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Group Material's "Art for the Future"
Visualizing Inter-American Solidarity at the End of the Global Cold War

In June 1982, Group Material, a collective of young activist artists based in New York City, organized a ground-breaking exhibition titled *¡Luchar! An Exhibition for the People of Central America*. Held at 19 West 21st Street in Lower Manhattan, the exhibition was a collaboration with the community center Taller Latinoamericano and a number of other likeminded cultural organizations that occupied the second floor of that address.[1] Comprised of contemporary US and Latin American art works and artifacts, *¡Luchar!* made a political statement against the Reagan administration's interventionist policies in the region. It also recognized and supported the culture and art making practices of Central Americans.[2] In so doing, the exhibition not only contested the Reagan administration's efforts to position the conflicts in Central America as proxies for the Cold War rivalry between the US and the USSR. *¡Luchar!* also provided a significant, though now largely forgotten, model of transnational solidarity between the Americas.

A photograph that accompanies a short review of the exhibition in New York City's oldest Spanish language newspaper, *El Diario La Prensa*, clarifies this aim. In the image, Group Material's Doug Ashford and exiled Salvadoran artist Daniel Flores y Ascencio stand next to a

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[1] The cultural institutions included Casa Nicaragua, Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee, and Committee in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala, Commusal, among others. For more information about *¡Luchar!*, see Julie Ault, ed., *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material* (London: Four Corners Books, 2010), 74-76; and Group Material Archive; MSS 215; box 1; folder 36; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.
[2] See Press Release for *¡Luchar!*, 25 May 1982; Group Material Archive; MSS 215; box 1; folder 36; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

pair of photographs taken by Ecuadorian native Bolívar Arellano.[3] Like many photographs snapped at art exhibition openings, the image at first seems to serve a referential function in its documentation of individuals posing next to art works. Upon closer inspection, however, the meaning of this image exceeds this evidentiary purpose. Through its assemblage of geographically distinct artistic nationalities culled from across the Western hemisphere alongside its circulation within a Latino newspaper, the photograph imagines, even desires, the prospect of Central American cultural and artistic agency as well as inter-American collaboration and support.

The transnational solidarity suggested in this photograph was not new to the 1980s. Rather, this kind of "extra-national political activism" has a long genealogy that extends back, as historians Christine Hatzky and Jessica Stites Mor note, to "two interconnected historical moments…both of which addressed the evils of imperialism and the expansion of transitional capitalism." They include nineteenth-century Anti-Slavery Societies in Europe as well as the US and early twentieth-century international working class movements, which grew out of the success of the Russian Revolution and led to the development of organizations such as the Communist International or Comintern. Both movements provide historical examples of efforts to form international alliances and exchanges across the globe. Yet, the problem with this historical understanding of transnational solidarity is that it fails, as Hatzky and Mor crucially point out with respect to Latin America, to "[reflect] on the very different dynamics of solidarity that emerged from the global South" and thereby situates "this activism as between First World

[3] See "*¡Luchar!* Exposición conjunta," *El Diario La Prensa*, 1982; Group Material Archive; MSS 215; box 1; folder 36; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

humanitarians and their unequal Third World counterparts."[4] To counter this asymmetrical tendency in scholarship on transnational solidarity, scholars such as Hatzky and Mor have sought to realign discussions, especially within a Latin American context, from a North-South to a South-North and a South-South vantage point, with the hopes of "[uncovering] nuances of understanding that can be gained from focusing on reciprocities and contingencies within solidarity networks and between partners in struggle."[5] My chapter on Group Material's *¡Luchar!* owes much to this growing body of scholarship. At the same time, it departs from these studies in its consideration of the visual. That is to say, rather than focus on transnational political action in the Americas broadly conceived, I consider the complex and ever-changing relationships between aesthetic experience, activist practices, and the affects that they produced in the first half of the 1980s.[6]

My interest in transnational visual practices, or what I call *visual solidarities*, hinges on two propositions. First, rather than use this concept to address the ways in which aesthetic

[4] Christine Hatzky and Jessica Stites Mor, "Latin American Transnational Solidarities: Contexts and Critical Research Paradigms," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20, no. 2 (2014), 128-129, 132.

[5] Hatzky and Mor, "Latin American Transnational Solidarities," 129. They go on to point out that a network of international, anti-imperialist activities in Latin America likewise helped to shape what transnational solidarity could mean. These include trans-border solidarity campaigns around Cuban independence, the Mexican Revolution, the national liberation struggle led by Augusto C. Sandino in Nicaragua, and the Cuban Revolution, among others.

[6] While the transnational dimension of the Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement (CAPSM) has recently received increased attention from scholars, considerations of the visual remain largely absent from these discussions. See, for instance, Héctor Perla Jr., "Si Nicaragua Vencío, El Salvador Vencerá: Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.-Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement," *Latin American Research Review* 43, no. 2 (2008): 136-158; Héctor Perla Jr., "Heirs of Sandino: The Nicaraguan Revolution and the U.S.-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 80-100; and Héctor Perla Jr. and Susan Bibler Coutin, "Legacies and Origins of the 1980s US-Central American Sanctuary Movement," *Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees* 26, no. 1 (2009): 7-19. One notable exception is Patricia Stuelke, "The Reparative Politics of Central American Solidarity Movement Culture," *American Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (September 2014): 767-790.

practices can build commonalities or forge identifications, I consider the kinds of misrecognitions or contingencies that they also create. Second, I argue that to understand the political possibilities opened up by transnational visual solidarities, one must situate these practices in time and especially within the affective dimensions of time. To address these two interrelated aspects of visual solidarity—its contingency and temporal framings—I begin the chapter by first establishing the aesthetic and political parameters—in this case, postmodernism and the global Cold War—under which Group Material organized *¡Luchar!* as well as some of the affects—doubt and fear, in particular—that they produced. I then move on to consider how members of Group Material attempted to use *¡Luchar!* to overcome the affective logic of this art/politics binary as well as some of the contingencies that resulted. I conclude by turning to Group Material's subsequent 1984 exhibition *Timeline: A Chronicle of U.S. Intervention in Central and Latin America*. I use this exhibition to suggest how members of Group Material, building upon instances of misrecognition within *¡Luchar!*, recognized the necessity of constructing transnational visual solidarity within this ensuing exhibition not just in terms of the affective possibility of the future but also the past. And, specifically, a past which included the hemisphere's broader histories, multiple temporalities, and vexed geographies that had been ignored and even suppressed through the Reagan administration's as well as the mainstream news media's polarizing discourse of Cold War era communist aggression in the region. It is this effort by Group Material, then, to use the affective potential of the visual to empower viewers to think differently about the present, the past, and, by extension, the future that serves as the basis for my exploration of the political possibilities as well as limitations of inter-American visual solidarities at the end of the global Cold War.

Visualizing the Global Cold War

In 1982, when Group Material organized *¡Luchar!*, many practitioners of a politically informed art were experimenting with techniques that Hal Foster defined as an "oppositional" or a "resistant" postmodernism. Critics like Foster, defined this so-called political postmodernism, in terms of contingency, or its ability to "question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations." In short, for Foster and critics such as Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens, among others, a postmodernism of "resistance" or an "oppositional" postmodernism instilled in viewers a sense of doubt about "the world as it is."[7] Nevertheless, these critics disagreed on how to frame postmodernism's politics, whether in terms of a "resistance" to modernist aesthetics or sexual difference, or whether, as Crimp suggested, some forms should be characterized as "regressive" and others as "progressive."[8] Evidence of the inadequacies of postmodernism's politics also extended beyond the art world. In the mainstream news media, for instance, postmodernist strategies of doubt were used to challenge, even unmask, the ideological nature of the Reagan administration's foreign policies in Central America and thereby counter the fear used to justify these policies. Yet, as I will suggest below, despite the efforts of the news media to harness postmodernism's politics of resistance against the Reagan administration's Cold War interventionist policies, in the end such oppositional tactics only served to perpetuate the very ideological terms that news media initially attempted to

[7] Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), xii, xv.

[8] See Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic*, 57-82; and Douglas Crimp, "Appropriating Appropriation," in Paula Marincola, ed. *Image Scavengers: Photography* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1982), 27-34.

deconstruct.[9] It was within and against this framework of a "resistant" postmodernism and the global Cold War that Group Material first developed the visual and affective terms of an inter-American solidarity.

When Ronald Reagan took office on January 20, 1981, he immediately began to implement his foreign policy of combating the spread of so-called Soviet-backed communism throughout the globe. Central America occupied a central position in this foreign policy, which would later become known as the Reagan Doctrine. In Central America, Reagan adopted a dual policy of military support. In El Salvador, his administration provided aid against the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) rebels. While, in Nicaragua, his administration backed the Contra war against the Sandinistas. To gain public acceptance for these interventionist policies, Reagan sought to convince the US public that the FMLN rebels and Sandinistas were working together as part of a larger global communist scheme—fronted by the USSR via Cuba—that posed a significant threat to US national security.[10] The ideological as well as affective terms of this Cold War propaganda campaign were thus set in motion almost immediately after Reagan took office. As Reagan's newly appointed Secretary of State, General Alexander M. Haig, Jr., famously declared, within a month of Reagan taking oath: Central America and, more specifically El Salvador, was "'the place to draw the line' against communist influence."[11]

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[9] This problem is also one that occurred within the context of the art world. See Abigail Solomon-Godeau's discussion of "postmodernism as style" in her, "Living With Contradictions: Critical Practices in the Age of Supply-Side Aesthetics," *Screen* 28, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 2-23.
[10] For a further discussion of Reagan's media campaign as well as opposition to it, see, Héctor Perla Jr., "Media Framing & Opposition to the Use of Force in U.S. Foreign Policy," in "Revolutionary Deterrence: The Sandinista Response to Reagan's Coercive Policy Against Nicaragua," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2005, 158-203.
[11] Chairman Charles H. Percy, quoted in Don Oberdorfer, "Salvador Is 'the Place to Draw the Line' on Communism," *Washington Post*, 20 February 1981, A20.

Besides preserving the imaginary geopolitical boundaries of the global Cold War, Haig's "line against communism" and, by extension US intervention in Central America, more generally, was also meant to instill fear in the US public about what might happen if communism were not contained. This fear of an unknown future, as anthropologist Joseph Masco has recently argued, was not new to the US public but is one whose "origins reside in the logics and lessons of the Cold War" and especially the "nuclear war machine…designed first and foremost to produce fear of the near future in adversaries and to harness that fear to produce a stable bipolar world."[12] Like the affective politics of the Cold War nuclear war project, which, as Masco continues, "was fought incessantly at the level of the imagination," Haig's imaginary "line against communism" likewise provided the Reagan administration with the affective means to harness US public sentiment so as to uphold their Cold War rhetoric of containment.

The Reagan administration also perpetuated the affective politics of the "nuclear war machine" in Central America through their use of "secret information" to shape public fears about the threat of communism in the region.[13] On February 23, 1981, Haig released an eight-page State Department White Paper titled *Communist Interference in El Salvador* that outlined "the central role played by Cuba and other Communist countries…in the political unification, military direction, and arming of insurgent forces in El Salvador."[14] For Haig and the State Department, however, it was not enough to simply activate these Cold War fears verbally; they also sought to stimulate them visually. To that end, the White Paper—purportedly drawn from

[12] Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 15.
[13] Masco addresses the affects of "secret information" in both the nuclear war project of the Cold War and the counterterror state of today in his chapter "Sensitive but Unclassified: Secrecy and the Counterterror State." See Masco, *The Theater of Operations*, 113-144.
[14] United States Department of State, *Communist Interference in El Salvador: Documents Demonstrating Communist Support of the Salvadoran Insurgency* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 1981), 1.

hundreds of pages of confiscated "secret" insurgent documents—also included a map detailing arms flow to El Salvador, a copy of a list of weapon commitments from Vietnam, as well as two sets of photographs of captured weapons. Together these documents, as was detailed in the White Paper itself, provided "definitive evidence of the clandestine military support given by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and their Communist allies to Marxist-Leninist guerrillas now fighting to overthrow the established Government of El Salvador."[15]

When the White Paper was first released on February 23, 1981, the mainstream news media largely accepted it at face value. Less than a month later, however, some began to challenge its accuracy, though mostly journalists and other individuals already critical of US interventionist policies in Central America. Yet, by June 1981, even conservative leaning newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal* began to dispute its truthfulness, judging that its conclusions were "flawed by errors and guesses."[16] Much of this criticism was based on close analysis between the White Paper itself and the hundreds of pages of "secret" classified insurgent documents that the State Department released with it, which were said to provide "incontrovertible" proof of the participation of communist countries in the Salvadoran civil war. But, when critics actually analyzed the supporting documents, they found that they did "not substantiate the massive tonnages of arms allegedly shipped by communist countries to El

[15] United States Department of State, *Communist Interference in El Salvador*, 1 and 8.
[16] Jonathan Kwitny, "Tarnished Report? Apparent Errors Cloud U.S. White Paper," *Wall Street Journal*, 8 June 1981, 33. See also See John Dinges, "White Paper or Blank Paper: U.S. Report on Aid to El Salvador Guerrillas Falls Short," *Los Angeles Time*, 17 March 1981, C7; Ralph McGehee, "The CIA and the White Paper on El Salvador," *The Nation*, 11 April 1981, 423-425; Robert G. Kaiser, "White Paper on El Salvador is Faulty," *The Washington Post*, 9 June 1981, A1; and Warner Poelchau, ed., *White Paper Whitewash: Interviews with Philip Agee on the CIA and El Salvador* (New York: Deep Cover Books, 1981).

Salvador, and that the Soviet and Cuban role shown in the documents is different in many fundamental ways from its portrayal by the Administration."[17]

The White Paper was mired not only with textual discrepancies but also with visual problems. Within the White Paper, the State Department presented photographs as transparent, unmediated documents. The captions, which serve to fix what each image depicted, reinforced their seeming truthfulness and objectivity. Yet, as was being debated widely within postmodernist criticism at this time, photography's truthfulness and objectivity, especially documentary photography's, was far more contingent and mutable than generally acknowledged.[18] The instability of photographic meaning, or the incongruence between what images depict and mean, extends to photographs in the White Paper. Several of the images were not newly discovered. Rather, they had been in the government's possession since the Carter administration, although the Reagan administration failed to disclose this information. While these intelligence photographs had influenced Carter's decision to resume aid to the Salvadoran government, which he had briefly suspended in the wake of the widely publicized human rights abuses represented by the murder of four American churchwomen in El Salvador in December 1980, they by no means had convinced his administration that the leftist Salvadoran insurgents

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[17] John Dinges, "Chilling Accusation is Coldly Contradicted by Facts," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 1981, F11.

[18] Beginning in the late 1970s and continuing through the 1980s, critics such as Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, and others, building largely on the theories of Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin, offered trenchant critiques of documentary photography's supposed truth value. See, in particular, the essays included in Martha Rosler, *3 Works* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981); Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photographic Works* 1973–1983 (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984); and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

were part of a larger Communist takeover in the region.[19] The inclusion in the White Paper of a bird's eye view of a trailer truck seized in Honduras further underscores the contingency of these photographs. In this image—which purportedly depicts 100 M-16 rifles, some of which, as the caption notes, were supposedly traceable to Vietnam—the top right side of the truck has been noticeably montaged to make it appear longer and hence to make the weapons cache seem more expansive than it actually was.[20]

In response to these textual and visual inconsistencies, the State Department issued a rebuttal defending the conclusions of the White Paper on the basis that its claims originated in "additional still-secret intelligence reports."[21] Here, the members of the State Department imply "*the idea* of secret knowledge" in which, as Masco explains of the Cold War nuclear war project, "the secret thus becomes a means of claiming greater knowledge, expertise, and understanding than is in fact possible."[22] But, whereas the deployment of "secret knowledge" in the nuclear age, and more recently in the counterterrorism state, has mostly provided a means to dispel doubt, the Reagan administration never mobilized secrecy and deception to eradicate the possibility of doubt completely. Instead, the Reagan administration sought to manage the sentiment of doubt so as to uphold existing power structures. Put differently, the Reagan administration used "*the idea* of secret information" in terms of Central America to construct an affective environment in which the claims and assertions put forth about the spread of communism in the region could be

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[19] See the discussion of the White Paper in William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 86-89.
[20] The State Department's photograph of the trailer truck is also reproduced in "The U.S. Gets Tougher," *Newsweek*, 9 March 1981, 37-39. Its montaged construction is noted in Jonathan Evan Maslow and Ana Arana, "Operation El Salvador," *Columbia Journalism Review* 20, no. 1 (May/June 1981), 55.
[21] Dinges, "Chilling Accusation Is Coldly Contradicted by Facts," F11.
[22] Masco, *The Theater of Operations*, 138.

called into question without having "the underlying hegemonic assumptions or the overarching Cold War ideological framework,"[23] as historian Roger Peace describes them, disrupted. The cover story "Taking Aim at Nicaragua," published in the March 22, 1982, issue of *Newsweek*, clarifies this point.

The article begins with a description of a press briefing orchestrated by the Reagan administration on March 9, 1982. For this "media campaign," the government's so-called "premier photo interpreter," John T. Hughes, turned to blown-up aerial reconnaissance photographs as he had done twenty years earlier during the Kennedy administration. But, this time, rather than prove that the Soviets had removed their offensive missiles in Cuba, Hughes used reconnaissance photographs to demonstrate that Nicaragua, via the Soviet Union and Cuba, was supplying arms to the Salvadoran leftist guerillas.[24] To further uphold the Nicaragua-Salvador connection upon which their interventionist policies in the region depended, the *Newsweek* editors also reported that the Reagan administration relied on the eye-witness account of Orlando José Tardencilla Espinosa, a Nicaraguan whom Salvadoran troops had captured in 1981 while fighting with guerrillas.

At the same that the *Newsweek* special report details what transpired during the State Department's press briefing, it also instilled in readers a sense of doubt about the purported truthfulness of many of its claims. This uncertainty is evident in the editors' discussion of the grainy aerial renaissance photographs used by Hughes. The authors agree, for instance, that these images "[demonstrate] that the Sandinistas had been far from candid about the size of their military buildup." But, the authors also point out, "nothing in the declassified material showed a

[23] Roger Peace, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti-Contra War Campaign* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 51.
[24] See Philip Taubman, "U.S. Offers Photos of Bases to Prove Nicaragua Threat," *New York Times*, 10 March 1982, A1.

direct conduit of arms into El Salvador."[25] In short, like the photographs in the White Paper, what the images depict and what they mean are incongruent. The *Newsweek* special report also emphasized important discrepancies in the eyewitness account of Tardencilla.[26] The editors elucidate, for instance, that when brought before reporters, Tardencilla, rather than specify how he has been sent to El Salvador by the Sandinistas, "confessed" that he had been "tortured and beaten into collaborating with El Salvador and Washington."[27] By calling attention to this confession, the authors again emphasize how, like the meanings of the reconnaissance photographs, Tardencilla's eyewitness account was far more open-ended and uncertain than the Reagan administration let on.

A political cartoon by Don Wright that accompanies the *Newsweek* special report casts further doubt on the evidence that the Reagan administration supplied to justify their interventionist policies. For this cartoon, Wright eschewed his usual medium of drawing for a photograph to which he appended the following caption: "Evidence just released by Secretary of State Alexander Haig includes this actual unretouched photograph taken by Spy Satellite showing group of Nicaraguans directing guerrilla war in El Salvador." As the nineteenth-century attire and hairstyles of the subjects substantiate, the photographic proof that Wright supplies in his political satire is not an "actual unretouched photograph taken by Spy Satellite" of "Nicaraguans directing guerrilla war in El Salvador." Instead, as baseball aficionados might recognize, Wright appropriated a woodcut reproduction of a photograph of the 1882 New York Mets baseball team that had been initially published in the August 5, 1882 issue of *Harper's*

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[25] "Taking Aim at Nicaragua," *Newsweek*, 22 March 1982, 20.
[26] This account was also spoofed in a sketch on *Saturday Night Life* in which representatives from the CIA and the militaries of El Salvador and Nicaragua have trouble identifying Orlando José Tardencilla Espinosa, who was played by Tim Kazurinsky. Some of their guesses include Jane Fonda and Ed Asner. See *Saturday Night Live*, 20 March 1982.
[27] "Taking Aim at Nicaragua," 20.

Weekly. Although not all *Newsweek* readers may have been familiar with the specific baseball reference included in Wright's cartoon, the incongruity between what the image depicts and what the caption states would have been immediately clear. Moreover, in including Wright's political satire as part of their special report on what they call Reagan's "Propaganda Blitz," the editors at *Newsweek* again call into doubt the current administration's efforts to use photography to establish a causal link between the leftist insurgents in El Salvador and Communist governments worldwide. On another level, the inclusion of Wright's cartoon also highlights the malleability and contingency of photographic meaning. For a news publication, this seemingly postmodernist approach was especially noteworthy given that, as communication studies scholar Barbie Zelizer more recently has noted, "fact and actuality of photographic depiction has been so central to supporting the journalistic record."[28] It would seem, then, that the inclusion of Wright's political satire enables the editors at *Newsweek* to encourage readers to doubt the truthfulness of photography as a medium.

Given the tendency of the Reagan administration to use whatever means necessary to establish its interventionist agenda in Central America, including outright deceit, such "postmodern" criticality on the part of the news media was especially needed. The problem is that while the *Newsweek* editors used Wright's cartoon to question the transparency and seeming objectivity of photography and thereby unmask the ideological nature of the Reagan administration's foreign policy strategies in the region, they did little to expand the Cold War debate beyond whether or not a communist threat in fact existed in Central America. Put simply, the press's postmodernist hermeneutics of suspicion did not achieve its desired political objectives. This is because the public feelings of doubt that Wright's cartoon raised about the

[28] Barbie Zelizer, *About To Die: How New Images Move the Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

validity (or not) of communist aggression worked to affirm rather than dislodge the ideological framework already put in place by the Reagan administration's propaganda machine. In this way, it became impossible to consider, for instance, how the administration's decision to turn to "premier photo interpreter" John T. Hughes might inextricably link the Reagan's administration's current interventionist policies in Central America to a much larger and more complex history of US-Latin American relations. In the United States, these relations extended back to the New Left's support of international solidarity with the Cuban Revolution.[29] It was against this polarizing, affective logic of the global Cold War that Group Material sought to use their 1982 exhibition *¡Luchar!* to envision an alternative visual solidarity between the Americas. It was also through this exhibition that Group Material sought to address the limitations of an "oppositional" postmodernism and its methodology of a hermeneutics of suspicion to unmask ideology.

