

Semiperipherality (Berlin/online, 3–4 Mar 22)

Freie Universität Berlin and Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Mar 3–04, 2022

Sérgio B. Martins

While the historical avant-gardes typically embraced a rhetoric of progress that affirmed new developments by declaring preceding ones defunct, the emergence of the contemporary artworld has often been conceived in terms of its definitive posterity (vis-à-vis modernism, the avant-garde or even history) or relative undifferentiation (as in so-called “global” curating and art-history). The notion of semiperiphery, in contrast, is staked on the spatial and historical mediation of contradictions. Coined by Immanuel Wallerstein, it builds on the classic core-periphery model first advanced by Latin-American economists such as Raúl Prebisch and Celso Furtado, and further elaborated by dependency theorists, who challenged developmentalist assumptions – common both in conservative and left-wing circles – that peripheral nations could retrace the historical steps of central economies either to reach their development standards or to set the necessary conditions for revolution. Capitalism was not an intrinsically national affair, those theorists argued, but rather an international system within which productive processes were distributed unequally, with peripheries allocated to the function of supplying raw materials and cheap labor to core regions while importing back industrialized and more valuable products.

Crucially, core and peripheral productive processes coexist in semiperipheral states. On the one hand, this situation often leads to heightened social, political, and cultural contradictions; on the other, as literary critic Roberto Schwarz has argued, it has prompted art forms that captured the gist of those national contradictions and that, by doing so, also offered unique perspectives on crucial aspects of international capitalism that were not clearly discernible from the viewpoint of major European and North-American artistic centers. While art is certainly no exception to the predominance of unequal trade (think, for example, on how American Pop art swept the international scene in the 1960s), the case can be made for its occasional capacity to turn this very inequality on its head (think, for example, of how artists and critics in different semiperipheral countries responded to Pop). Also, as neo-avantgarde artists from semiperipheral regions began to circulate more and more in core regions (often due to political exile), they entered into unpredictable dialogues with peers both from those regions and from other semiperipheral contexts.

Relevant questions that may be raised in the course of the symposium include, but are not limited to: to which extent does the semiperiphery call into question the temporal mold of avant-gardism and its historiographical derivatives (such as the neo-avant-garde and post-avant-gardism)? Can the notion of semiperiphery exceed regional specificity and function methodologically in accounts of transnational exchanges and encounters in either pre- or postwar art? Does it complicate curatorial models such as those that underlie “global” exhibitions like *The World Goes Pop* and *Other Primary Structures*? Conversely, can it also propose alternatives to nationally-oriented historiographies? How do its critical and historiographical perspectives compare to those of postcolonial

thinking? Is it also productive for reexamining the uneven artistic landscapes of countries that possess major artistic centers, but might be deemed semiperipheral due to their internal discrepancies? Do different geopolitical contexts yield distinct, yet coeval forms of semi-peripherality? Moreover, can the semiperipheral also complicate canonical accounts of European and North-American art and prompt us to reframe our understanding of hitherto familiar works? Do the internal contradictions of the semiperipheral condition also encompass other kinds of peripherality (urban, environmental, linguistic, etc.)?

Program

Thursday, March 3rd 2022

14.30-14.45 (Central European Time) - Opening

14.50-16.10 (CET) – Session 1

Karen Benezra (Leuphana University)
Popular Art, or, the Folklore of the Future

Rafael Cardoso (UERJ/FU Berlin)
The trouble with modernismo: the centrality of a term imported from the periphery

Moderator: Zanna Gilbert (Getty Research Institute)

16.30-17.50 (CET) – Session 2

Klara Kemp-Welch (Courtauld Institute)
Countercultural Misunderstandings and Alternatives to the Alternative

Luke Skrebowski (University of Manchester)
Ian Burn's Itineraries: On Conceptual Art in the World System

Moderator: Eric de Bruyn (FU Berlin)

Friday, March 4th 2022

14.00-16.00 (CET) – Session 3

Gabriel Zacarias (UNICAMP/Universität Hamburg)
Semiperipherality in postwar Europe: the multiple geographies of the Situationist International

Teresa Kittler (University of York)
Modern/Early Modern Connections: Battisti/Celant

Sérgio Martins (PUC-Rio/FU Berlin)
Negative art for a negative country: underdevelopment inside out

Moderator: Ileana L. Selejan (Decolonizing Arts Institute, University of the Arts London)

16.20-17.20 (CET) – Session 4 - Artist's Talk

Matheus Rocha Pitta (Artist, Berlin)

Eye for and Eye

Discussant: Mela Dávila (Independent curator and researcher, Hamburg)

--

Organized by Prof. Dr. Sérgio B. Martins and Prof. Dr. Eric C. H. de Bruyn

To register please send your name and e-mail address to: birgit.reinert@fu-berlin.de

Reference:

CONF: Semiperipherality (Berlin/online, 3-4 Mar 22). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 15, 2022 (accessed Jul 16, 2025),
<<https://arthist.net/archive/35927>>.