

# Corner College

Kochstrasse 1 • 8004 Zürich

## **Cold. War. Hot. Stars.** ***The Iron(y) Helmet of the Intellect***

A group exhibition with

**Denise Bertschi, Jackie Brutsche, Thomas Galler,  
Andreas Glauser, Andreas Marti, Nicolasa Navarrete**

From 09.12.2015 to 29.01.2016.

Opening on **9 December 2015**, 19:00h.

At the opening

reading performance *peace pills* by **Jackie Brutsche**  
and sound performance *signal* by **BUG (Andreas Glauser and Christian Bucher)**.

With artist talks and parallel events (to be announced).

Curated by **Dimitrina Sevova**

Organized by Corner College

**T**he exhibition *Cold. War. Hot. Stars. The Iron(y) Helmet of the Intellect* displays a dystopian landscape produced by asymmetric relation of delirious realism and rigorous fiction in the time of global capital, with a certain sense of alienation, coldness and distance. It intensifies these affects and creates a space of reflection and a heterogeneous perceptual field that is simultaneously a close-range haptic space of proximity, on the backdrop of the recent mass media rhetoric announcing a new global crisis in which the world has never been closer to a New Cold War, a security crisis that escalates the fears of a future nuclear "option." The exhibition inquires into some of these scenarios for the future from the past, and traces various historiographic lines or directions through the artistic practices and art works as seismographs of global social change. They sense the current symptoms "where everything is played in uncertain games, 'front to front, back to back, front to back ...,'" as consequences of the politico-social and economic developments after WWII, and the so-called Cold War, a period of propaganda, technologization and militarization of civil life in the competition between Western and Eastern blocs. The segmentary forms of the fight for control and domination altered the North and South lines of longitude and deepened the gap between the so-called Third World and the Western or advanced technological-industrial societies with their current development of a knowledge and service based economy. The exhibition undermines the stereotypes produced by binary abstract machines that overcode the divisions into a homogeneous West and a homogeneous East, into the "rich" North and the "poor" South. It proposes rather other focal points as thresholds to the outside, through which the South can be thought as a new trajectory of knowledge, aesthetics and practices of critique of cultural, ideological and technological hegemony, from which can emerge new lines of resistance and the potentiality of new cooperations,

as everybody has their own South with electric palm trees, not only geographic and economic but personal and political, too.

The participating artists, through their practices based on research, appropriation, poetic displacements and personal aesthetic reflections on memory, cognition, attention, mass media, territory and technologies critically interrogate the past/future tensions and give a passage to the present impossibility of isolation through securitization, militarization and ideological separations in order to increase the modes of connection. With the irony of the intellect, which is a qualitative duration of consciousness, the exhibition aims to intensify and empower movements of deterritorialization that fabulate and produce desires to repeat over and over again the melody of The Plastic Ono Band's *Give Peace a Chance*, grasped as a cosmopolitical proposal for the upcoming winter – not a military machine, but a mutating living machine on which one can take a flight or just stay in bed.

## **Cold. War. Hot. Stars. The Iron(y) Helmet of the Intellect**

*Curatorial Text by Dimitrina Sevova in collaboration with Alan Roth*

During the past extremely hot summer, when one of the record heat waves of the century swept over Europe as a harbinger of global warming, the mass media reported that global relations were moving ever closer to a new Cold War. The following paragraphs on the topic of the exhibition *Cold. War. Hot. Stars.* are composed predominantly of rhetoric and statements appropriated from a new fashionable narrative turning the current global unrest into apocalyptic predictions of a new Cold War. The lack of critique of the ideological premises inherent in such reports contributes to producing a threatening situation on a global scale. One can question the neutrality and independence of the media and the Internet, whose role could have been to de-escalate, through a collective effort of many voices at careful analysis and contextualization, the tensions on the battlefield of the new military, political, economic and ideological post-Cold-War confrontations between superpowers. Unabated, these forces can ideologically damage global politics creating bipolar camps after the end of the Cold War and thwart desires to "Give Peace a Chance."<sup>1</sup>

The exhibition *Cold. War. Hot. Stars.* critically reflects by artistic means on the configurations of this polemic and speculative fiction that sounds like it is cited from a book already written, with its contradictory and controversial narratives blown up anew by the mass media reporting on various (im)possible scenarios of a Cold War reloaded, with hints that the world is "at the gates of a new kind of cold war."<sup>2</sup> The curator is the one who "must have a finger on the pulse, aware of the collective concerns of the moment as the history associated with an artist and his or her narrative,"<sup>3</sup> as the artists' work is "a seismograph of change in society" that can sense the current symptoms of global socioeconomic politics and events like "Russian bombers in the air" or "U.S. tanks in Europe." Politicians and political analysts have officially announced a new global security crisis close to a "New Cold War" that escalates fears of a future nuclear "option."

