and precisely is "Eurocentrism," or "a crisis of Eurocentrism," or even simply – "Europe." Most of the scholars, whether they come from the Global South (or the former Third World), or from the West, completely neglect inner European tensions, especially East-West relations. To them Europe is simply a homogeneous continent. For us East Europeans, however, this issue is a crucial one. There is not one Europe; so-called postcolonial Europe is just a part of the continent, actually the Western part, or even merely a section of it. The other countries which are considered Western, such as Italy, had only little experience in such issues, as did the Scandinavian countries. The example of Greece (Western country?) is even more complicated: it was facing Asian colonization; that is, the Other was the colonizer, and the Self colonized. There are also countries like Germany and Austria – particularly important for us East Europeans – whose colonial experience is completely different to the imperial countries in the West (it should be also differentiated to each other).

The difference lies in the fact that their main colonial strategies, with only a few overseas exceptions, were directed toward their neighbors, other Europeans. This is definitely a different colonization. We can say the same about Russia, and later the USSR. For Eastern Europe, or Central Eastern Europe to be precise, particularly in terms of the Cold War, this point is crucial.

Thus, what do we, Croats, Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, Serbs, and Slovaks, have in common with colonial history (talking of course about the post-1945 period)? Do our nations bear a sort of responsibility for so-called European colonialism, and finally, shall we share the postcolonial social and political experience? Were we ever in the center, or Euro-Center? What does "Eurocentrism" mean in such a situation? It simply means ignoring European history, geography, politics, and culture. This vocabulary has to be changed. Thus the problem is not a critique of Eurocentrism, but Westcentrism instead. We have to name those who are responsible for colonization.

The final questions in terms of the relation between post-communist and postcolonial studies are: Who was the colonizer, and who the colonized, when did colonization take place and in what ways? These questions are posed, of course, in terms of the post-World War II period, and not others, since we are talking about "postcommunist." A commonsensical answer seems clear: after 1945 East-Central Europe was colonized by the Soviet Union. But was this really the case? Beyond any doubt, one attempt at colonization was the introduction of Socialist realism as an obligatory artistic and ideological doctrine in most countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe, as well as in those Soviet republics which before World War II had been independent states, such as Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Still, in some of the Eastern Bloc countries Socialist realism either did not appear at all (as in Yugoslavia), while in others it was merely an episode (Poland). In most of them it remained just an ideological facade. Modern art, which was definitely more important for East Europeans than Socialist realism, and which came from the West, not from the East, was developing independently of its tenets, determining the genuine cultural identity of Eastern Europe in the period 1945–1989. Finally, I presume that the word "occupation" would be better in this context than "colonization," and this is another major problem for the adaptation of postcolonial studies to the study of East European art.

Postcolonial studies developed out of an entirely different range of historical and geohistorical experiences. In general, postcolonial studies scholars' aim has been to critique the center from the position of a "far-off" Other, or to put it in different terms, to critique the cultural hegemony

<sup>11</sup> See: Rebecca M. Brown, "Response: Provincializing Modernity: from Derivative to Foundational," in: *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 90, no. 4, December 2008, pp. 555–557; Saloni Mathur, "Response. Belonging to Modernism," in: *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 90, no. 4, December 2008, pp. 555–557.

of Europe. For Dipesh Chakrabarty, such a critique “provincializes Europe.” He is not referring to a form of “postcolonial revenge” (shift of power from the center to a periphery), but rather to a “renewal” of European thought from a marginal position through its “translation.” Chakrabarty writes that European thought (he focuses mainly on the analysis of two authors, Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger) is at once “necessary” and “insufficient” for the needs of the postcolonial world.<sup>12</sup> One could say that the fundamental difficulty in adapting postcolonial studies to the work on European margins has to do with the very different status of the not-European Other vis-à-vis the Eastern European Other. The former occupies the position of the “far-off” Other while the latter has that of the “close” Other; one is not European by definition, while the other is certainly European, but marginalized, which is not the same. What (East) European art history can learn from postcolonial studies, however, is its critical, decentralizing view in which he or she can see the West, as above mentioned Partha Mitter shows.

