

Call for Papers

Deadline for proposals: 15 April 2021

Languages: Spanish, Catalan, English, French, Portuguese

Responding to the reflections developed in the framework of the research projects [Decentralised Modernitie\(s\)](#) and [Fossil Aesthetics](#), this international conference asks about the role that cultural imaginaries have played in the shaping of neoliberal subjectivity during the period from 1979 to 2019. Marked by historical key milestones such as the beginning of Perestroika and the fall of the Berlin Wall, this period has been determined by the effective implementation of the economic, cultural and political model that shapes our present. Although the historical origin of neoliberalism as an ideological project can be traced back several decades, it is from the end of the 1970s, after the experiment of the Chilean dictatorship and when Margaret Thatcher came into power, that its cultural hegemony began to take shape on a global level.

During this threshold period, between the 1970s and the 1980s, Michel Foucault made the relationship between neoliberalism and bio-politics a subject of discussion, Raymond Williams proposed an eco-social updating of cultural criticism, and Jean-François Lyotard reflected on the end of grand narratives, which we associate with the transition to the postmodern world view. All this took place in a geopolitical context marked by the disputes over the planet's energy resources (with the Iranian Revolution as the culmination of the 1970s), the restructuring of the international division of labour (with the policies of industrial relocation and financialisation of the economy), technological acceleration in areas such as information technology, and the threats of extermination arising from nuclear proliferation and space-based armament (such as the US strategic defence initiative / SDI). These processes, on the one hand, continued the bipolar climate of the Cold War and, on the other, heralded its decline.

The long neoliberal wave extends to the present day showing signs of both, its success as well as its demise. Thus, in the absence of macro-political alternatives to the free market ideology, we are witnessing the emergence of neo- and eco-fascist tendencies that announce an illiberal variant of the post-war link between democracy, growth and fossil fuels. On the emancipatory side of the scale, the political de-activation of culture saw at the same time the emergence of new forms of resistance to the dominant economic and political dynamics. Actually, these epochal tensions have now been accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, of which China warned on 31 December 2019 and whose management has combined the intensification of bio-political forms of governance with expectations of a green revival of Keynesian egalitarian policies.

Whether we understand neoliberalism as a simple economic doctrine, a pervasive governmental rationality or a powerful political theology, its enormous capacity to shape the existence of individuals is based on a cultural hegemony unprecedented in history. The imposition of a credo based on the free market, the reformulation of

the functions of the state, subjective individualism in conduct, behaviour and desires, or the implementation of a new labour framework based on competitiveness, flexibility, entrepreneurship and the supremacy of profitability, would not have been possible without enormous direct political intervention. In this process, the configuration of new visualities, imaginaries and cultural practices was key to legitimizing this historical project. In the midst of the contradictions of the period, art and culture accompanied its construction, while at the same time resisting its normalization.

Between Tehran and Wuhan, this conference will trace the permutations of artistic and cultural imaginaries, aesthetic discourses and political subjectivities that have accompanied the shaping of a new world order from the late 1970s to the present day. Among the lines of work and questions suggested for the submission of paper proposals are the following:

1. Cultural imaginaries, technological faith in the future and neoliberal visuality

At a time of transition in the geo-political system, with the exhaustion of the cycle of collective revolts and a widespread generalized economic crisis, the desire for change was articulated at the origin of neoliberalism through new imaginaries (produced by the media, the cultural industries or visual culture), which had an enormous capacity for seduction and that ended up instituting a new cultural hegemony by proposing new ways of life. This subjective promise was characterized, among other aspects, by individualism, a techno-liberal faith in the future, the offer of instant pleasure through consumption or the centrality of the body, thus installing a historical dynamic that has been crossed by a permanent malaise and an endemic conspiratorial discourse. Despite the conditioning factors affecting late-capitalist representability (hypervisibility, reification and creative commodification, the society of the spectacle), we are interested in analysing the effects on artistic and audio-visual practices of contemporary social experience.

2. Imaginaries of work, malaise and neoliberal subjectivity.

In the context of the mutations in employment conditions brought about by the neoliberal regime (from the abandonment of security in factory work to the processes of total deregulation, with the hyper-flexibility and uberization of work), we are interested in examining the subjective transformations that these seismic changes have brought about. When looking closer at the new models of organization that they have determined (the transition from the decline of traditional trade unions to new forms of horizontal unionisation, feminist strikes and the struggle for the social recognition of care labour), it becomes evident that we cannot understand the new subjectivities brought to light by the neoliberal reorganisation of work without taking into account the aesthetic and cultural productions that have accompanied this process. At the same time, it is a question of determining how the new imaginaries of work (and the resistance towards them) have responded to historical phenomena such as the emergence of the social factory, the increasing entrepreneurialisation of ourselves or the emerging importance of the 'I-brand', whose effects on the neoliberal subject, burdened with

individualised and politically disarticulated discomforts, cannot be underestimated.

3. Transformations in the political imaginaries of the left: social movements, aesthetic politics and utopian imagination.