Is it the rhetoric of outdated scenarios predominantly directed by the most rigid segmentarizations and their military cutting machines that aim to re-distribute and possess frozen fossils, or the anticipation of the climate change of a Cold War reprise? Is it history going to repeat itself, this time with the iron knowledge of irregular warfare and cyberwarfare and automation? Is there a danger that the shadow of the temporality of the Cold War return? Or was the end of the Cold War but a tactical move of *détente* (a French word meaning a temporary release from tension) in a war that has never ended? Will global consciousness and awareness not prevent a new timeless global winter that will be of unseen magnitude, rather a post-Cold War than a new Cold War with its tentative peace based on a balance of terror,<sup>4</sup> a multilateral disbalance of terror that will make navigation perilous and close the potentiality of the passage of life of a cosmopolitical proposal for global peace? Will the warning noise of the ice crust cracking under the environmental damage and facing the inevitability of melting down be heard,

1 John Lennon, "Give Peace a Chance." Released as a 1969 single by the Plastic Ono Band.

2 Finnish president Sauli Niinistö, quoted by Simon Tisdall, *The Guardian*, 5 November 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/05/finland-warns-cold-war-russia-eu>> (accessed 2015-11-08).

3 Carolee Thea and Gregory Williams (eds.), *Foci: Interviews with 10 International Curators by Carolee Thea* (New York: ApexArt Curatorial Program, 2001), p. 17.

4 Balance of terror: The seemingly stable relation between the Soviet Union and the Western powers after WWII based on the fear that entering into a nuclear conflict would destroy the planet.

or will “preventive stupidity”<sup>5</sup> silence it? It seems to be a dystopian landscape of science-fiction with more realistic touches. The new battlefields and frontiers set the stage for the first “live fire” exercise of strategic military games with “high-risk operations” manifesting weaponry and economic power and scattering military bases and surveillance flights all over the globe.

The front lines of the post-Cold War and its new forms of managerial colonialism are the Ukraine, Greece and the Arctic. The current large-scale maneuvering of military forces representing various geopolitical interests in the High North can be seen as significant steps of militarization of the Arctic. The North thus emerges as a new frontier of the speculative scenarios of rigorous and dry scientific capitalist realism. Rather than putting thought into ways of addressing the ecological disaster, with the support of their respective governments transnational corporations look to put it to use to serve the profitability of the scientific and economic search for energy and natural resources. “The race for arctic oil and gas” is a confrontation about how and who will exploit these resources that can escalate unnecessary tensions in the direction of unnecessary conflict, in a post-Cold War without the charming figure of James Bond, but with cold surveillance technology and the automated collection of data, pushed to the extremes by the old paranoia of the former Soviet satellites.

Greece’s debt crisis has become one of the “post-Cold War” battlefields between Washington and Moscow, too, intersecting the geopolitical interests of the former Soviet Union and the West. Are the new military training exercises that cover a dispersed map of proxy wars re-exhuming the indecomposable body of the Cold War? The permanency of the economic crisis and austerity can only be the cold effect of a “silicon based political order”<sup>6</sup> of managerial capitalism in a coalition with oligarchic systems that privatize welfare, leading to a flood of refugees and a displacement of populations that is the greatest since World War II, threatened by the destabilized balance of power across the Middle East. How could the end of a Cold War come about? If the nuclear bomb had turned out to be “as cheap and easily manufactured as a bicycle or an alarm clock,” this might have put an end to it, but “it might have easily plunged us back into barbarism” as nearly everyone would have a nuclear bomb. This did not turn out to be the case. Only “unpredictable demographic changes” might thus put an end to the Cold War, wrote George Orwell in his anticipatory short essay *You and the Atomic Bomb*, written within two months of the USA dropping two atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan.<sup>7</sup> In this essay, Orwell first used the term of Cold War to designate the relation between unconquerable states in permanent conflict with each other. It is thus the melting heat of the first atomic bombs that marks the beginning of an endlessly cold global winter.

The exhibition project critically interrogates the (im)possibility of a New Cold War through aesthetic speculations about the global socioeconomic politics and propagandistic heritage of the shadowy space that appears today from “an epoch as

5 George Orwell, 1984.

6 Wu Qiang, “In the Wake of the Sino-American Summit, the Potential for a New Cold War,” *China Change: News and commentary from those who work for change*, 12 October 2015 <<http://chinachange.org/2015/10/15/in-the-wake-of-the-sino-american-summit-the-potential-for-a-new-cold-war/>> (accessed 2015-11-08).

7 George Orwell, “You and the Atomic Bomb,” *Tribune*, 19 October 1945 <[http://orwell.ru/library/articles/ABomb/english/e\\_abomb](http://orwell.ru/library/articles/ABomb/english/e_abomb)> (accessed 2015-11-08). “The atomic bomb may complete the process [of insulating one nation from another] by robbing the exploited classes and peoples of all power to revolt, and at the same time putting the possessors of the bomb on a basis of military equality. Unable to conquer one another, they are likely to continue ruling the world between them, and it is difficult to see how the balance can be upset except by slow and unpredictable demographic changes.”

horribly stable as the slave empires of antiquity” led by a few “monstrous super-states”<sup>8</sup> that possess weapons of mass destruction.<sup>9</sup> With the “enormous industrial effort” it takes to manufacture the Atomic bomb, the intensification of the history of weaponry is pushed to its limit. At this limit, the credibility of nuclear weapons has been extended to the electricity grid of the nuclear power plants and the wiring and miniaturization of high technologies which forced the automation of abstract and semiotic machines to rule the social productivity. From this perspective, daily life is appropriated into the military industrial complex, or the military industrial complex is dispersed into the entire civil society. The history of the arsenal and of military institutions is closely tied to investment and research in science and technology, whose by-products have found their ways into daily life in the form of the radio, the network of highways, satellites, television, the Internet or mobile phones, etc.

This merger further accentuates the difference between so-called rich and poor countries, as a consequence of which a map is fabricated, deeply rooted in the colonial and hegemonic episteme that designates the lines of demarcation between civilized and barbarian, civil society and savage, and even the more precisely scaled geopolitical and economic apparatuses measuring who is part of the first, the second and the third world, and the unrecognized minorities who escape all of these classifications and tend to disappear. In the Third World,<sup>10</sup> all kinds of experiments took place that led to the Third World debt and social and environmental havoc. At the beginning of the so-called Cold War, extremely toxic and hot regions arose in the Third World. War can only be extreme, cold or hot, “in order to create a climate of terror.”<sup>11</sup>

The Cold War remained in the realm of fiction for the greatest part of the civilian population of the world, and mostly escalated in the rivalry of sport events like the Olympic games, in fiction, art and mainstream feature movies, as well as massive propaganda and conspirative espionage stories revealed in the mass media. The fight for domination in the cold U.S.–Soviet conflict cartographed the diagram of hot proxy wars that modulated the relations between the Eastern and Western Bloc and altered the North–South lines of longitude, exporting to the Third World the battlefield of their increased competition for influence by occupying the wars for liberation and efforts of decolonization.

New political formations emerged from the hot regional proxy wars – oligarchies whose ruling elites have exclusive political and economic prerogatives within their isolated regional hegemonies. George Orwell further develops his critique of the Cold War, emphasizing the role of newly emerging oligarchies, in his political fiction and dystopian science-fiction novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984), published in 1949.

8 George Orwell’s insights into the genealogy of the monstrosity of the State, he is inspired by political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who wrote in 1651 that a hypothetical State of nature was a condition of perpetual war. His ideas resonated later and crystallized in different forms in the avant-garde movements from WWI on, like Dada, the Situationist movement and Guy Debord’s ideas about the Society of the Spectacle as a militarization of the media, or in the two philosophical volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

9 George Orwell, *op. cit.*

10 The term *Third World* (*Tiers Monde*) was invented by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy in reference to countries that were unaligned with either the Communist Soviet bloc or the Capitalist NATO bloc during the Cold War, in an article published in the French magazine, *L’Observateur* on 14 August 1952. This first use of the term is a rather positive and emancipatory effort, referring to the Third Estate of the French revolution (the common people, as opposed to the first and second which were the clergy and aristocracy): “[...] because at the end this ignored, exploited, scorned Third World like the Third Estate, wants to become something too.”

11 Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema. The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London and New York: Verso Radical Thinkers Series, 1989), p. 9.

