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**Latin American networks: Synchronicities, Contacts and Divergences.**

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*The Art of Solidarity: Visual and Performative Politics in Cold War Latin America*, edited by Jessica Stites Mor and María del Carmen Suescun Pozas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018).

George F. Flaherty



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*The Art of Solidarity: Visual and Performative Politics in Cold War Latin America*, edited by Jessica Stites Mor and María del Carmen Suescun Pozas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 310 pages, Black and white images

- 1 What does it mean when an artist sends an artwork in solidarity with Salvador Allende's government in Chile, joining other artists who may or may not know each other, separated by national borders? What is the significance of boycotting the São Paulo biennial in solidarity with the people living under dictatorship in Brazil, even if you have never travelled there? While "solidarity" is not usually thought of as jargon, it sometimes stands as a placeholder or stopgap for more detailed, micro-historical analysis of interpersonal relations and transnational politics that has yet to or may never materialize in any historically verifiable form. As such, solidarity joins "community" and "resistance" in the pantheon of keywords that are essential to Cold War cultural studies and at the same time quite elusive.
- 2 *The Art of Solidarity: Visual and Performative Politics in Cold War Latin America* (University of Texas Press, 2018), edited by Jessica Stites Mor and María del Carmen Suescun Pozas, aims to more thickly describe the *practice* of transnational cultural solidarity in the Americas. Solidarity-based cultural production, as Stites Mor and Suescun Pozas write

in their introduction, is “broadly conceptualized as modalities of action within various art forms and media, the social and intellectual habits of participants, and strategies of expression and representation that grew out of and alongside transitional solidarity movements” (2). The co-editors are especially interested in the role(s) of empathy in fomenting and suturing solidarity relations. Thinking empathy is complicated, they admit, as it “gains full expression in the human body and its labors, as opposed to simply being expressed in works or cultural artifacts in their finished form” (6). Empathetic politics is relational and always in formation—making it hard to write about in a conventional academic manner. However, it may be the only way to begin to account for the sensations and feelings that are the connective tissue of the New Left that emerges after World War II.

- 3 The study of transnational cultural solidarity has expanded in recent years. Significantly, south-south axes of solidarity are of increasing interest to scholars, promising to break open networks that have been previously routed through the Global North. See, for example, Alan Eladio Gómez’s *The Revolutionary Imaginations of Greater Mexico: Chicana/o Radicalism, Solidarity Politics, and Latin American Social Movements* (University of Texas Press, 2016) or the catalog (various authors) accompanying the exhibition *A los artistas del mundo ... = To the artists of the world ... : Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende México/Chile 1971-1977* at Mexico City’s Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo. Stites Mor has made essential contributions, including her *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2013). And, reading more broadly, Patrick Iber’s *Neither Peace Nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Harvard University Press, 2015) placed definitive emphasis on the Cold War as a cultural field.
- 4 *The Art of Solidarity* is divided into four parts: 1) Preparing the Ground, Holding the Ground, 1944-2015; 2) Resistance and Liberation, 1960-1974; 3) Cultural Economies of Solidarity, 1970-1987; 4) Solidarity Action Beyond Movements. Melanie Herzog examines how artist-activist Elizabeth Catlett, who trained in the U.S. and made her career in Mexico, crossed borders in her varied forms of politico-historical address to African-American, Afro-Mexican, and mestizo audiences. Katherine Borland considers the ways solidarity activists in the U.S., seeking to alert North Americans to their complicity in the 2009 coup in Honduras, translate tactics from Latin America to new contexts. Javier González reads Ignácio de Loyola Brandão’s novel *Zero* as a formal experiment in Sixties solidarity, an extension of a long-standing but evolving “aesthetics of resistance” in Brazil. Ashely Black looks closely at the interactions among U.S.-based folk musicians Barbara Dane and Phil Ochs, and the status of Cuba and Chile in New Left solidarity. Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda mines the visual and performative culture of the feminist movement in 1970s Mexico to consider its production of allies for its critique of gendered political violence. Lucinda Grinnell extends this analysis to consider revolutionary lesbianism in Mexico in the same period, drawing from police surveillance documentation in the national archive. Kevin Coleman looks at photojournalism’s role in stoking solidarity or its opposite, contrasting coverage of the 1954 Honduran banana strike in *Life* magazine and Cuba’s *Bohemia*. Jacqueline Adams reprises some of her ethnographic scholarship on Chilean *arpilleras* as “solidarity art.” An epilogue by Ernesto Capello contrasts the various contributors’ approaches.
- 5 Taken as a whole, *The Art of Solidarity* is reaching in the right direction, toward a consideration of empathy and also affects. Still more work can be done, however. The

field of solidarity studies would benefit from more detailed and sustained case studies that are able to narrate the embodied complexities, nuances, and contradictions of solidarity, as both an interpersonal and socio-cultural phenomenon. In spite of its title, the collection would also benefit, with a few exceptions, from closer, more critical reading of images. And while the essays together cross-media boundaries, including photography, graphics, literature, textiles, and film, there are moments when it is clear that most of the contributors treat the image is more an illustration than an object of inquiry in itself.

- 6 A fuller embrace of humanistic methods, especially from art history and cultural studies more broadly, would allow for the interpretive sensitivity and flexibility to make fuller sense of solidarity. Solidarity is always in formation and contingent. It is continuously renegotiated, sometimes anxiously so. It exists in tension with the diverse codes of conduct, including social obligation. In solidarity we are both political and social beings. It should not be reduced to being for or against something or someone, perfect total alignment or not. This is further complicated in the cultural sphere, where some of these relations are meditated through works of art and artistic gatherings, where discourses of quality, taste, judgement, and commitment (simultaneously political and aesthetic) distort these already tangled relations to the point of fuzziness. Solidarity, while coming out of the desire for community, does not produce constancy or democratically horizontal relations among those who claim it. The contradictions of solidarity are perhaps symptomatic of this Cold War stalemate. Nothing can stay ideologically pure for long. *The Art of Solidarity* rightfully extends beyond 1989, the year the Berlin Wall fell, to consider the Cold War not unlike the so-called Long Sixties, a phenomenon that exceeds its initial periodization. Scholars interested arts activism, social movements, human rights, and transitional justice should consider this anthology for their research and teaching.

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