

Before and after the '90s.

The 60s are endless. We still live in them. We do not live in them because of a chronologically determined historical continuity - which carries within it the trauma of the Vietnam War, the life after Civil Rights, the anti-culture movement and the rest of the liberation movements that followed. More than all these 60s are endless as a cultural phenomenon. The 60's embodied a vision of the future, through the shadow of technological entropy, which is accelerating and repetitive, which follows us to this day¹.

This short note is written to provide a brief overview of ideas triggered by the intention of this exhibition to bring together artists who were active from 1960-1990 and artists after 1990 to the present day. Our intention is to map out how the different poles of art have moved to the wider borders of the western hemisphere and to focus on the transition period of the 90s. The Greek case and specifically the artists presented here and the causes of the changes need a separate study.

In the 1960s, as mentioned in the preface, a breakthrough was made in the cultural development of the west. Especially through the American effort of theorists and artists, art has passed into another context of references. The issue of this change, which can be said to have begun to be conceived in the early postwar years in the American consciousness, showed the deep character of America that set it apart from its European heritage. This change of paradigm has taken place in all areas of humanities as well as in science. In the field of art, we could summarize, although the field is huge, that we have gone from the metaphysics of quality to the challenge of interest. It mattered now what is interesting. What can embody the viewer in an adventure and not hierarchically impose on them meaning and values. This change of look brought forward situations that until then nobody noticed. Relationships, material culture and, in general, the whole of reality have been imposed. A reality that we no longer read with the tools of art history but with its own means. A reality freed from historical readings.

In the mid-1980s and early 1990s there was a second major change in art and its theory. In short, we could say that we went from the real to the real as a trauma. If for the first generation of postmodern artists (1960-1990) the real gave a solid basis for poetry, even as an absence, in the second generation (1990-2020) the real was a source of trauma. The real of the second generation broke any relationship that the form could have with the content and from the poetic relationship we passed to a prose of the intellect. Why this happened, what is the genealogy of this evolution and why every time the choices were also historically necessary cannot be exhausted in this short note. The result was a violent invasion of the body and the gaze into space and things and vice versa. It was essentially a collapse of all the distinct elements of art. Like a black hole leading the real and the language of art to come together in a condition of indifference and schizophrenia together. This form of collapse of the core of the art star gave birth to two species of white dwarf planets. On the one hand, we had the collapse of the symbolic and the liberation of the real (and therefore the out-of-reality) and on the other hand, the terror caused by this collapse. The real, the unreal and the horror as its inverted image was the fan that opened wide for artists after 1990. As early as the 1960s, Robert Smithson had said that we artists are divided into those who see science fiction movies and those who see horror movies. If the strategies of the first generation led to the overcoming of the reference through the real itself, the strategies of the second generation trapped in the real not only its prose but also the terror created by this condition. But what is real without its symbolic and mythological dimension or even without the promise to surpass the historical time, as the first-generation artists envisioned? This problem was faced by second-generation artists, whose tools were the - already in place- deconstruction of language and a shaped framework that defined what is art. In short, this generation found itself with a real that had no symbolic dimension but only a spare value and a

¹ (Pamela M. Lee, 2004)

deconstructed language to communicate it and that had lost every horizon of collective meaning and was also trapped in its present. On the other hand, mass culture responded to this with the relentless flow of spectacle and content- that is, with violence- and certainly influenced the art itself.

Art on its part was found between a dipole. On the one hand, it expressed the real naked, almost dead, and on the other it showed an insistence on the holistic trauma of the real. All this took place through an adventure that had already gone through appropriation, the unhistoricity of pastiches, the dummy, the crisis of creative identity, the victimization of the allegorical, etc. In art like in literature and cinema, after 1990, the narration became unstable, inverted, the adventure happened once in the past or never happened. The current void of life and memory was in the things themselves and not in an idealistic future as happened many times before the 90s. A meteoric presentness characterizes all art after 1960 and this is the common component of both generations. The noticeable difference for the art after the 90's is that this happened in the things themselves, in the horizontal axis and not in the aesthetic field, in the vertical axis. On the one hand, there was an explosion in the search for multicultural identities, and on the other, there was the collapse of relations between the individual and the world.

This gave birth to a new meteoric subjectivity on the verge of zombies. A subjectivity that has nothing heroic and that works not to overturn a normative relationship structure but more to activate new relationships during the collapse. If we used to talk about avant-garde today, we can only talk about garde. Globalization has taken on the role of avant-garde, but it is still the role of art to preserve relationships and the creator himself. Modern experience has shown that the artists of this emerging subjectivity are divided into those who act in the regime of collapse with extroversion and those who retreat into a realm of private melancholy. In the above two cases, the strategies of critique and relationship building and not integration, in the flow of images of our culture, are common.

Art after the 90's showed perseverance in two main ways of organizing the real. On the one hand, there was an extensive use of the file in the narrow but also a very broad sense, and on the other hand, the exaggeration of imitation. The various means of expression such as video - image - installation - objects etc. were used within these two poles of organization. These ways pre-existed, almost since the beginning of modernism, but in the second postmodern generation they were used as tools for community building and construction, or for an update of what is now obsolete. The file has the power to override the contrasts and bring opposite and dissimilar situations into contact. The archive goes beyond the dialectic and defines a common place of autonomy that the viewer is immersed in. While on the other hand the frenzy of imitation opens the work to the allegory that Craig Owens² had emphasized so early on for the postmodern. An allegory that intended to disrupt the total power of his symbolic and autonomous work of art in the first postmodern generation while, in the second, it functioned as a collection force. Collection of lost relationships, memory and history deconstructed by almost 50 years of post-war consumption.

What changed; What was not overturned by the first generation was used as an opportunity to create a new identity by the second generation. That has changed. One could say Utopia, if the aesthetic was isolated. But aesthetics maintains a relative autonomy and an open dialogue with its history and society despite all efforts to the contrary. The division of the felt is precisely this open dialogue of art. We are certainly not talking about a heroic generation but about a generation that relies on the uncertain and the strategies of weakness.

KARATZAS DIMITRIS_2020

² (C. Owens, page 67-86, 1980)