After a nuclear war and civil dissolution, over the 20 years between 1945 (the end of WWII) and 1965, in a province of the superstate of Oceania in a world of perpetual war, governmental control and public manipulation are omnipresent, under the constant surveillance of the Thought Police. The main protagonist works in a small office in the Records Department at the Ministry of Truth, where he rewrites historical records, such as past newspaper articles, eliminating from the language the words that can bring about unorthodox political and social thoughts.

Under the media slogan  $2 + 2 = 5$  "two plus two equals five," control is exercised over perceptions. The "objective" reality that  $2 + 2 = 4$  can be obeyed, as Orwell said, and they will be quite right that the result can be five. This is one of the riddles of the novel, whose title ends in four. Four is the smallest composed number. It is the esoteric number of the square. Without it there is no diagonal and transversal passages. It inevitably brings emotives and moods of the upcoming spring that will break the system. Planet number four in the solar system is Mars, the god of war. For the ancients, his war paradoxically brings peace and makes the grass grow and flowers bloom. In the novel, there is a fictional book, the samizdat / self-published treatise *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, a story within the story, written by the fictional heretic and clandestine figure of Emmanuel Goldstein. His ghostly appearance only in the media and his projected presence justifies the surveillance and the elimination of civil liberties in Oceania by "a self-elected oligarchy." The book circulates underground without a title, *A Book*, a handbook of the persecuted minority, dissenting in a phantom cell structure of social resistance.

### *Chapter III: War is Peace*<sup>12</sup>

In a state in which war is permanent, the permanent state of war is "a peace that is no peace."

During the 1970s, Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev proclaimed a new era of "peaceful coexistence" and established the new policy of *détente* between the two superpowers. Despite the official discourse of "relaxation," confrontation continued throughout the period of *détente* in the Third World, particularly in the Middle East, Chile, Ethiopia, and Angola. This period ended in 1978 with the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, and was followed by a new intensification of the Cold War.

A related concept to Orwell's "a peace that is no peace" is found in the analyses by Paul Virilio in *War and Cinema – The Logistics of Perception* (1984), a technical history of weaponry that extends to photography and cinematography. There is no war without representation. Perceptions are themselves a continuous war of destruction and creation in the reproduction of reality. The war machine, says Virilio, is a chemical and neurological process appropriating bodily functions of the nerve system, while weaponry and arsenal are active elements of the ideological construction of subjectivity. Battles radically change the fields of perception, exploiting and exhausting their immateriality. War has always been colored and radically changes the temperature to the extreme. It is a state of exception. In war there is no gentle variation of temperature. The amplitude goes directly from melting heat to freezing cold.

The end of the Cold War at the beginning of the 1990s has been analyzed as the end of the proliferation of science-fiction, the end of utopia and of communism. Despite these conclusions, the genre continues to grow, and the Cold War has mutated into its new nickname and cyber name World War III. Science fiction has transformed into so-called speculative fiction in popular culture and proliferates in the game industry, revealing the poverty and scarcity of the dystopian landscape from where a new genre

<sup>12</sup> This is the title of Chapter Three of *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, the fictional book in Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*.

of global integrated capitalist realism has emerged, in which the capitalization of the affect is pushed to the extreme.

The clouds of the planet Mars that give it its dramatic red color, consist of inorganic dust of Iron(III) oxide, or rust. On the surface of the "Red Planet," iron oxide in the form of powder and dust is prevalent and gives it a reddish appearance. It is the very element that is the main source of iron for the steel industry on Earth. The fourth, red planet is cold and might be dead with its two irregularly shaped moons. It embodies imperial Rome's Mars, or the Greek Ares, the Iron god with a red-plumed helmet and red wings or a crimson cape, in whose honor the ancient Romans built their society on the sophisticated apparatus of a military organization. For them, Mars tells the founding myth of their own barbarian invasion on the territory they inhabit. He is the father of Romulus and Remus, i.e., of the Roman Empire, "savage" or "feral" like a wild animal, a kind of immanent life force that goes beyond the human. It is the myth of the marvel, of the spirit of non-human otherness, of the dragon of the virtual that encircles the visible world and makes its metamorphosis possible in the vertigo of the eternal return. Mars is simultaneously destruction and creation: the destructive militant forces of war and the war that leads to peace and brings the vital potentiality of creation. He inhabits the obscure connections of the wild woodlands. He is the incarnation of a mystical and wild empiricism, the iron(y) of knowledge, and change that any spring brings inevitably with itself.