Instead of the postcolonial framework, discussed above, the still problematic, postapartheid and postauthoritarian conditions in South Africa and South America could perhaps provide more promising prospects for postcommunist studies. As I mentioned before, chronological coincidences are certainly intriguing. In South Africa, 1989 marked the fall of the apartheid system and the election of Nelson Mandela as the country’s first black president. In South America, the first half of the 1980s witnessed the collapse of a series of military dictatorships and the return of democracy. In Argentina and Brazil the military gave up power in 1983. In Chile, a national referendum led to the departure of Augusto Pinochet in 1988, and a year later a return of democratic elections. In Paraguay, the long-lived military dictatorship was abolished in 1989. In Uruguay, the process of erosion of the dictatorship and return of democracy took place in the second half of the 1980s, and was finalized by the end of the decade.

It is true that such comparisons are not unproblematic, especially if we consider the art world. John Pepper observes in his wonderful book on the art of the apartheid period that the work produced under such conditions reacted to the politics of racial segregation, and continued to do so even after 1994, when such policies ceased to function legally and politically.<sup>13</sup> Of course in the case of South Africa, we are dealing with a single country and therefore with a much more homogeneous environment, even though

South African society is far from homogeneous linguistically. In the case of Eastern Europe, we have to consider many different and distinct administrative and political systems, pursuing different, sometimes diametrically opposed cultural policies, even though until 1989 they were all officially embracing the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. We will also notice considerable differences if we consider art itself, its institutional apparatus, symbolism, and reception. There are significant differences, for instance, between Polish and Hungarian art. What matters is that in both instances, in South Africa and in Eastern Europe before 1989, artistic cultures functioned under conditions of confinement that limited their development, but also provided a challenge. Moreover, the fact that the societies of South Africa and Eastern Europe defeated totalitarian regimes at virtually the same time creates a possibility for a comparative perspective encompassing not only artistic production, but also, and primarily, culture released from the authoritarian straitjacket. Such analysis still awaits us, mainly because these processes have not yet been fully digested by art criticism.

The same could be said with regard to South America. The postdictatorial systems there are quite different from the postcommunist ones in Europe in terms of access to consumer culture, economic development, free market structures, art institutions, and so on. But, it is precisely those differences that are important. This type of comparative, interregional art history must aim to establish such diversity. What connects contemporary art produced in the regions emerging from the totalitarian systems with the postcolonial countries, such as India and Pakistan, is its marginalization vis-à-vis mainstream art culture, and its neglect within and omission from the Western art discourse in art historical narratives produced from the perspective of the center or the position of symbolic power. The centers and their power are still identified for many reasons (economic, political, cultural, etc.) with the West. That is why the new world art history, or global art history (and not universal art history) should not consist of the history of Western art appended with other art histories; it should be the history of both – the West and the Others, on equal terms, and the so-called West (some call it the “former West”) should be seen as the Other, too. To borrow Dipesh Chakrabarty’s term, such world art history should “provincialize” the West; it must identify it as one of its regions. By locating the West within a historic and cultural context as one of the regions of the art world, admittedly a very influential one, it will make it possible to analyze its influence from a historic perspective, to deconstruct it, and to approach it axiologically in the way that we have been approaching the art of South America, Asia, Africa, or

<sup>12</sup> See: Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ), 2000.

<sup>13</sup> See: John Pepper, *Art and the End of Apartheid*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis (MN), 2009.

Eastern Europe. This horizontal approach will have the effect of provincializing the West. I am not arguing that we should deny or negate the existence of the West, since its continuity is assured on many levels as an artistic tradition, system of values, institutional infrastructure, art market, etc. What I am arguing for is a need to see Western culture not in terms of its hegemony, but its geographic specificity: as a culture of one of the regions of the world.

The great challenge coming from the perspective of provincializing the West as a result of the 1989 changes, would not necessarily be to write on contemporary art, but also to rewrite art history instead, at least (but not only) so-called recent art history; that is, postwar art history, along with the horizontal, comparative art studies. I particularly mean something called the transregional approach to art history (instead of transnational), where by comparing different regions such as Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa, would finally show the West as another province among the others. The problem of comparative, transregional art history, however, is the platform of mediation. If we talk about interregional relations, we should identify some fields where such relations would meet each other. I argue that such a level is global politics. After World War II and during the Cold War, obviously, politics was global, as I have mentioned before. East-West confrontation, and the emergence of the Third World in the light of such competition is the core of postwar history. Thus, we can find out some key dates of that history, and relate them to the art. It is not an issue of neglecting Western influences on art around the world; on the contrary – the issue here is to deconstruct them and reconstruct their meanings in particular, local contexts, and to compare them. Let me just mention two possible examples. The first date would be the end of the 1940s which is the beginning of cultural Stalinism in Eastern Europe dominated by the Soviets, at the same time the Yugoslavian breakout from the Soviet world, and the beginning of the nonaligned states movement. There is also a moment when India and Pakistan declared their independence (1947), apartheid was officially introduced in South Africa (1947), and Israel emerged as a new state in Palestine (1948), changing the map of the Middle East radically up till today. These are many dates like this in the West, East, North, and South. The general approach to the art world from this perspective, is a sort of dialectical bounds between Socialist realism, on the one hand, and modernism on the other; two myths of universalism created on either side of the “Iron Curtain.” Both of them had a global dimension as competitive art and political strategies, and this is a crucial issue in terms of comparative global art history for that time. Another date, or a sort of horizontal cut, would be 1968. Many things were happening at that time, both

in the West (“Euramerica,” in John Clark’s terms) and in the East, including the Prague Spring and Polish March. At the same time there was the Vietnam war, the Middle East conflict, harsh military regimes in South America, cultural revolution in China, and so on and so forth. In terms of art it was the time of a rigorous critique of modernism, on the one hand, and the appearance of critical and rebellious art (called sometimes neo-avant-garde), on the other.

To illustrate this method let me compare two experiences: East European and Latin American in terms of 1968, or more precisely: Polish and Argentine. Both countries started to “modernize” art in the mid-1950s, in similar geographically oriented points of origin, namely French, and at a somewhat comparable historical moment – the collapse of authoritarian systems: Peronism in Argentina and Stalinism (but not Communism) in Poland. Art modernization in Argentina after Juan Domingo Perón’s removal from power resulted in reinforcing and reopening (1957) the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (MNBA) in Buenos Aires under new directorship, namely, under famous Jorge Romero Brest (appointed in 1956); founding the new museum of modern art, Museo de Arte Moderno (MAM) in 1956; and two years later the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (ITDT). This represented a strong institutionalization and internationalization of modernism, as Andrea Giunta argues.<sup>14</sup> In Poland no museums were founded, but a similar institutionalization of modernism can be observed. For example, in 1957 there was the *Second Exhibition of Modern Art* at one of the most notable and prestigious art institutions in Poland, the Zachęta National Gallery in Warsaw, which was followed by a very important contribution of Polish modern art to the most important official exhibition of the art of socialist countries in Moscow in 1958/1959, where – as the only delegation – Polish curators decided to show modern (abstract) art, instead of socialist realism, as all other delegations did.<sup>15</sup> Of course, Peronism was not the same as Stalinism; nevertheless, the broad acceptance of modernism almost at the same time after the fall of authoritarian regimes as a reply to them, is quite striking. In both cases modernism (the French, not the American version) was perceived as the right attitude towards freedom and free and modern culture. What is more, contrary to the US conceptual art trend, art in both Argentina and Poland derived somehow from modernism, that is, Informel and especially geometric abstraction art,

<sup>14</sup> See: Andrea Giunta, *Avant-garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentinian Art in the Sixties*, Duke University Press, Durham (NC), 2007.

<sup>15</sup> See: Susan E. Reid, “The Exhibition ‘Art of Socialist Countries,’ Moscow 1958–1959, and the Contemporary Style of Painting,” in: Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (eds.), *Style and Socialism. Modernity and Material Culture in Post-war Eastern Europe*, Berg Publishers, London et al., 2000, pp. 101–132.

rather than from Minimal art. In addition, object art, that is, art that operates with real things, developed a comparable historical dynamic at the beginning of the 1960s, and was submerged in existential issues, rather than in an ironic attitude to low culture, as in North America.

However, the Argentine artists of 1968 discredited the modernist mythology and abandoned it as a tool of power (at that time under the military regime after the coup in 1966), whereas their Polish counterparts still believed in that myth; to be frank, until the end of the 1970s. In both cases modernism was the mainstream of national culture. In Argentina, however, the artists rejected all of it and took the radical position of questioning art as such, and responded with direct, political action (the most striking example was a collective project called *Tucuman Is Burning*, Rosario and Buenos Aires, 1968). In East-Central Europe such radicalism was unknown. Even Hungarians, the most political artists in the entire Eastern Bloc, created their critical positions through metaphors rather than direct actions, and did not question the value of art. Although some of their events looked purely political (e.g., Tamas Szentj6by's *Sit Out*, 1972), they were recognized primarily as art. In Poland the neo-avant-garde artists discarded modernist visuality (abstract painting), somehow the mainstream institution, but not the value system with autonomy of art and its self-referentiality at the top. Instead of political action, like that mentioned above, Polish artists were involved in analyzing art language and visual media. The grounds for this were, on the one hand, the persisting trauma of socialist realism understood as the only art doctrine accepted by the authorities in the public sphere during the first half of the 1950s and political confusion concerning global US politics, and on the other hand a kind of conformism. This conformism stemmed from the pseudoliberal cultural policy that granted artists the pseudofreedom to do anything he or she wanted to in art (abstract art, conceptual art, performance, body art etc.), quite unusual at that time in the Soviet Bloc, except political engagement. That was of course banned, and anything connected with critique of the political system was censored. It looks as though the artists did not want to lose such a "velvet prison," and it was the reason why the modernist value system was maintained so long. When these artists looked at the 1968 movements elsewhere, whether in Western Europe, the US, or South America they mostly depoliticized it, especially in Poland (Hungary was different), precisely because of the infamous and traumatic tradition of cultural Stalinization in the first half of the 1950s. Politics (once more: particularly in Poland) was more the negative point of departure of art at that time than the welcome message. This situation was just the opposite in Latin America, including Argentina,

where politics and art went together, even though the first had priority.

As I mentioned above, *Tucuman Is Burning* was just the tip of the iceberg in the process of politicization of Argentine art in the 1960s. In Poland probably the only response to March '68 in terms of visual art was a ball in Zalesie near Warsaw titled "Farewell to Spring," in which many people from the art scene, especially connected with the Warsaw Foksal Gallery, participated, and had actually organized.<sup>16</sup> Seen from this perspective, the event was intended to function as a gesture of protest against politicization (*sic*) of intellectual life and the pressure to be political in the Polish reality of 1968, and not vice versa. I must say that at first glance this looks strange; however, if we consider the modernist background of the Polish neo-avant-garde, discussed above, it does have a sort of logic. Even in Czechoslovakia in the course of normalization after 1968, after suppression of the Prague Spring by Warsaw Pact troops where repression and persecution were definitely much stronger, the artists also responded in a comparable way: they just congregated in bars, drank beer, or organized outdoor trips, simply in order to spend some time together.

This essay is based on a lecture given on the occasion of receiving the Igor Zabel Award in Theory and Culture, Barcelona 2010, and an abbreviated version of a chapter in Piotr Pitrowski's book *Art and Democracy in Post-communist Europe*, Reaktion Books, London, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> See: Anka Ptaszkowska, Paweł Polt et al., "Remarks and Comments: Discussion on the Zalesie Ball and Participation," in: Claire Bishop and Marta Dziewańska (eds.), 1968-1989. *Political Upheaval and Artistic Change*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, 2009, pp. 106-111.