Art and Politics

On view at Taller Latinoamericano in New York City from June 19 to July 9, 1982, *¡Luchar!* included a constellation of objects that ranged from FMLN demonstration banners, posters by the Cuban political movement Organization of Solidarity of the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), and paintings by Nicaraguan school children, to works by such US artists as Mike Glier, Anne Pitrone, and Martha Rosler, as well as by Latin American artists such as Daniel Flores, Catalina Para, and Jesús Romeo Galdámez, among others.[30] Through

[29] See Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left* (London: Verso, 1993).
[30] The full list of participating artists can be found in Ault, *Show and Tell*, 258 as well as in Group Material Archive; MSS 215; box 1; folder 36; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

juxtapositions of cultural practices—art and politics—as well as regions—North and South—in *¡Luchar!*, Group Material attempted to foster, as Doug Ashford explains, "a sense of shared destiny essential to aesthetic experience and political emancipation."[31] The aim of Group Material, in other words, was to forge transnational solidarities through the visual.

To build a framework for understanding how inter-American activism might work in visual terms, next to the exhibition's title on the entry wall, Group Material prominently displayed the pair of photographs by Ecuadorian native Bolívar Arellano featured in the review in *El Diario La Prensa* discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Arellano took these images while working for the Associated Press in Central America in the early 1980s. The top photograph depicts the corpses of four Dutch journalists who had been murdered in El Salvador only three months prior to the exhibition's opening (figure 1). In the image, the journalists are stacked by twos, head to toe, on morgue refrigerator drawers in the capital city of San Salvador, some 30 miles south of where they had been killed. Within *¡Luchar!*, this photograph seems to function primarily as objective, even factual information. It provides historical evidence of state-sponsored atrocities in El Salvador that the Reagan administration continued to deny in their effort to link the oppositional movement in El Salvador with the Soviet Union. According to a report by the Salvadoran government, which at the time the Reagan administration found no evidence to "contradict," the journalists had been accidentally killed in cross fire between the Salvadoran guerrillas and a group of government soldiers on a routine patrol. The Dutch government, however, vehemently denied this official account, insisting instead that government soldiers, who trailed the journalists to an interview with the Salvadoran guerrilla leaders,

[31] Doug Ashford, "Aesthetic Insurgency: Artists Call Against US Intervention in Central America (1982-1985)," in Lorenzo Fusi and Naeem Mohaiemen, *System Error: War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (Milano: SilvanaEditoriale, 2007), 116.

deliberately killed them. In addition to spurring solidarity protests across Europe against US interventionist policies in Central America, the controversy over these murders also caused several members of Congress to publicly question whether the United States should continue providing foreign aid to El Salvador's government if they continued to commit such human rights violations.[32]

While Arellano's photograph clearly references these contemporary Cold War debates over the humanitarian crisis in Central America, Group Material did not use this image to prove that the death of these journalists was real or even to place into doubt the truthfulness of the Reagan administration's position regarding these murders. Given the coercive tactics of the Reagan administration's propaganda machine, in which even the sentiment of doubt could be used to uphold their interventionist policies, Group Material needed a different visual as well as affective strategy, one that did not fall back on either the fear produced by the truth claims of a documentary practice, or the doubt of the deconstructivist tendencies of postmodernism. To overcome this art/politics binary, Group Material turned to a second photograph by Arellano. Mounted directly below his first, this image—a close-up of the top two deceased journalists's right hands, poignantly clasped together—not only visualized the human dimension of the journalists's deaths, which was often marginalized or ignored, but also offered the affective possibility of a "third meaning" (figure 2).

In his 1970 essay, "The Third Meaning," Roland Barthes makes a distinction between an image's "obvious" and "obtuse" meanings. According to Barthes, "obvious" meaning is that "'which presents itself quite naturally to the mind'," while "obtuse" or "third" meaning is that

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[32] See Warren Hoge, "4 Dutchmen Slain on a Trip to Film Guerrillas in El Salvador," *New York Times*, 19 March 1982, A1; "US Accepts the Account by Salvador on 4 Newsmen," *New York Times*, 20 March 1982, 6; and "Story of Newsmen's Slaying is Reconstructed in Salvador," *New York Times*, 22 March 1982, 22.

which exceeds signification and is “at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and evasive.”[33] For Barthes, in other words, an image’s third meaning is that which disrupts or alters the image’s obvious or cultural meaning. Barthes would go on to expand these notions in *Camera Lucida*, in which an image’s obvious and obtuse meanings become the basis for his terms *studium* and *punctum*. While these terms have been well rehearsed within the discourse of photography and visual studies, more generally, what remains under-discussed is their formulation in relation to photographs from Central America and, more specifically, photographs that photojournalist Koen Wessing took in Nicaragua.[34] It is the affective potential of these Central American photographs that is also central to my concept of visual solidarity.

In formulating his notions of *stadium* and *punctum* in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes turns a portrait by James Van Der Zee of an African American family. When Barthes first discusses this photograph, he evokes his concept of *punctum* in terms of the strapped pumps worn by one of the women in the image. A few pages later, however, he changes his mind and states that “the real *punctum* was the necklace she was wearing; for (no doubt) it was this same necklace (a slender ribbon of braided gold) which I had seen worn by someone in my own family.”[35] This shift in Barthes’s conceptualization of *punctum* is important because, as Margaret Olin so wonderfully notes, Barthes’s description does not align with what is actually depicted in Van Der Zee’s photograph. Barthes misrecognizes the pearl necklace that the woman wears for a gold one.[36]

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[33] Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning: Research notes on some Eisenstein stills,” *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 54.
[34] For one notable exception, see Ileana Selejan, “Postmodern Warfare in Images: The Aesthetics of War Photography in the Late 1970s and 1980s” (PhD diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2014), 77-88.
[35] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 53.
[36] See Margaret Olin, “Touching Photographs: Roland Barthes’s ‘Mistaken’ Identification,” *Representations* 80, no. 1 (2002): 99-118.

Likewise, Barthes also makes a similar slip in his reading of Wessing's photograph from Nicaragua. Although Barthes claims that the image was taken in 1979, it was actually shot in 1978 as part of a series that Wessing made "about the city of Estelí in Nicaragua, which had been bombed by President Somoza's army in an attempt to put a stop to the Sandinista offensive."[37] Though slight, this slip is significant because it foregrounds the extent to which the affective potential of this photograph, or its *punctum*, is predicated in terms of misrecognition or contingency that I argue is also central not only my concept of visual solidarity but also affect theory, to which I will return at the end of this chapter.

In addition to misrecognition, Barthes also discusses Wessing's Nicaragua photograph in terms of time. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes writes about his first encounter with one of Wessing's photographs from Nicaragua in an illustrated magazine. What gives Barthes "pause" about this image, and even causes him to seek out additional photographs by Wessing from Nicaragua, is "the co-presence of two discontinuous elements, heterogeneous in that they did not belong to the same world (no need to proceed to the point of contrast): the nuns and the soldiers." It is from this duality, or the sense that certain of Wessing's photographs at once document the revolution in Nicaragua but also point to something beyond it, that Barthes goes on to theorize his ideas about *studium* and *punctum*. While Barthes ultimately uses these terms to reflect upon the relationship between photography and death, it is telling, maybe even fortuitous, that Barthes initially formulates his ideas about the role of contingency in photography in terms of images from the Nicaraguan revolution taken by, as Barthes points out, "the Dutchman Koen Wessing."[38] Wessing's nationality is important because, even though his photographs from

[37] "Collection Koen Wessing: Nicaragua, 1978," Stedelijk Museum, accessed May 31, 2016, http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/artwork/43665-nicaragua#sthash.CVetuD65.dpuf.
[38] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 23.

Nicaragua—as well as images that he took of the 1973 military coup in Chile—do not document transnational solidarity between Europeans and Latin Americans, they nonetheless imagine the possibility of transnational collaboration and support through their making and subsequent viewing, including by the Frenchman Roland Barthes in a news magazine in Europe, and then through their later reproduction in *Camera Lucida*. In short, Wessing's photographs are not only about, as Barthes initially proposes, "that-has-been." They are also about "*this will be.*" And, while Barthes understands "*this will be*" primarily in terms of death, or "*he is going to die*,"[39] the transnational terms of their making and viewing also renders Wessing's photographs from Nicaragua about an as yet unrealized transnational solidarity. It is this future potential imagined by Wessing's photographs that connects them to Arellano's images in *¡Luchar!* as well as my conceptualization of visual solidarity.

Whereas in Arellano's first photograph, the stacked, laid out bodies, encourage reading the image in terms of *studium*, or its cultural meaning, the second image features a close-up of the top two deceased journalists's right hands. The latter image accordingly not only arouses greater affect, or *punctum*, but also asks for a different kind of reading of the photographic signifier. By unsettling the explicit referentiality of the atrocities represented in the first photograph, the *punctum*, or second image, transforms the *studium* reading of Arellano's first photograph into "something more than blood, something more than inert matter, something," as Cuban writer Edmundo Desnoes would later note about Susan Meiselas's photographs of the dead in Central America, "that transcends horror and calls for solidarity and a future."[40] In other words, within *¡Luchar!*, this second close-up image of the slain journalists's interlocked hands

[39] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.

[40] Edmundo Desnoes, "The Death System," *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 40. This essay was notably published in an anthology on rethinking the cultural value of semiotics.

dislodges the referentiality of the first photograph and opens it up to the affective prospect of transnational solidarity. Together, then, Arellano's photographs not only documented contemporary historical atrocities, more importantly, they visually activated the affective possibility of a larger global community in solidarity against US-backed repression in Central America.

Critic and activist Lucy Lippard passionately described *¡Luchar!* as "art for the future" in her speech at the exhibition's opening. But did the exhibition in fact result in broader hemispheric exchanges and encounters? Did it begin to break down the East-West binary that dominated so much of the Reagan administration's and the mainstream media's current discussions of the communist-inspired conflicts in Central America? In a *Village Voice* article, Lippard mentions the "apprehensive phone calls" that Doug Ashford received just prior to the opening of *¡Luchar!*, in which so-called "artworld [sic] artists" fretted that their works "would be seen as naïve and politically incorrect," while those working "in left organizations worried that their contribution would be seen as 'too dogmatic' and not artful enough."[41] Such circumstantial evidence suggest that ideological debates over art and politics, which tended to pit these practices as diametrically opposed to one another, remained a major deterrent. The antagonistic reactions of visitors and staff members associated with the Latin American community cultural centers housed at El Taller where *¡Luchar!* was installed, as well as Group Material member Tim Rollins's own ambivalence about the exhibition, further substantiate the entrenched nature of the art/politics binary at this time.[42]

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[41] Lucy Lippard, "Revolting Issues," *Village Voice*, 27 July 1982, 75.
[42] For an overview of the art/politics debate, see Lucy Lippard, "Too Political? Forget It," *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America*, ed. Brian Wallis, Marianne Weems, and Philip Yenawine (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 38-61.

What most troubled the exhibition's Latin American public was Group Material's prominent display of US artist Anne Pitrone's colorful life-size papier-mâché piñata entitled *What's in the Campesino? Homage to the Dismembered* (figure 3). For many Latin American visitors and staff members, who had little to no familiarity with Euro-American contemporary art making practices, Pitrone's suspended piñata, which she sculpted bent over as if gagged and bound, disturbingly recalled actual torture experiences that they or others whom they had known had personally experienced.[43] For them, Pitrone's ironic artistic engagement with issues around human rights abuses in Central America was simply not comparable to a Sandinista banner or paintings of the revolution by Nicaraguan school children—produced in a seemingly more accessible visual language—also on view in the exhibition. In short, their expectations of what a revolutionary art should look like did not align to what Pitrone, a US artist, envisioned, supposedly in solidarity with them.

This misrecognition speaks to the difficulties of constructing transnational solidarity within the Americas in visual terms. Though Pitrone and, by extension, many of the other US artists in *¡Luchar!* sought to make art in visual solidarity with artists from Central America, they struggled with the commonly held belief that explicitly political art was "aesthetically uninteresting" and should rather be infused with "irony, subtlety, wit, and calculated ambiguity." Yet, in so doing, as Lucy Lippard continues in her essay "Too Political? Forget It," these artists "often labored under the illusion that [they] could make 'the people's' art for them."[44] Conversely, the responses of the Latin American visitors to *¡Luchar!* were also the product of narrowly conceived ideas about what a revolutionary art should look like. They exemplified "the trap," as Nicaraguan Comandante Bayardo Arce noted, "that in order to make revolutionary

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[43] See Ault, *Show and Tell*, 74-75.
[44] Lippard, "Too Political? Forget It," 56-57.

painting, we must paint *compañeros* in green with rifles in hand, or barefoot children in the *barrios*." This assumption was equally problematic, most especially, since it failed to take into account current revolutionary cultural expressions being developed in Central America, especially Nicaragua, in which, as director of the Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers (ASTC) Rosario Murillo explains, "When we talk about revolutionary art we are not talking about pamphlets—the clenched fist or the raised gun. We are taking about art of quality, which expresses insights into the reality of life."[45]

It was precisely this kind of "art of quality" that Group Material's Tim Rollins hoped to include in *¡Luchar!*. In a quasi-fictional essay written for *REAL LIFE Magazine*, Rollins describes how, while preparing for *¡Luchar!*, he and Doug Ashford eagerly awaited the arrival of a crate in the mail, containing actual artifacts from the civil wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Their excitement about the contents of this box, however, was quickly "crushed" when upon its opening, as Rollins reflects, they found "Nothing but little images of the usual self-consciously crude renderings of erect muscular arms holding rifles, drawings of revolutionary heroes by schoolchildren, some poorly-designed flyers and pamphlets." At the same time that Rollins and Ashford felt "disappointed" with what they found within the box of revolutionary artifacts, Rollins maintains that they likewise felt "guilty for not 'liking' what was sent." Since, after all, as Rollins continues, "These are objects from a *real* revolution. People have been shot for producing this art that falls so short of our aesthetic standards." Still, these feelings of guilt did not stop him from lamenting, "We don't know what to do with the things."[46] Though such reflections may not be entirely historically accurate, alongside the reactions of the Latin

[45] Quoted in Lucy Lippard, "Hotter Than July," *Village Voice*, 9 August 1983; reprinted in Lucy Lippard, *Get the Message: A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), 294-298.
[46] Tim Rollins, "Particles, 1980-83," *REAL LIFE Magazine*, no. 11/12 (Winter 1983), 8.

American visitors and staff members, they suggest the difficulty of engaging viewers within a transnational as well as transcultural dialogue regarding aesthetic experience, solidarity, and the global Cold War, as well as the complex, even contradictory, set of emotions—anger, disappointment, and guilt, among others—that constructing transnational visual solidarity produces.[47]

The question remained, then, how to navigate these constricting binaries of art and politics and the affects that they produced. For Rollins, it was a recent issue of *People* magazine that provided him one answer. In his *REAL LIFE* essay, Rollins also wrote that on the same day that he and Ashford received the seemingly disappointing box of revolutionary artifacts in the mail, he later encountered, while flipping through a recent issue of *People* magazine, a photograph of Salvadoran President José Napoleón Duarte painting in his home studio.[48] From the article that accompanied this photograph, Rollins learned that on Sundays, Duarte would shut himself off from "rampaging guerrillas or stiff-necked generals" to paint "a still-life bowl of lilies" or "sun-drenched buildings and idyllic landscapes." According to the article, these paintings allowed Duarte "to relax from the pressures…Instead of thinking of all the problems, I have to think what color to use."[49] Upon reading this personality profile about Duarte on the eve of what would be a "phony and disastrous election" in El Salvador, Rollins supposedly has a revelation about what was missing from *¡Luchar!*: "It's *that* painting of lily-pads that we need for our solidarity exhibition, for more than anything we've received from the revolutionary front,

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[47] Artifacts from the conflicts in Central America also appeared in Group Material's 1982 exhibition *Primer (for Raymond Williams)*, held at Artists Space just prior to and concurrently with *¡Luchar!*. For more information on *Primer*, see Ault, *Show and Tell*, 70-73 and 258; and Group Material Archive; MSS 215; box 1; folder 35; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.
[48] See John Saar, "Of Bullets and Ballots: Portrait of El Salvador," *People*, 17, no. 10 (15 March 1982), 24-29.
[49] Saar, "Of Bullets and Ballots: Portrait of El Salvador," 26.

it is in that painting of waterlilies [sic] that one can best discern the real basis for the misery, genocide and fascism now inflicted on the majority in Central America." In this passage, Rollins suggests that what makes Duarte's painting so important is not its aesthetic form or political content but its "social function." He continues, "the more bogged-down we get in aesthetic evaluation, the more the social function, the uses, the practical, human meanings of the artworks are disregarded. A truly democratic art is going to be the strangest thing the world has ever seen."[50] In short, for Rollins, constructing transnational visual solidarity depended on the affective work that aesthetic practices do in the world.

But, the problem remained of how to visually activate such "human meanings" or affects without, at the same time, disregarding the very real cultural and humanitarian concerns specific to Central America and US involvement in the region. For Rollins, at least, Duarte's still-life painting of water lilies seemed to provide a model for addressing this problem. The position of still-life painting within El Salvador and Duarte's complicity with this European art making practices is key to understanding Rollins' reasoning. Introduced in El Salvador during the Spanish colonial period, still-life painting was an elitist and paternalistic tradition often used to suppress indigenous interests, rights, and culture.[51] In turning to this practice as a means to "relax," Duarte not only ignores the present humanitarian crisis taking place within El Salvador, more critically, he implicates himself as part of a longer history of oppression and subjugation. It was this realization of the ways in which aesthetic practices might evoke the past in a manner that connected them affectively to the present, as well as the future, that became the basis for

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[50] Rollins, "Particles," 8.

[51] See Mariano Castro Magana, *Gods, Spirits and Legends: 20th-Century Art from El Salvador* (New York: Museo del Barrio, 1998); Clayton C. Kirking and Edward J. Sullivan, *Latin American Still Life: Reflections of Time and Place* (New York: Katonah Museum of Art, 1999); and *Two Visions of El Salvador: Modern Art and Folk Art* (Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank, Cultural Center, 2000).

Group Material's subsequent exploration of the visual *and* temporal dimensions of inter-American solidarity in their exhibition *Timeline: A Chronicle of U.S. Intervention in Central and Latin America*.

Past, Present, and Future

On view from January 22 to March 18, 1984, as part of the activist campaign Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America, *Timeline* filled four walls at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in Queens, New York, with a disparate group of objects that ranged from cultural artifacts and documentary materials, to contemporary and historical works of art. Among these items was propaganda from the insurrections in Nicaragua and El Salvador, including a FSLN banner and a FMLN scarf, and also commodities—bananas, coffee grinds, tobacco leaves, cotton, and copper—that directly referenced longstanding US imperialist interests in the region, as well as newspaper clippings and press photographs. Interspersed alongside these cultural artifacts were works of art made by some forty contemporary artists, most from the US, including Richard Prince and Barbara Kruger, among others, as well as by such historical figures such as Tina Modotti and John Heartfield. In addition, in the center of the room, Group Material installed a large red sculptural navigational buoy that US artists Barbara Westermann, William Allen, and Ann Messner had recently made for use in a march against US intervention in Central America that had taken place in Washington, DC.[52]

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[52] The full list of participating artists can be found in Ault, *Show and Tell*, 258 as well as in Group Material Archive; MSS 215; box 1; folder 41; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries. For critical overviews of the exhibition, see Claire Grace, "Counter-Time: Group Material's Chronicle of US Intervention in Central and South America," *Afterall: Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 26 (Spring 2011): 27-37; and Heather Diack, "Hand over fist: A chronicle of Cold War photography," *Visual Studies* 30, no. 2 (2015): 182-194.

As in *¡Luchar!*, Group Material displayed these objects in a collage-like array on the walls with relatively little explanatory material. What differed in this exhibition, however, was the relationship of the works on display, not just to a potential future, but also to the past. Whereas in *¡Luchar!*, Group Material had used contemporary US and Latin American art works and artifacts as well as inter-American collaborations to envision a revolutionary future, in *Timeline*, they used predominantly, though not exclusively, US contemporary artworks to situate the idea of transnational visual solidarity not only in terms of the present moment and a potential future, but also in terms of the historical past. To this end, Group Material hung all of the items in the exhibition either above or below a three-inch red painted timeline that extended horizontally across all four walls of the room. Spanning the years 1823 to 1984, the dates marked off in black on the timeline correlated approximately to a chronology that had been prepared by members of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), and mounted on the installation's entry wall. The chronology listed US interventions in Central and South America as well as the Caribbean.[53] Yet, as artist and critic Thomas Lawson notes in his review of *Timeline* in *Artforum*, "Those seeking exact correspondences between dates and display items would have been disappointed for the evidence was put to a different use."[54] Here Lawson refers to the fact that, though many of the works in the exhibition were made in the 1970s and 1980s, their placement along the red painted timeline did not necessarily synchronize with these time periods.

Arellano's photographs of the murdered Dutch journalists are cases in point. Within *¡Luchar!*, Group Material used these photographs, alongside the other US and Latin American

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[53] The CISPES chronology was also reproduced in the exhibition's catalogue, a copy of which can be found in the Group Material Archive; MSS 215; box 1; folder 41; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.
[54] Thomas Lawson, "Group Material, Timeline, P.S. 1," *Artforum* 22, no. 9 (May 1984), 83.

art and artifacts, to activate the affective possibility of inter-American visual solidarity against US-backed repression in Central America. Within *Timeline*, however, Group Material shifted the visual terms of this transnational exchange so as to emphasize its relationship to the past, and the ways in which the vexed geographies of the global Cold War were also entangled within overlapping and conflicting temporalities. To this end, Group Material mounted Arellano's photographs, which he had taken in March 1982, just below the date "1984" on the red painted timeline. Though placed at the conclusion rather than the beginning of the exhibition, this positioning likewise emphasized that the meaning of these photographs exceeded their referential function. As in *¡Luchar!*, their asynchronous placement within *Timeline* underscored that the meaning of these photographs is not closed and completed but continues to inform the present moment of 1984 when viewers would have initially encountered the exhibition at P.S.1.

At the same time that Group Material linked Arellano's 1982 photographs to the present moment, their spatial placement directly across from another photograph of dead bodies that Arellano also took in 1982, serves likewise to link them to the historical past (figurem4). In this image, which Arellano also took while he was working for the Associated Press, the mangled corpses of recently killed Salvadoran guerrillas are piled haphazardly onto the flatbed of a military truck. Like the top image of the Dutch journalists, this photograph also references recent events in El Salvador, specifically fighting in an impoverished suburb of San Salvador between military forces and rebel insurgents that resulted in these killings as well as the horrific dragging of three guerrilla rebels through the streets behind a pickup truck. Yet, rather than report on this fighting directly, or commenting on the scant coverage that it received within the US print media, within *Timeline*, Group Material places Arellano's photograph just to the right of "1932," the year of the Salvadoran peasant massacre or "Matanza"—in which up to 30,000 civilians

(mostly indigenous people) were brutally killed by the Salvadoran military—that is listed as part of the chronology put together by members of CISPES (figure 5).

The asynchronous placement of this third image by Arellano may again appear contradictory. Displaying Arellano's 1982 photograph in reference to a massacre from 1932 that is not even depicted in the image itself might appear to denigrate both sets of killings. Such an understanding, however, assumes that the value of Arellano's photograph lies in its "factuality" and "actuality." Like Arellano's photographs of the murdered Dutch journalists, that is not the case. Though Arellano's photograph does not in fact depict the 1932 massacre, through its asynchronous placement on the red-painted timeline, viewers are encouraged to read the violence that it depicts, no longer exclusively with respect to the present humanitarian crisis, but rather in terms of the past and, more specifically, the larger history of state-sponsored inequity and subjugation in El Salvador that was closely intertwined with US interventions in that region.

As the chronology prepared by CISPES noted, the year "1932" was not just the date of the 1932 peasant massacre, it was also when five US and British/Canadian warships were sent to El Salvador out of fear "that the revolt was being backed by Moscow,"[55] as one commanding officer reported in a confidential telegram. Given the Reagan administration's efforts to justify US intervention in El Salvador through its own Cold War agenda, the link between the present and past in Arellano's photograph would have been critical for redescribing how US public sentiment related to and concerning the history of US intervention in Central America could be deployed. Rather than ask viewers to doubt the accuracy of Reagan's fear-inducing assertions of Soviet expansionism in the region, the placement of Arellano's photograph within *Timeline*

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[55] Confidential telegram from Commanding Officer of U.S.S. Wickers, 25 January 1932, quoted in Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Erik Chang, and Rafael A. Lara-Martínez, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 65.

encouraged them to consider the larger history of US interventions in the region and the ways in which communist aggression was repeatedly used as a smokescreen for imperialist objectives. The heap of rotting bananas placed on the floor underneath Arellano's photograph would have further encouraged this kind of embodied reflection. Mirroring the pile of bodies, the rotting fruit shared not only formal parallels with the decimated corpses, but also ideological affinities, since bananas were one of the very commodities upon which US economic interests and by extension US backed repression in the region depended.

The significance of the 1932 peasant massacre in the present moment is also reiterated through the date of the exhibition's opening, January 22, 1984, which was the 52nd anniversary of the 1932 massacre. Objects on display on the wall directly across from Arellano's 1982 photograph of the slain guerillas and the heap of rotting bananas also relate to the 1932 massacre. There just below and to the right of "1984," the year when *Timeline* was on view at P.S.1, Group Material hung a silkscreen print of Agustin Farabundo Martí, the legendary revolutionary leader, who helped to instigate the peasant uprising in 1932 and was subsequently executed by the Salvadoran military after they massacred up to 30,000 indigenous insurgents. In honor of his memory, the 1980s Salvadoran revolutionaries called their organization the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front or FMLN, which is referenced through a scarf bearing their name that Group Material places just above "1980," the year of the group's founding. Through these numerous references to the 1932 peasant massacre, Group Material linked the past to the present and thereby modified the ways in which the Reagan administration as well as the mainstream news media attempted to ignore and even suppress this larger history in order to uphold the

ideological framework of Cold War era communist aggression in Central America.[56] At the same time, however, for Group Material, such redescription of the current humanitarian crisis in El Salvador was not an end in itself. Taken together, Arellano's photographs documenting atrocities in the Salvadoran civil war were not just objective historical documents that belonged to the past; instead, on the walls of *Timeline*, they became dynamic, affective objects, whose mobility and contingency could empower viewers to think differently about the present, the past, and, by extension, the future. One could even call them "conversations," as Doug Ashford would later aptly describe his own art making practice, "that can move groups from history to a future."[57]

More recently, however, *Timeline* has been critiqued for its lack of Latin American agency. Curators Shoair Mavlian and Inti Guerrero, who organized the 2014 exhibition *A Chronicle of Interventions* at the Tate Modern in response to Group Material's 1984 *Timeline*, contend that the exhibition "may well speak more about American anti-establishment and leftist anti-war generations rather than voice, or properly represent, the true context of Central America." In making this criticism, the curators base their appraisal largely on the fact that while "*Timeline* included Latin American artists living in exile in New York, the exhibition, due to the socio-political complexities and limited means of communication of the time, lacked the inclusion of artistic and intellectual production from the region itself."[58] This assessment, of course, is valid. One could push it even further by pointing out that, beyond Bolívar Arellano, who was a native of Ecuador, *Timeline*, in fact, included no exiled Latin American artists

[56] For more information on the 1932 massacre, see Lindo-Fuentes, Chang, and Lara-Martínez, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador*.
[57] Doug Ashford, Wendy Ewald, Nina Felshin, and Patricia C. Phillips, "A Conversation on Social Collaboration," *Art Journal* 65, no. 2 (Summer 2006), 70.
[58] Inti Guerrero and Shoair Mavlian, "A Chronicle of Interventions," text accompanying exhibition at Tate Modern's Project Space, London 2 May-13 July 2014 and TEOR/eTica art space in San Jose, Costa Rica, 9 October 2014-22 February 2015.

whatsoever; rather, it was through *¡Luchar!* that Group Material sought to integrate these voices. Does this omission of an autonomous Latin American point of view from *Timeline* point to Euroamerican-centrism or, more specifically, to the global Cold War narrative of the US once again speaking on behalf of the interests and wishes of its neighbors to the South?

One way to respond to this criticism is to turn to recent scholarship on affect as a model. In the introduction to the volume *Political Emotions: New Agendas in Communication* edited with Janet Staiger and Ann Reynolds, Ann Cvetkovich points out, "One of the hallmarks of this recent scholarship on affect is the effort…[to pay] attention to the complexities of lived experience and cultural expression in ways that do not necessarily break down into convenient dichotomies between left and right, progressive and reactionary, resistance and containment." Here Cvetkovich suggests that we not give up on "ideology critique," but rather attempt to "do its work differently."[59] Situating *Timeline* and the complex set of feelings from which it developed in terms of the "nuances of understanding that can be gained from focusing on reciprocities and contingencies within solidarity networks and between partners in struggle,"[60] offers one way to think around the impasse of these binaries.

Even though *Timeline* may not have included works by artists in exile from Central America, as members of Group Material reiterate in a 1988 interview, the exhibition was nevertheless "informed by working with the Committee of International Solidarity of the People of El Salvador, Taller Latinoamericano, Casa Nicaragua, and others who brought information from sources radically different from the dominant media." Moreover, as they continue, "Without them and chance meetings with artists and intellectuals who where here in exile from

[59] Ann Cvetkovich, "Introduction: Political Emotions and Public Feelings," in *Political Emotions: New Agendas in Communication*, ed. Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich, and Ann Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.
[60] Hatzky and Mor, "Latin American Transnational Solidarities," 129.

Central America, our work wouldn't have been possible."[61] In short, like the global Cold War itself, *Timeline* was the product of a "multilayered and multivocal history."[62] This historical past extends back to the installation of *¡Luchar!* at Taller Latinoamericano, which served in part to activate "a kind of reciprocity," as members of Group Material reflect, "with people's agendas informing various artistic practices and the art exhibition becoming a springboard for political organization."[63] The establishment of the Institute of Arts and Letters of El Salvador in Exile (INALSE) by Salvadoran artist Daniel Flores that same year was one such "political" outcome. Modeled on New York City's Institute for Cuban Studies as well as on Flores's own experiences as a Latin American artist in exile in Paris in the 1970s, Flores founded INALSE as "a cultural campaign and a series of exhibitions for and of Salvadoran culture" that would provide community, education, as well as material resources and support and for Salvadoran artists working in exile in the US.[64] As part of that mission, on May 19, 1983, less than a year after the opening of *¡Luchar!*, Flores along with writer and critic Dore Ashton and Nicaraguan consul Noel Corea sent a letter on behalf of INALSE to a group of New York-based artists, writers, and activists, inviting them to attend a meeting to discuss the possibility of organizing an art exhibition at the United Nations in support of peace in Central America.[65] It was from that

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[61] Group Material, Interview with Critical Ensemble, *Art Papers* (September/October 1988), 25.
[62] Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, ed., Preface to *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), vii.
[63] Group Material, Interview with Critical Ensemble, 26.
[64] "Hispanic Art From Outrage," *Upfront* 5 (February 1983), 6. A description of the mission of INALSE can also be found in Lippard, "Revolting Issues," 75; and Cultural Correspondence, *We Will Not Be Disappeared!: Directory of Arts Activism* (New York: Cultural Correspondence in cooperation with Lake View Press, 1984), 57.
[65] See Letter from Daniel Flores Ascencio, Dore Ashton and Noel Corea establishing first meeting that became Artists Call Against US Intervention in Central America, May 19 1983, http://www.dougashford.info/?p=306. See also Daniel Flores Ascencio and Lucy R. Lippard, "Artists Call: For Solidarity and Culture," *Art & Artists* 14, no. 4 (January 1984): 1-4.

gathering that the more broadly-based activist campaign Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America emerged.

Taking place primarily between the months of January to March 1984, Artists Call was a nation-wide campaign developed by an international group of artists, intellectuals, and activists. Consisting of exhibitions such as Group Material's *Timeline* as well as performances, poetry readings, film screenings, concerts, and other cultural and educational events that took place in over twenty-seven cities across the United States and Canada, Artists Call was intended not only to oppose the US government's interventionist policies in Central America but also to raise money for and awareness about Central America as well as to build international solidarity amongst artists and other cultural workers.[66] In short, Artists Call functioned as a kind of "literacy campaign," in the words of Lucy Lippard, by which she meant that Artists Call, like the National Literacy Crusade that took place in post-revolutionary Nicaragua in the early 1980s, was a consciousness-raising effort that would do more than just educate the US public about Central America, or protest US military involvement there.[67] More significantly, it was organized to bring disparate groups of people in dialogue together in support of the possibility of cultural freedom everywhere. As the slogan for Artists Call, which appears, among other places, on the poster designed by Claes Oldenburg, makes clear: "If we can simply witness the destruction of another culture, we are sacrificing our own right to make culture."[68]

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[66] Although there is of yet no comprehensive study of Artists Call, an overview of the campaign can be found in Ashford, "Aesthetic Insurgency," 100-119. See also the special issue of *Art & Artists* devoted to Artists Call in op. cit.
[67] Lucy Lippard, "Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America," *Village Voice*, 24 January 1984, 82. For more information on the literacy campaign in Nicaragua, see David Archer and Patrick Costello, *Literacy and Power: The Latin American Battleground* (London: Earthsan Publications, Ltd., 1990), 21-39.
[68] Claes Oldenburg, Poster for Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America, offset lithograph in 3 colors on white, medium, very smooth paper, 37 1/16 x 24 in., 1984. Oldenburg's

To that end, Artists Call included exhibitions and events that were numerous and, most importantly, wide ranging in their aesthetic approach and political alignment. As critic Kate Linker explained in her review in *Artforum*, "The conception of Artists Call adheres to a three-part structure, including work by Central American artists, by US artists dealing with Central American issues, and by those who support the cause but do not relate its themes to their art." Through this tripartite configuration, Artists Call sought to magnify the potential affiliation with the activist goals of the campaign and thereby to initiate, as Linker further wrote, "a recognition of, and tolerance for difference and for a diversity in art that will not be reduced to the simple denomination of pluralism." Here Linker refers to the ways in which Artists Call—again, modeled on the dialogical aims of the Sandinista literacy campaign—sought to promote difference—albeit more transcultural than intercultural—within the art world in a way that would begin to break down existing power structures and aesthetic hierarchies. Or, returning once more to the words of Linker, "What [Artists Call] indicates is the centrality of these concerns to the operation of a culture globally conceived."[69]

But, as *¡Luchar!* revealed, initiating such transnational and transcultural solidarities also necessitated situating those affiliations and the affects they produced in terms of the complexities of the region's historical past. The affective potential of transnational visual solidarity, in other words, could not be severed from the hemisphere's broader histories, multiple temporalities, and vexed geographies. Group Material did not intend to speak for "the region itself," but rather they sought to activate and re-imagine these overlapping and multifaceted narratives, time periods,

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poster was reproduced in numerous contexts, including as an advertisement taken out by Artists Call in the *New York Times*, 22 January 1984, 6E; in a special edition of *Art and Artists* 13, no. 4 (January 1984), 9-10; in *Artweek* 15 (21 April 1984), 13; and as the cover of *Arts Magazine* 58, no. 5 (January 1984).

[69] Kate Linker, "Forum," *Artforum* 22, no. 5 (January 1984), 70.

and spaces through the visual representations in *Timeline*—many of which had seemingly nothing to do with the history of US oppression and military involvement in the region. Largely forgotten today, the transnational solidarity raising activities of *Timeline* testify to the complex, shifting, and even fraught ways in which aesthetic experience, activist practices, and the affects they produced were inescapably intertwined within and against the intricate histories and temporalities of the global Cold War.