### *The Iron(y) Helmet of the Intellect*

The iron(y) of knowledge is the unified force of power/knowledge, as in Ortega y Gasset who considers that "the force of arms is not brute force but spiritual force."<sup>13</sup> When the technology of the war machine is appropriated by the military apparatuses, the "intellects cool" and the spirit is rationally cold, having lost its erotic power and ability for love and empathy. In the monochrome monumental painting of *Guernica* by Picasso (1937), the cold electric bulb or surveilling/cutting and alienated eye is above all the figures on the top of the grotesque composition. The iron(y) of helmet knowledge is comic or grotesque, an electric mechanical eye without any empathy. War is the faceless machine of the cyclops' heads which with their non-human otherness observe and gaze "with envious eyes, and slowly and surely draw their plans against us,"<sup>14</sup> as H. G. Wells wrote in his dystopian science-fiction novel *The War of the Worlds*, imagining an extraterrestrial invasion from Mars, unlike Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* where the ideological conflict is perceived through the melancholic destruction of life on the red planet by humans fleeing from a troubled and eventually atomically devastated Earth.<sup>15</sup> While H. G. Wells interpreted the "advanced" Martians as militarized, cruel and conquering monsters, Alexander Bogdanov's *Red Star*<sup>16</sup> presents the "advanced" aliens as communist, and therefore peaceful and prosperous. In Bogdanov's novel, the Martians invite the main narrator, a young Russian student named Leonid, back to the Red Planet to see the Martians' civilization: a thriving, peaceful – and communist – social utopia. The aliens even follow Marx as they change their professions from the morning to the end of the day. *Red Star*, a symptom of the temptation of the upcoming revolution, was later to become part of a Soviet mainstream of optimistic writing about the extraterrestrials and the red planet of Mars, and to provide the general party line of state-supported Soviet science fiction.

13 Quoted by Paul Virilio in *War and Cinema – The Logistics of Perception*, p. 8.

14 H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (1897).

15 Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles* (1950).

16 Alexander Bogdanov, *Red Star* (1908).

## *Some Additional Materials: Chronicles of the Cold War and Its Hot Stars*

In the Korean War, which began in 1950, U.S. and South Korean forces fought against Communists from North Korea and China, in an effort to contain communism and prevent it from spreading to other South-East Asian countries like Indonesia. In Vietnam, too, the U.S. government viewed its involvement in the war as a way to prevent a Communist takeover of South Vietnam. What the Vietnam War was to the U.S., in terms of destabilizing economic impact and crisis of interior affairs, the Soviet Afghan War was to the Soviet Union. U.S. interventions in the Middle East, like their actions in Iraq under the motto of peacekeeping military interventions in the name of a boundless "Global War on Terror" as launched by the Reagan Administration in 1984, later escalated in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks.

From the first Soviet Sputnik satellites to spaceships, space travel was seen by the USSR as part of a grander design to achieve a communist victory on a galactic level. The show of power in outer space culminated in the Apollo mission to the moon, which the astronaut Frank Borman described as "just a battle in the cold war," and later went over into the "Star Wars" Strategic Defense Initiative of the 1980s.

During the 1950s the specter of the impure and synthesized "noise without shelter" of Rock 'n' Roll haunted the U.S. and spread across Western Europe – a hybrid of African and American genesis. The phrase "rocking and rolling" originally described the movement of a ship on the ocean. Its waving or swinging movements coming from the South mixed with the military technologies from the previous war, like the electric guitar, the amplifier and the microphone, and the 45 rpm record. Rock 'n' Roll encouraged racial cooperation and shared experience, new forms of social rebellion, new forms of life with their new value systems from the beat generation to the hippie movement with their slogan of "make love not war."

Jack Kerouac's phrase "Beat Generation," which he coined in 1948, came to characterize a perceived underground, anti-conformist youth movement in New York with their new visions. This is not to be confused with the mainstream popular term *Beatnik* invented by Herb Caen, columnist of the *San Francisco Chronicle* on 2 April 1958, a portmanteau on the name of the recent Russian Sputnik satellite launch in October 1957 – the first artificial satellite to orbit the Earth – and the Beat Generation. This suggested that beatniks were far out of the mainstream of society and possibly pro-Communist. In the 1960s, elements of the expanding Beat culture were incorporated into the hippie movement, which gave a completely different account of the American Dream, merged into the movement opposing the U.S. war in Vietnam and became the largest counterculture movement, with an enormous intellectual outreach into all social strata, turning into a catalyst of social change, inventing and practicing not only new cultural forms against the war, censorship and also racial segregation, demanding civil rights. It opened a new dynamic of subculture and new alternative living forms that embraced creativity.