Since the 1970s, neoliberal imaginaries have become apparent as the vectors of emancipation, decolonisation and revolution that characterised the previous decades have been eroded. However, the forms of struggle that accompanied the global implementation of neoliberalism, though silenced, were not completely swept away, giving rise in different parts of the world to the emergence of new social movements. They defined the aesthetic politics that accompanied counter-hegemonic resistances around memory, feminism, anti-racism and environmentalism (to give just a few examples). These practices of resistance, deployed in a context where the decline of communist and social democratic transformation processes (culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of the third way) coincided with the rise of neoliberalism. On the one hand, they expanded traditional aesthetic and political imaginaries, but, on the other hand, also shelved other dimensions central to the thought and action of modernity's emancipatory movements, such as the utopian dimension, whose decline we tend to relate to the end of mass utopias and the slow cancellation of the future (Mark Fisher).

4. Between multiculturalism and racialised politics.

The emergence of neoliberalism was also accompanied by the birth of multiculturalism as a new cultural paradigm. Heir to the discourses on the end of history, multiculturalism advocated the non-conflictual social integration of the different ethnic groups, races and religions into the nation-states of the so-called First World, leaving the economic system intact (indeed, it placed cultural difference at the service of value production). However, this multiculturalism coincided over time with an intensification of xenophobic policies of exclusion, as well as the strengthening of borders. These tensions have had an impact on artistic and cultural practices, which have not ceased to take a stand in a context increasingly convulsed by phenomena such as the war on terrorism, new geopolitical conflicts and forced migrations. Recently, discourses around threats to late-capitalist normality have also insisted on the identification of the internal enemy, often with a deliberate racial bias. The rise of the ultra-right in the context of the crisis of civilisation has coincided with the emergence of forms of resistance that redefine in a new bio-political key (for example, around the Black Lives Matter slogan) the racialised struggles of previous decades, composing new bonds of internationalist solidarity that had been volatilised by the consolidation of neoliberal hegemony. Moreover, these political resistances and their aesthetic productions emerge when colonial-capitalist modernity is at a critical moment in its trajectory, threatened by the prospect of eco-social collapse.

5. The political ecology of neoliberalism: political ecology, cultural imaginaries and political subjectivities.

From an objective point of view, the period covered by the congress highlights the scale of the ecological crisis underway, related to variables such as the acceleration of biodiversity loss (that has favoured the global proliferation of various pathogens) or the critical consequences of global warming (highlighting the fact that more than half of the CO₂ emissions in the history of humanity correspond to the historical period of neoliberalism). In subjective terms, however, the cognitive dissonance has deepened between the crudeness of environmentalist diagnoses and the unsustainability of consumption patterns. The imaginaries of the good life and the discourses of progress and modernisation have been increasingly captured by the technological factor and the commitment to the digitalisation of the economy. However, we can also identify the emergence of a series of cultural practices, environmentalist imaginaries and social movements that have resisted this historical drift, trying to restore the link between sustainability, subjectivity and the organisation of work. In this sense, the eco-social transition must involve a reactivation of the utopian imagination in which artistic and cultural productions are called upon to play a particularly prominent role.

Submission and presentation guidelines

Papers, and creative projects addressing topics that are relevant to one of the conference panels are welcome. Accepted presentations will be 20 minutes long. The official languages of the conference will be Spanish, Catalan, English, French, Portuguese. The deadline for submitting proposals is **15 April 2021**. Please submit a 300 words abstract and a short CV stating in your abstract the panel or panels for which you are applying. Send your proposal to: anitaorzes@ub.edu using as your subject '**Conf. A neoliberal counter-revolution**' and include the number of the panel you wish to apply for.

Organising committee: Juan Albarrán (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), Paula Barreiro (Université Grenoble-Alpes), Olga Fernández López (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), María Ruido (Universidad de Barcelona), Jaime Vindel (CSIC).

Coordination: Anita Orzes (Universidad de Barcelona / Université Grenoble Alpes) and Alejandro Pedregal (CSIC)

Scientific Comitee

Juan Albarrán (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)
Paula Barreiro López (Université Grenoble Alpes)
Olga Fernández López (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)
Jonathan Harris (Birmingham City University)
Sonia Kerfa (Université Grenoble Alpes)
Gal Kirn (ICI Berlin)
Pablo Martínez (MACBA)
Daniel Montero (UNAM, México)
María Ruido (Universidad de Barcelona)
Emilio Santiago (Universidad de Zaragoza)
Jaime Vindel (CSIC)

This International Congress is organized by [Decentralised Modernity\(ies\). Art, Politics and Counterculture in the Transatlantic Axis of the Cold War](#) (HAR2017-82755-P), [Fossil Aesthetics: A Political Ecology of Art History, Visual Culture and the Cultural Imaginaries of Modernity](#) (PIE 202010E005) and Energy humanities. Energy and sociocultural imaginaries between the industrial revolutions and the ecosocial crisis (PID2020-113272RA-I00) in collaboration with the Laboratoire de Recherche Historique Rhône Alpes (LARHRA) of the Université Grenoble Alpes and the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA).